Wolfsbane

by JuniperJones

Summary

When the Volkrod spoke of ‘Wolfsbane’, it was with triumph. They spoke of the day when the treacherous Samuel Campbell died and their Alpha heir was rescued.

Wolfsbane was where the war had been finally won.

But twelve years after that fateful day, Castiel, now the American Alpha of All, was still haunted by the events at Wolfsbane, by a blood-oath broken to a pup his pack insists could only have been a fever dream.

Castiel’s mind agrees.

Yet his heart, for all it has grown bitter and cold, hardened by his role and responsibilities and the scars of his time at Wolfsbane, still yearns for the boy who saved his life and his wolf still howls in mourning every full moon.

Castiel still dreams of white fur, green eyes and the scent of magnolia.
“Well, that’s a different type of gift-wrapping,” Gabriel snorted, licking his lower lip unconsciously as the iron-taste of human blood suffused the room from the now open doorway.

Castiel raised one hand calmly to ease the shuffling alarm of his bodyguards. “Let him enter,” he said, his face expressionless.

It was telling that he said, ‘him’, despite the two figures in the doorway. Luke was the only person whose presence was causing Viktor and Benny to finger the holsters under their jackets. The second figure was a naked, bound and bloody mess, his face so swollen and battered that his features were barely recognisable as human. But the fact he was human would have dismissed him as largely irrelevant anyway.

“Я пришел к тебе с миром, Я пришел к тебе с миром, брат,” Luke announced, throwing the man to the ground at Castiel’s feet.

“A gift for me?” Castiel drawled, his eyes hooded with suspicion. “How very… unexpected, brother.”

“I would never enter an Alpha’s territory empty-handed,” Luke shrugged. “Not even that of my little brother. Besides, this is a special day. My brother is thirty today. An occasion worthy of marking with a gift.”

“Если ты пожелаешь мне счастливого дня рождения, я укушу тебя,” Castiel snarled.

Luke smirked. “Now, if only the rumors were true about Alpha-bites, I would take the risk and definitely wish you a’ Happy Birthday’ in addition to providing you with such a tasty Blood Moon ‘snack’.”

The battered and bloody man whimpered with fear.

Castiel snorted with reluctant humor. Luke was not the only one of Castiel’s siblings who frequently bemoaned the fact that only Castiel had been born Alpha. Only Luke and Gabriel, however, also found the subject a matter of wry amusement. Castiel was not known for his own sense of humor but, undoubtedly, preferred his interactions with Luke and Gabriel to those he had with Michael and Anael; both of whom visibly smoldered with resentment whenever they were in his presence.

“The bite of an Alpha does not transform a Beta into an Alpha,” Castiel agreed. “Neither, for that matter, does an Alpha particularly enjoy the taste of a human’s heart even when the Blood Moon rises on his birthday. That too is a false rumor.”


Castiel’s eyes remained icily unimpressed.

“His name’s Brendan O’Toole. I picked him up a couple weeks back running drugs through Chicago.”

“Thought you’d driven the Irish Mob out of Illinois a decade ago,” Gabriel snorted. “Obviously you didn’t scare them enough, if they’re sneaking back in.”
“This wasn’t the damned Irish. The fucker is working for some Columbians now,” Luke said. “Humans.”

Castiel shrugged disinterestedly. “So? I have no interest in your petty rivalries. Deal with the Columbians yourself. If you can’t hold your territory against mere humans, it will be given to someone who can.”

“I’ve already dispatched a pack to Columbia to handle the matter. You’re missing the point,” Luke smirked. “It’s irrelevant who O’Toole is working for now. It’s who he was working for twelve years ago that’s important.”

Castiel’s eyes flared Alpha red.

Gabriel paled.

Unless Luke literally had a death-wish, there was only one possible reason the Beta would mention ‘twelve years ago’ in a conversation with their Alpha brother.

“He worked for the Campbells?” Castiel growled.

“He was one of the Faelchu’s Gallas. And he was there on that day, брат,” Luke replied. “He was present at Wolfsbane.”

“Everybody DIED at Wolfsbane,” Gabriel snarled. “Not one member of the Campbell pack escaped that place alive. Not even their human bitches survived the slaughter. Our Sire painted the land with their blood and we all danced on their bones.”

“Castiel knows that isn’t true,” Luke countered, then turned his attention fully on his Alpha. “You always said there were pups at Wolfsbane. Pups that must have somehow gotten out of that place just before we arrived to rescue you. Turns out, you were right. This is the Galla who took those pups and fled.”

Castiel stiffened, his expression dark with fury. “You and every other member of this pack has spent twelve years telling me my memory of that day is flawed. That the pain of my wounds and the drugs that Campbell used on me caused hallucinations and now, NOW, you dare to stand before me and say my memory was real? Why, Luke? What the fuck about this bastard, O’Toole, has finally changed your mind?”

But it wasn’t Luke who answered.

It was the broken, blooded human who croaked a single word from the floor.

“Omega.”
Interlude: The birth of war

Dean was four years old when his brother was born, by which time his grandfather Samuel had long since dismissed him as nothing more than a useless embarrassment. Born without presentation, without either a secondary sex or the ability to shift, Dean’s only physical differentiation from a Creiche - what the Faelchu dismissively called a human - was his Wolfkin constitution.

That wolf-strength was literally the only reason Dean had survived long enough to greet his brother’s birth at all.

Until a pup was a year old, until it was named - brought into the pack with the bite of the pack Alpha - a pup was not considered Faelchu at all. A cruel tradition that reached back centuries to when the Celtic packs roamed the wilds of Ireland and the necessity to fight and flee often necessitated the abandonment of the tiniest of pups to ensure the survival of the rest of the Pack. Although killing an unnamed pup was still considered a crime, the simple abandoning of one - of sacrificing it to the whims of the Gods - was not.

On the eleventh full moon after his birth, by which time it had become evident to the rest of the Faelchu that Dean would always lack the ability to shift and join the pack to answer the lunar call, Samuel had declared him îobairteach. Dean’s first Christmas Eve was spent alone in the woods of Wolfsbane, the American ancestral home of the Campbells, where he had been left, naked and defenceless, to die of hypothermia.

Mary, his mother, had spent that night locked inside the deep dungeon beneath the Wolfsbane Pack House, her frantic howls of fury and loss echoing through the building.

On Christmas morning, when Mary was finally allowed out of her prison, her vocal chords had been shredded as viciously as her hands, upon which not a single nail remained. The claws that had ripped out of her paws - as she scrabbled desperately against the silver-veined, iron door that held her captive - grew back within hours. Her voice returned within a few days, though it retained a husky, broken quality for the rest of her life in legacy of that terrible night. But her hatred and loathing of both her father and husband never faded.

She was helpless to act against her father. As the Alpha whose bite marked her neck and whose saliva had woven bonds of obedience through her veins, his physical thrall could only be supplanted by the mark of a different Alpha and there was no alternate American Alpha bloodline to submit to. But for Mary the thrall to her Alpha had never been mental. As Samuel’s daughter, so marked only the once on her naming day - her first birthday - but never subjected to the secondary bite of submission at seven - the age when Wolfkin were believed to enter the ‘age of reason’ - Mary remained free to actively hate her father.

Her loathing of her mate was far more visceral. Perhaps because she had never loved Samuel. Her feelings for her father had always been duty and obedience and fear, mixed with awe and a faint dislike. In retrospect, she realized his pragmatic decision to murder her ‘flawed’ pup had not even been unexpected.

But her mate? She would never understand how he had supported the decision to murder his own pup.

Not even the knowledge he was double-marked - Alpha-thralled in both body and mind - excused his behavior to Mary. A Wolfkin’s obedience to their Alpha was not mindless. Resistance, refusal,
defiance was possible. Any Wolfkin could simply say ‘no’, as long as they were prepared to pay the price. John could have chosen to go rogue to save their son.

The fact he hadn’t, that he had stood by even as she, his mate, had been cast into Wolfsbane’s dungeon whilst the deed was done, froze her heart to him forever. She would never forgive John Winchester.

Not even when she snapped back to wolf form and, almost feral with rage and loss, had raced out of the house in search of the corpse of her child and had found, instead, that Dean had miraculously survived the night.

Icily cold, lost in the woods, the boy had simply cried himself to sleep. And though his lips and limbs had been frosted blue and his green eyes were stark with terror, and his whimpers had been heartrending at his abandonment, the child had somehow survived. Impossibly survived. And that, by itself, proved his Faelchu blood was not as dilute - as tainted - as the members of the Campbell pack insisted.

She wanted nothing more than to snatch her pup and run, run, run from the monsters that wore faces she had called ‘family’. But there was nowhere to run to. Impossible to hide herself and her child within the Creiche, the prey, and all of the Faelchu packs looked to her father, who was the single Alpha of All. There were other Wolfskin in America now, the Russian invaders, but they were reputed to be even more cruel than the Faelchu. She knew they would offer no sanctuary to Alpha Campbell’s daughter. Her only value to them would be as hostage or broodmare and she had no reason to believe the Volkrod Alpha wouldn’t slaughter her pup on principle of his bloodline alone, regardless of his lack of presentation.

If Dean had been capable of shifting, she would have gone rogue. She would have driven to the border of Canada, allowed both herself and her pup to break the bonds of pack; to become feral; to release their human forms forever and become lost to the thrall of the moon.

But her pup was impossibly trapped within the frail, vulnerable body of a human.

So she had no choice except to return to Wolfsbane. Although Samuel’s only comment on the boy’s unexpected survival was ‘so even the gods found him unworthy then’, he had no choice other than to accept the divine decision to reject the pup as a sacrifice. He grudgingly permitted Dean’s naming ceremony the following month and, in doing so, granted him acceptance into the pack and the status of Faelchu. If only because, since the gods had refused Dean as ìobairteach and he couldn’t be considered Creiche, for all he seemed no more than human, a begrudged acceptance of the pup into the pack was then the only option.

As Samuel’s second - First Beta of the Faelchu - John Winchester shared his father-in-law’s reluctant public tolerance of Dean after his unexpected survival. But his personal, private, continuing dislike of the boy persisted. Since Mary was the daughter of the Alpha, it was generally accepted that her bloodline could not be the cause of their child’s ‘disability’. So when the pack muttered that Dean was little more than a half-blood, a mongrel, it was not the boy they were insulting as much as John himself. Dean’s non-designate status, and - far more importantly - his inability to shift, was a constant weeping wound to John’s pride.

He wished, daily, that the gods had accepted the sacrifice offered. A dead unnamed pup could have been forgotten, his existence swept under the carpet, nothing more than a retroactive abortion of a flawed fetus. Dean’s continuing survival, his rejection as ìobairteach, was a cause of intense regret to John. In surviving, he became a daily reminder to all of John’s apparently ‘flawed’ genes.

His attitude to the boy drove a deeper knife into the already bitterly festering relationship with his
mate. It was well over two years after his attempt to kill the boy before John managed to mount his estranged wife again, and even then it was done only because he caught her when both were in wolf-form under a full moon and his sharp teeth and brute strength prevailed where no verbal argument had found a chink in her cold rejections since the night of the attempted sacrifice.

He considered his mounting of her as simply the claiming of his dues as her mate.

Samuel Campbell’s daughter more correctly considered it rape and proved, perhaps, that she was Samuel’s daughter by greeting John the following day by discharging a silver-loaded shotgun into his heart.

Ironically, although John Winchester’s departure from the world was unmourned by the Pack - who hoped Mary might mate again to a less tainted bloodline and thus finally gift them the Alpha heir they so desperately needed - nine months to the day after his death, Mary gave birth to John’s second son and the boy was not only wolf, but was *Alpha*.

The first to have been born into the Faelchu in fifty years.

Unlike a Beta, whose appearance was human save for when fully shifted, an Alpha had subtle but unmistakable physical characteristics that clearly marked their designation from birth. They were visibly Alpha even before puberty brought their most dramatic physical changes. Even as a newborn, Sam’s hungry cries for sustenance were accompanied by a red glow to his eyes and sharp retractable claws that sprang from his tiny fingers and his infant cries were resonant with alpha power that demanded instant compliance to his wishes.

It was for that reason the boy was named after the man from whom he was destined to inherit. Sam Winchester instantly became the hope and pride of the Campbell pack. His birth, when Dean was four years old, invigorated the Faelchu. For twenty years the Krushnic Pack had been snapping at their heels, driving them out of city after city as the Russian invasion - that had begun with an incursion into New York in 1980 - continued its slow, inexorable march across America.

For the first ten years of that invasion, Samuel Campbell had fought back with bitter pride and heavy artillery in defence of his territory. Although the Russian invasion was inexorable, they paid for it heavily in blood. But in 1990, when Karl Krushnic had announced the birth of an Alpha son, an heir for his empire, the heart to resist had begun to seep out of the Faelchu. They were no longer facing a single invader with an army but a new *dynasty*. Dean’s non-presentation six years later had struck the final arrow into that heart. That Samuel had fathered only a Beta daughter, who had then borne a ‘mongrel’ son, had seemed to ring a death knell for the American Wolfkin.

To most of the Faelchu, continued resistance seemed futile.

The Volkrod were ruthless in their attempt to take over the governing of America’s dark underbelly, but they were not unnecessarily murderous. The Russians, for all they were perfectly willing to tear out a throat when necessary, did not kill other Wolfkin for killing’s sake. They had made it perfectly clear to the Faelchu that they merely wanted control of Wolfkin-business, not the wholesale slaughter of other packs. ‘Surrender and join us, retreat and live, or resist and die’ was the basic Russian offer to the Faelchu and, by the millennial year of Sam’s birth, most of the American Wolfkin had already decided retreat or absorption into these stronger invading packs was their only option for survival.

Seeing the writing on the wall with Campbell’s failure to produce an heir, pack after pack of aligned Faelchu had broken their bonds to Campbell and instead sworn allegiance to the bite of Krushnic and his sub-Alpha, until only the Campbell Pack itself remained outside of Russian control.
By the end of 1996, forty-nine states had fallen to the Russians. Only Kansas, home of the Campbell family estate, Wolfsbane, remained out of Russian control because the Campbells were the only Faelchu pack with a living Alpha.

Willing to play a long game, Karl Krushnic had seen no benefit to further fighting. Knowing his ultimate victory was assured, he shrugged and agreed that in exchange for a percentage of their business in tithe, the Campbells would be allowed to hold on to that small territory until Samuel’s death, after which they would be absorbed into the Krushnic pack.

With snarling, resentful hatred, Samuel had no option except to agree and sign the accords. Bitter and defanged by the Russians, the former ‘Alpha of All’ stewed resentfully in his reduced territory and cast most of the blame for his downfall upon John Winchester’s defective genes and Dean, John’s ‘sexless’ mutant of a son.

But just four years later, Sam’s birth in 2000 was like a call to arms to the last American Wolfkin.

His existence offered them a future. A reason to fight.

Sam was only three months old when two of Krushnic’s boyeviks arrived at Wolfbane to collect the agreed quarterly tithe. This time they were greeted with silver bullets and were returned home in body bags.

And so the second Wolfkin War of America began.
Chapter Three

Gabriel was the only one who dared follow his Alpha brother when he stormed out of the Pack Hall into the lush riotous color of the sunny, enclosed, inner courtyard that lay directly behind the hall’s rear exit. The courtyard had belonged exclusively to their mother before she and their Sire had returned to their beloved homeland. On their departure, Castiel had claimed his mother’s garden for his own. Other than his bedroom, it was the only place in the New York Pack House in which the Alpha Of All could drop the controlled mask his position demanded and simply breathe.

His decision to claim the garden may also have been influenced by the Magnolia Tree that grew in its center and filled the entire space with its heady perfume every spring. Certainly, during springtime the Alpha rarely agreed to leave NYC at all and Gabriel, who understood his brother far more than he usually verbally admitted, was totally convinced the scent of the tree was a significant factor behind that particular behavior.

For all that the Wolfkin had evolved the ability to control their base instincts, smell was the one sense that still held considerable sway over their intellect. Scent could soothe or ignite emotion far more effectively than mere words. Sadly, just when Castiel was probably craving the scent of Magnolia to settle his emotions, the season was late enough that the primary scents within the courtyard were now the heady, dusky smell of Damask roses.

Still, at least the rose scent eradicated the lingering copper stench of O’Ttoole’s blood and Gabriel appreciated that benefit even if his brother was unlikely to care one way or the other. Castiel had a number of sensitivities but an aversion to blood was not one of them. Whilst Gabriel, despite his masterful insouciant game face, had always found extreme violence unsettling. He found himself feeling doubly grateful to be the only sibling welcome to enter the peaceful distraction of Castiel’s private space.

Even Benny and Viktor, normally Castiel’s faithful shadows, were forbidden entrance into the courtyard. So they simply stepped into their normal position of silently guarding the entrance to prevent anyone else from following Castiel and Gabriel inside the high-walled, flower-filled garden.

Not that it was likely anyone would dare try.

Castiel’s bodyguards were a cultural nicety rather than a genuine requirement. Gabriel liked to call them his Alpha brother’s suit guards, since Benny and Viktor’s primary purpose was to prevent Castiel ruining yet another tailored suit by handling his own ‘business’.

Gabriel waited for his Alpha to take several deep, gulping breaths of rose-scented air to steady the thumping of his heart, before speaking in a low, pacifying tone.

“I’m truly sorry, брат,” he said, and tried not to flinch when Castiel swirled towards him, eyes scarlet with fury.

“You’re sorry,” Castiel spat. “Sorry. You, who pretends to be my closest confidante and yet has spent years agreeing with those who told me I was rabid with pain and had merely imagined the existence of the boy who saved my life.”

Gabriel winced but held his ground. “Of course I did because, even though I truly believed our Sire was right when he said your claim was an impossibility, it would have been even worse to believe you to be correct. To know ourselves responsible for the pup’s death. We believed the entire
Campbell pack perished in the explosion that finally destroyed the pack house. That fire burned too hotly for identification of any remains. The killing of an Omega would have been a stain on the Krushnic name forever. Our entire pack would have been excommunicated in our homeland had it become public knowledge. It is no wonder our Sire has always denied even the possibility of the Omega’s existence.”

He saw his words strike home, saw Castiel’s reluctant acceptance of that truth. But it was a truth that raised the Alpha’s hackles.

“This is the twenty-first century, Gabriel. Science is the only ‘god’ that the Wolfkin still believe in and yet still we find ourselves bound by pointless superstitions and outdated laws. As special and rare as they are, there is nothing mystical about an Omega.”

Gabriel chuckled sadly. “I agree there is nothing mystical about them. But good luck convincing packs in Europe and Mother Russia of that. The old packs cling to the past. To them, an Omega is something ‘holy’. They would rather believe the boy never existed at all, than learn of his violent death.”

“The Omega does exist and, furthermore, he is not dead,” Castiel growled.

”And neither, according to the Galla, is the young Alpha dead,” Gabriel pointed out. “I think that’s the more pressing immediate concern. Samuel’s heir survived. That could prove to be a serious problem for all of us.”

Castiel glowered. “We didn’t know that either of the pups survived before today and neither have caused a problem to us yet. There is no evidence to support the idea the Alpha is ever going to be a threat. If he were planning to reclaim his birthright, he would surely have declared himself by now. But lest anyone doubt his future intentions and think to act precipitously in my supposed ‘protection’, swiftly make it known to all of the Volkrod that I have declared Sam Winchester to be neprikasayemmy.”

Gabriel’s jaw dropped in almost comical horror. “Untouchable? Are you insane?”

Castiel’s eyes flared dangerously. “Step carefully, brother.”

“Forgive me, Alpha,” Gabriel said hastily. “But your safety is more important to me than my own. If I must risk insulting you to make you take this threat seriously, then I will accept the price I might pay for my words. It’s better to risk a torn throat than a dead Alpha.”

Castiel narrowed his eyes at his brother. “You think sweet words can compensate for disrespect?” he demanded, arching a brow sardonically. Yet the red faded from his eyes in contrast to his words and Gabriel released a sigh of relief.

Castiel shrugged his concern away. “A single rogue Alpha without a pack is no threat to anyone. Besides, a deal was struck and the canon of that is clear. In saving my life the Omega purchased a blood-debt from our pack. His brother’s life for mine. And the blood debt cannot be transferred now even were negotiation still possible. As the sole remaining Campbell, Sam Winchester is the only possible recipient of that mercy. He is untouchable unless or until he draws first blood in a new war. My word was given and, unlike the false tongue of Samuel Campbell, my word was given with honor and will not be willingly broken. I have lived a dozen years believing my word was inadvertently dishonored by our father’s actions. You cannot imagine I will willingly throw away this unexpected reprieve.”

“You’re being foolishly sentimental,” Gabriel insisted. “A promise given to an enemy under duress
is never binding. Not even if that enemy was an Omega who happened to have a scent that has driven you crazy for twelve years. Forgive me, Alpha, but you need to think with your head not your dick. The younger whelp is twenty now. A man, not a pup. And he was raised until he was eight to be Campbell’s heir. Which means he was double-marked by Samuel. Bitten twice. Sam Winchester’s already tainted blood teems with his grandsire’s insanity. You think a rogue Alpha with an Omega mate will have any problem forming an army to raise against you? You think the Faelchu we absorbed within our packs won’t break rank to join him to gain the bite of an Omega-blessed Faelchu Alpha?”

“They’re brothers, not a mated pair,” Castiel pointed out, his mouth screwing into disgust at the thought.

“You hope. You seem to forget that Crowley crawled out of a gutter and became the Scottish ‘Alpha of All’ by mating his own mother, the Omega Rowena. Sam Winchester is a Campbell. They have no honor. There has been no honor in the Campbell line since the time of Nathaniel. I don’t believe there’s any pit of depravity that a Campbell would fail to wallow in. And, for that matter, do I need to remind you that the Omega is also a Campbell?” Gabriel pointed out, only to yelp in terror as Castiel’s hand shot out and grasped his neck with claws that sank deep enough to draw blood.

"You will never speak ill of this Omega. Do you understand?"

Unable to speak due to the crushing of his larynx, Gabriel waved his hands in a gesture of surrender, then took several gasping gulps when his brother released him. “I apologize, Alpha,” he croaked formally. “You are correct, of course. If he truly saved your life then the entire Volkrod will willingly owe him a debt of gratitude. Well, with the possible exception of Michael and Anael, who we both know would both dance on your grave given the opportunity.”

Castiel’s lip curled into a reluctant smile at his irrepressible brother. “I am well aware of Michael and Anael’s feelings. However, the ancient accords are clear that an Omega’s behavior cannot be held to account. Which is why none of you should have doubted me. Why I should not have allowed you to make me doubt myself. None but an Omega could have walked me out of that dungeon in clear view of Campbell’s pack. Even Samuel was unable to prevent the pup’s actions. In front of so many witnesses, he had no choice except to let me go. As much as I curse the stupidity of Omega superstitions, I owe my life to them.”

Gabriel sighed in defeat. “I admit it does finally explain how, half-dead and near delirious with pain, you managed to escape a silver and iron dungeon and already be outside the building when we arrived. But still it makes no sense, because how can he even exist at all?” he demanded. “The Campbell line never produced a single Omega in three hundred years because only Alpha bloodlines carry the Omega gene and it is always recessive. An Omega can only be produced if both parents carry the gene. So John Winchester would have needed to also be from an Alpha line and that is not possible, is it?”

"I studied biology, Gabriel. You do not need to bore me by speaking truths that every pup knows. I have no explanation of how the Omega came into being. However, it’s irrelevant. My lack of understanding does not negate the reality that he exists.”

Gabriel considered his brother’s words. The slaughter at Wolfbane was the end of the Campbell reign of America. The end of a dynasty born from Nathaniel Campbell’s deliberate and systematic slaughter of every opposing Alpha bloodline in the United States. For over three centuries, the primary criminal underground of the entire country was run by one family not because it was the strongest or best or most worthy, but simply because none remained to oppose them. The
suggestion that John Winchester, Samuel’s trusted Beta lieutenant, had somehow carried the heritage of an Alpha Bloodline within his veins made no sense.

“The single Alpha line is the very reason Samuel fell to us, брат. Not because he was personally weaker than our Father but because he was a sole Alpha facing many,” he said. “If the Faelchu were concealing secret Alphas, they would have joined Campbell against us. More to the point, if there were more Alphas there would also have been more Faelchu.”

It was true. Although the Krushnics now ruled America, and Castiel was now ‘Alpha of All’, he was not a sole Alpha as Campbell had been. There were currently nine different Russian packs involved in the management of the 50 states and each of those packs had Alpha leaders. Several of them were grooming Alpha sons. Whilst all of those Alphas deferred to the Alpha of All, the individual packs were self-maintained. Strong, disciplined and vast in number.

The Russian Wolfkin - the Volkrod - were rich in Alphas.

It was what made them strong.

Undefeatable.

Similar hierarchies existed in Europe, South America, China and the African states.

Which meant that Omegas, whilst so rare as to be considered almost as mythical as unicorns, also existed. Their rarity was merely the consequence of their genetic structure. Since it took a double recessive to create an Omega, the odds of two Alpha-line parents birthing an Omega were only 1 in 4. Since it was rare for a mated pair to produce more than one or two pups, the lack of Omega Wolfkin was simply a matter of low statistical probability.

But, of course, centuries before science had provided that explanation the legends surrounding Omegas had been set in stone. Wolfkin lore claimed Omegas to be soothsayers with mystical powers of foresight. Nonsense, of course, but it had led to laws that prevented interference in their actions because no matter how nonsensical their behavior, it was assumed they simply could see the future more clearly than other pack members.

Unlike Michael and Anael who bitterly regretted they had not been born Alpha, Gabriel’s secret resentment was that he had not been born Omega. Karl Krushnic had sired five pups, by two mates, in search of his heir. Statistically, one of them should have been Omega.

Gabriel couldn’t imagine anything better than being able to do anything he damned well liked, free of any Alpha censure.

But statistics lied anyway.

To the best of Gabriel’s knowledge, the only two current living Omegas were in England and South Africa respectively. Well, possibly the number of Omegas was three now, if the tale about the older Winchester pup was true. But it couldn’t be.

Gabriel clung desperately to the idea that O’Toole must have been lying. By the time Luke had delivered him, he was so insane with pain and fear that he would probably have said anything to soothe Castiel, so perhaps it had all been a lie.

Wolfkin packs needed numerous Alpha bloodlines to thrive and grow.

The Campbells had never understood that. In 1692, when Nathaniel had arrived in America and had begun his campaign to claim the New World for the benefit of his family alone, he had set in
motion a series of events that had always been destined to lead to his family’s eventual defeat. It had been inevitable that another stronger pack with multiple Alphas would eventually arrive to take over such rich pickings as the United States.

Worse than Campbell’s hubris though, was his irresponsibility. In having a single line of Alphas, just one lost generation would have ended the existence of the American Wolfkin forever. Packs couldn’t survive without an Alpha. Without one, the center couldn’t hold. The pack hierarchy was not just an ideal, it was a biological necessity. The Canadian wolves were proof of that. Not a single one remained of the original Canadian Wolfkin. One severely bad winter, back in the 1800’s, had killed every Alpha line in that country. Within two generations, every Canadian Wolfkin pup was born feral, born wolf, a mere beast without the ability to shift into human form. Their blood had forgotten the magic of their ancestors and they had become lost forever to the urges of the moon.

Canada had many wolves now.

Sometimes, if you encountered one in the wild, you could see a flash of racial memory in its eyes but, as quickly as that brief moment of comprehension appeared, it clouded over again, and then it was gone and only a beast remained in its wake.

The Wolfkin were not humans with the ability to transform into wolves. They were the opposite. Without the bonds of pack, bonds woven by the bite of an Alpha, the ability of Wolfkin to hold their human forms was swiftly lost.

The magic was lost.

Not magic as the humans perceived it. Modern Wolfkin spoke no rituals, prayed to no Gods, and bargained with no devils. The ‘magic’ of an Alpha was, realistically, nothing more than a virus they naturally carried within their bodies and spread with their saliva. A virus that could not survive for more than a generation outside of an Alpha host.

As Castiel had told his brother Luke earlier, the idea that an Alpha’s bite could ever transform a Beta into an Alpha was nothing but a fairytale. But that myth was built on a grain of truth. The truth that it was only the bite of an Alpha that allowed the Betas to maintain their human forms at all. Only Betas who submitted to the marking bite of an Alpha then carried the ‘magic’ in their veins to birth Wolfkin. And those Wolfkin pups needed to be infected themselves if they were ever to pass the virus to their offspring.

Which was the real reason why the Campbell family had been unable to create an ‘army’ of Wolfkin. It had nothing to do with any vengeance of the ‘Gods’ enacted against the hubris of the Campbell Alphas.

Like the source of the so-called ‘magic’ in an Alpha’s bite, the reason for Campbell’s defeat had come down to nothing more than science.

The total number of Faelchu in America when Karl Krushnic had first arrived was less than five hundred, split into half a dozen packs, and since the survival of all of them had depended on the bite of the incumbent Campbell Alpha, further expansion had been impossible. There was a hard limit to how many Betas a single Alpha could mark and control. Krushnic had arrived in America supported by eight sub-Alphas, and so he had almost ten times as many Volkrod as Campbell had Faelchu. It had not only made it possible for him to displace Campbell’s organization but also to defeat and eradicate all human organized crime from the states too.

The entire network of prostitution, drugs and guns that underpinned every human city was now
Volkrod owned. The wolves who walked on two legs still considered humans to be ‘prey’; they simply had found a more efficient way of farming them.
Interlude: The Boy King

Dean could have been forgiven for resenting his brother.

Because Sam was born with the physical characteristics of an Alpha, he was feted from the moment of his birth. Every word spoken in welcoming praise of Samuel’s new-born heir was like a knife in Dean’s back. The contrast between Sam’s instant acceptance and Dean’s constant rejection was like night and day; a daily dichotomy that only grew more pronounced as the months passed.

Despite his mother’s strong, and often strident, support of Dean - and the Pack being too fearful of their Alpha to directly insult one of Samuel’s grandchildren, no matter how flawed - Mary could only ensure that none of the pack was verbally cruel in Dean’s hearing. She couldn’t make anybody like or even value him. Dean had been an outlier from the first month he had failed to shift and his separation from the pack increased with every month that passed because, month after month after month, he continued to feel no pull on his blood from the full moon.

That was the main issue as far as the Faelchu were concerned. Dean’s lack of ability to shift from human form into wolf set him apart from his pack far more than his lack of presentation. Having no secondary gender was considered aberrant but was not unique. Every pack had one or two Wolfkin who, for one reason or other, lacked a second gender. They were usually referred to as Theta although the term was not a true sub gender but rather the indicator of a lack of secondary gender. Dean being ‘sexless’, being Theta, was only scandalous because he was born of an Alpha-line from which an Alpha heir had been so desperately needed. Now that Sam had solved the lack of an heir, Dean would have been accepted if that had been the primary objection to his existence.

Dean being Theta was sorely disappointing but not in itself an insurmountable problem. Dean was, however, the only member of the Pack who couldn’t shift forms.

It was the inability to shift that was the primary cause of his isolation.

Now and then, pups were born with an immunity to the Alpha-borne virus. Those pups, who would remain forever in their wolf-form, could not be suffered to live. The Wolfkin could not draw human attention upon themselves by keeping the wolf-born as ‘pets’.

If Dean had been born feral like that, locked inside a wolf-form, his condition would have been seen as a tragedy. He would have still been considered iobairteach - and his life would have been swiftly dispatched with a bullet - but there would have been no scandal attached to his birth and his death would have been mourned as a sad necessity rather than a preferred option.

What made Dean completely unnatural was that he was locked inside the form of a Creiche. Because Wolfkin were wolves who could become human, not humans who could become wolves.

Even at four years old, Dean already was fully aware he was seen as something different, something other. His human appearance and lack of shifter ability drove a wedge between him and the other pack members. This was not necessarily due only to intolerance, though admittedly that was a large part of it. The actual physical inability to shift meant his isolation and exclusion would have been inevitable even if the Wolfkin were more sympathetic to his ‘disability’. Although the Wolfkin could shift at will, there was no escaping the overriding influence of the lunar tides on their psyche. Not a single month passed without the entire pack transforming together to run the deer and howl at the full moon.

So every month for as long as he could remember, Dean had found himself abandoned alone as all
of the pack, even his mother, had given into the lure of the pale silver moon that shone through the canopy of trees above the woods of Wolfsbane.

The running of the pack was an almost holy ritual, something that fixed the bonds between the Wolfkin. It was in their four-legged form, where communication transcended words, that the Pack became one. In the days immediately following a run, although the pack returned to human appearance, speech was rare. The whole pack still thrummed with unspoken understanding, each shrug and twitch a symphony that made spoken words unnecessary. In those silent times, Dean’s isolation and loneliness was almost unbearable.

At four months old, when Sam was still struggling to sit up under his own strength in his human form, the tiny Alpha was already spending the full moon scampering around Wolfsbane as a pup. By eight months old, when his human body was taking its first tottering steps, his wolf form had grown robust enough for him to run with the pack. Though he would inevitably return early, his paws raw and his tongue lolling with exhaustion even as he basked in the praise of the pack.

And so, before he was even five years old, Dean learned from the contrast of witnessing Sammy’s easy absorption into the pack that his own existence was considered a life superfluous and essentially pointless.

So perhaps it would have been natural for him to resent or even hate his brother.

He didn’t.

Perhaps in his occasional wolf form Sammy was already a creature capable and dangerous, as large as Dean, all sinews and teeth, but in his more usual human form he was still tiny and helpless. Toddler Sam was still Dean’s little brother, in need of protection and care, of soothing and feeding and entertaining and soft sleepy lullabies. In Sam’s fragile baby form and big trusting eyes, Dean found a purpose previously denied him. Perhaps no one else in the pack had need or want of him but simply in being Sam’s big brother, Dean carved out a role for himself.

And with the Campbell pack igniting war with the Russians, Dean’s self-appointed role gave him a way to keep from being underfoot as Wolfsbane transformed from a pack house into a frantic bustling war hub filled with charging angry Wolfkin plotting and planning ways to retake their territory from the invaders.

In the immediate months after Samuel’s murder of the Volkrod tithe collectors, Dean had no true conception of what was happening around him. All he knew was that the pack - who had never had any tolerance for him anyway - were now almost totally alien. All the Faelchu spent more time in wolf form than human and snapped at him impatiently if he approached them.

He wasn’t even sure that the Wolfkin truly understood he was not Creiche when they were so lost to their wolves. Even his mother had little time or patience for him then, as liable to greet him with a snarl as any of the other pack members, so he spent almost all day, every day, with his tiny brother.

Of course he was envious that Sam would occasionally grow bored of his company, transform into his wolf form and race outside to bother the milling wolves with playful nips and demands for attention. No matter what meeting of import Sam interrupted with his puppy-like enthusiasm, no pack member ever met him - the Alpha Heir - with bared teeth and snarls of impatience.

Dean could only wait, worried and alone, for Sam to return to their room when he had played himself out enough to transform back into the form in which he was vulnerable and in need of Dean once more.
Dean was only six years old when his self-appointed role as Sammy’s caregiver was ratified by the death of their mother. Mary had been gone for months before it even occurred to someone to take the time to explain to Dean that his mother’s prolonged absence was not due simply to an extended mission into hostile territory but because she had fallen to the enemy. She had been dead and buried for weeks before one of the Wolfkin even thought to explain to Dean that his mother was never coming home.

Heartbroken, furious, Dean had ignored his fear of the pack and had charged to the Pack Hall where his Grandfather was holding court. He broke into the war meeting of Wolfkin warriors, uncaring of the snarls and bared teeth that greeted his entrance.

“My mom’s dead. Why didn’t you tell me my mom’s dead?” he cried at the huge, black, shaggy-furred wolf whose red-eyed glare was even more terrifying than the cold, stern visage of his Grandfather’s human form.

The assembled wolves snarled and snapped at him, their hackles raised at his intrusion, and normally that would have been enough for his nerve to break and for him to race from the room. But grief and righteous anger made him bold. He stood his ground, barely even flinching as one of Samuel’s bodyguards approached and flashed his teeth directly in Dean’s face in a clear warning to back off.

Six year old Dean did not back off.

If he had, if he had scurried away in terror perhaps that would have been the end of it. Or perhaps in running he would have proved himself Creiche anyway. Dean would never know.

But in defying his Alpha, he wrote himself a death sentence anyway.

It was his demonstration of brave defiance that caused Samuel to huff impatiently and slide into human form to speak.

“We are at war, you stupid pup. Your mother is gone. I have no time to pander to a useless little theta abomination and this pack no longer has room for dead weight.” He narrowed his eyes then, his eyes dissecting Dean, judging him, weighing his worth and finding him sorely wanting. “Perhaps it is time to finish what I once started. This decision is long overdue. We can no longer afford useless sentimentality.” He gestured impatiently at one of his lieutenants. “Take the useless Creiche outside and do what should have been done years ago. Do it swiftly and painlessly, but do it now.”

The Wolfkin flowed into human form, his expression troubled. In that one word, in calling Dean ‘Creiche’, the Alpha had removed the pup’s name and thus declared the boy was no longer Faelchu, no longer ‘pack’. “The boy is your flesh, Alpha. My fangs cannot rend him.”

Samuel’s face scrunched with annoyance, even as he accepted the truth of the lieutenant’s words. No wolf could shed the blood of his own Alpha’s kin.

“So just put a bullet through its useless head,” he snapped impatiently.

The lieutenant looked unhappy still, but shrugged his agreement. An Alpha’s orders were to be obeyed without question and in their human form a Wolfkin could act in ways repellent to their inner-wolf. He reached out and grabbed Dean’s arm, clinging fast with strong, cruel fingers even as Dean belatedly understood the danger and began fighting for escape with a strength far greater than his Creiche form should have allowed. It was the Lieutenant’s surprise at that unnatural strength, and the sudden doubt caused by the pup’s inadvertent reminder that the boy was Wolfkin
despite all other physical indications to the contrary - even despite the Alpha’s formal removal of Dean’s pack status - that delayed his enacting of his Alpha’s orders long enough for the gathering to be disturbed by a new entrant.

Sam Winchester, whose black juvenile Alpha wolf-form was lean and yet near full height even at two years old. Whose eyes flashed Alpha red at the sight of his brother being dangled so cruelly from the lieutenant’s hand. Who growled as he saw Dean fighting to escape the Beta’s hold.

Too young for reason, Sam acted purely on instinct. He charged, with a snarl of sheer fury, his teeth closing on the man’s right shin and shutting closed with bone snapping strength. With one bite, the baby Alpha severed the man’s lower leg completely, and then he leaped between Dean and their grand sire and howled his defiance.

Had any other Wolkin come to Dean’s aid, Samuel would have rewarded them with a swift death.

But Sam, the Alpha heir, could do no wrong in Samuel’s eyes.

And so it was the ruined lieutenant who ended that day with a bullet in his brain - Samuel Campbell was at war and had no room for crippled wolves - and Dean, so obviously granted the protection of his infant Alpha brother, had his death sentence communed yet again.

In the years that followed, as Sam - coddled and spoilt and corrupted by their Grandfather - grew into a boy that Dean often didn’t like, Dean’s memory of this single day was the reason he never lost faith that, at heart, Sam was a good and loyal boy who was still worthy of Dean’s unwavering affection.

As for Dean, Samuel decreed that if Sammy wanted to keep his older brother as a ‘pet’ and playmate then so be it. Since Dean was useful as a ‘nanny’, particularly in view of Mary’s death, he would be permitted to live until the little Alpha had no further need of him.

But that was the full extent of Samuel’s concession. The Alpha refused to restore Dean’s ‘name’; he did not formally take him back into the pack. His decree stood that Dean would henceforth retain no more status within Wolfsbane than any other Creiche Gallia.

Since Dean had never believed he had any status and had never felt like part of the pack anyway, the only primary consequence of which was that Dean never received Samuel’s bite when he reached the ‘age of reason on his seventh birthday. Like his mother before him, though for completely different reasons, Dean never received the Alpha mark that would have made him vulnerable to commands uttered in Samuel’s ‘Alpha voice’.

That single mistake on Samuel’s part had significant bearing on later events.
Chapter Five

Castiel loathed New Orleans.

The humidity was uncomfortable whether he was clothed or in wolf-form, the food was too spicy for his palate and the multiple pidgin languages spoken there were incomprehensible. Although he was born stateside, he had been raised within the Krushnic pack with Russian as his first language. English had always felt clumsy and alien to him, for all it had become his necessary primary language for universal communication, and he believed pronounced regional accents were tiresome enough to deal with without the addition of lexicons such as Cajun and Creole.

He wasn’t arrogant enough to insist all of the Faelchu Wolfkin that had been accepted into Volkrod packs learned to speak Russian. But, as the American Alpha of All, he felt it was incumbent on the pack members to at least have the courtesy to speak goddamned English to him. Particularly those born of Volkrod parents. The Russian Wolfkin had only been in America for forty years. How the hell could there be Russian-blood packmembers who spoke neither their mother tongue nor comprehensible American? Maybe he should tell Gabriel to send out a strongly worded nationwide memo that at least one or the other was obligatory.

Alternatively, he could help save the rainforest by eliminating paper and just cutting to the chase.

He made the decision that the next Wolfkin who spoke to him in Cajun French was getting a bullet through his eyes.

Castiel generally had more tolerance for the Dobycha he dealt with - or, as the Faelchu called them, the Creiche - because most humans had no idea that the Wolfkin even existed, let alone ran almost every black market in the world. The same was not true of the human authorities. At the very highest level of American government, the existence of the Volkrod was well known. Sometimes it amazed Castiel that the average citizen never queried why the ‘crime families’ were ‘tolerated’ by the authorities.

The majority of Dobycha were completely unaware that their leaders, right up to the President himself, were well aware of - and often in the service of - the Wolfkin. Though perhaps the occasional arrest and prosecution of human pretenders and drug dealers was sufficient to pay lip service to the idea of justice being served. And because of the Campbells’ mismanagement of America, caused by their systematic elimination of other Alphas, many human crime syndicates had gained footholds in the states. It wasn’t until Castiel’s father, Karl, had taken over that there had been sufficient American Wolfkin to ensure the Irish Mob and the Italian Mafia had been driven out of the country.

Irritatingly, those particular human organizations still kept attempting to return and reestablish themselves on American soil. They obviously had no idea of why their comrades had been so easily eliminated - since the Volkrod invariably left no witnesses of their activity when in wolf forms - so there was always another chancer ready to sneak back onto American soil in the mistaken belief the Volkrod were mere humans.

And then there were the cartels, such as the Columbians of course, who were as difficult to eradicate as cockroaches. A cartel was like a hydra because for every head cut off, two seemed to appear in its place.

Ostensibly, Castiel was visiting New Orleans because the pack there had just uncovered yet more attempted incursions by both Columbian and Mexican cartels. The situation was becoming
tiresome and examples needed to be made. As a relatively new addition to Castiel’s sub-Alphas, Alpha Felipe had been cautious enough to request permission from the Alpha of All before escalating matters.

Castiel appreciated the courtesy. He also appreciated the fact Felipe, whose first language was Portuguese, now spoke fluently in both English and Russian. It showed respect and that deserved support.

But his real reason for visiting the City was both New Orlean’s reputation for housing the best Volkrod data center and O’Toole’s assurance it was the location of his last sighting of the Winchesters. The information was eight years out of date. Castiel had no illusions the Winchesters were still in Louisiana. If they had any sense they would have gotten out of the godforsaken place many years ago.

But no matter how cold the trail, Castiel was confident he would be able to pick it up and follow it.

He just needed to make an example of a few Dobycha first.

He sighed, turned his attention back to the Volkrod before him who were practically trembling in nervous anticipation and he flicked a single, bored finger to indicate he was, finally, ready to hear them speak.

One of the Wolfkin, his ill-fitting suit cut too badly to conceal his shoulder-holster, a thin bead of sweat glistening on his upper lip, cleared his throat as his eyes flicked between Castiel and Alpha Felipe before clearly deciding his words should be directed at his Alpha’s Alpha.

He gestured at one of the five kneeling humans, the one whose expression showed as much defiance as terror, and announced, “His name’s Carlos Rivera, Pakhan. He is teniente of the Los Diablos Cartel.”

Irritation pricked over Castiel’s skin. He hated the term Pakhan. He understood it was the nervous Wolfkin’s attempt to acknowledge him as being even more important than the Alpha whose mark he wore, but Castiel had always felt the use of any Dobycha rankings or honorifics to be an insult.

He was not a ‘godfather’. He was the Alpha of All.

And the simple honorific ‘Alpha’ was perfectly sufficient... always.

Alpha Felipe, a South American immigrant who ran the pack which currently governed Louisiana on behalf of the Krushnics, shuffled uncomfortably at Castiel’s side; clearly sensing Castiel’s hackles rising but uncertain of exactly how his pack were displeasing the Alpha of All. Castiel deliberately rolled his eyes and completely ignored all of the bound humans kneeling at the feet of the Volkrod boyeviks.

“It’s Dobycha. Its name is of no interest to me,” he pointed out coldly.

It was a lie. Castiel was of the personal opinion that no man, human or Wolfkin, should die unnamed and unmourned. But he had a role to play and as Alpha of All - as Pakhan - he could not afford to suggest that any of the Colombians kneeling at his feet were anything other than meat.

Particularly since he had decided that one of the Dobycha - though Castiel hadn’t yet decided which one - would survive as witness of this execution. Because simply making people ‘disappear’ was evidently not sending a strong enough lesson to the Columbian drug lords. It was time to up the ante. Well, as long as...
“кто-нибудь видел твоих Волков?” he demanded.

Irritatingly, of the five Wolfkin present, the only one who understood him and answered was Alpha Felipe who wasn’t even Volkrod by birth. Felipe’s Alpha-line was Brazilian. “None have witnessed our wolves,” Felipe confirmed, too quietly for human hearing. “Those things sometimes happen, of course,” he added with a shrug, “but we deal with them immediately.”

Castiel nodded shortly. Unless a dobycha was considered покорный or, as the Faelchu would say, Galla - though the Volkrod term pokornyy or ‘Pok’ merely meant submissive rather than the far harsher ‘bitch’ - then any human who witnessed a shift was automatically slaughtered.

Which was interesting, Castiel decided since, although all of the captive humans stank of fear and pain, only one of them smelt of actual urine. His eyes homed in on that particular Dobycha, the small, fat one who looked more like a bookkeeper than a falcon. The smell of sweat was so great it almost drowned the evidence the man had also wet himself, but Castiel’s wolf could easily distinguish every thread of a scent trail. It was more fear than he would have expected, even in the face of almost certain death. Well, before the actual killing had started at least.

“Come,” he snarled, his voice resonant with Alpha power. And despite the man’s wild eyed fear, Castiel was immediately rewarded by the sight of the chubby Dobycha crawling towards him like a terrified, trembling puppy.

Some humans simply begged to become Pok.

"It’s one of the Diablos’ local money launderers,” Felipe advised him, his own eyes narrowing speculatively at the human’s demonstration of natural subservience. “Castrado. Clever but no balls.”

Castiel shrugged nonchalantly. “I have no interest in how you run your local operations but waste is always regrettable.”

Felipe nodded his agreement, snapping his fingers for one of his Volkrod to remove the bookkeeper from the room. Pointless to waste a potential asset.

Of course, that narrowed Castiel’s choice of a witness. Not the teniente, the lieutenant, because showing mercy to a man like that was seen only as a weakness to be exploited. Rather than being grateful for his survival, Rivera would become twice as dangerous and determined to reclaim his honor by acts of revenge.

Of the other three men, one was a tweaker. Castiel sniffed. Yes, the fool was using the product he was supplying. His days were numbered either way. If the drug didn’t kill him, the fact he was skimming the profits by his self-use would gain him a bullet sooner rather than later.

His temporary survival, though, would serve a purpose.

He flicked a finger in the direction of the tweaker and Felipe nodded his understanding, sending an order through the bond for his men to leave that particular Columbian Falcon to survive as witness.

Which left just the matter of how the three remaining Dobycha would die.

Exactly what message to send back to the cartel.

Brutally swift, or slow and agonizing?

Castiel steepled his fingers as he narrowed his eyes in thought for a moment. Then he sat back,
straightening his pant legs back into perfect creases as he made himself comfortable and reached, finally, for the drink one of Felipe's Pok had poured for him when he arrived.

It was good vodka.

Worth savoring.

"Use your knives," he decided. Then he smiled coldly. "And take your time."

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Not all Pok were craven cowards, though it was unarguable that it was particularly useful when they were. The servants and cooks and cleaners and gardeners within a Pack House were not expected to perform any tasks other than menial ones and so the fact they obediently scurried around, eyes to the ground, in complete terror of their Wolfkin owners was simply practical and convenient.

Those Pok never left Pack territory anyway. Once brought into a Pack they remained for life and their lives were not terrible. The Volkrod were not cruel to their pets. As long as the Pok served their purpose with quiet efficiency they were largely ignored. Their dormitories were basic but clean. They were well-fed. They were clothed. And they were never abused. The Volkrod considered the bedding of Pok to be a form of bestiality.

But not all Pok were equal.

There was a hierarchy to the tamed Dobycha. There were those who necessarily lived within the human world. One of Castiel’s most valuable Pok was the current Director of the FBI. That particular Pok was held by thrall, rather than fear. And, admittedly, it was a form of addiction more insidious than any drug.

A human bitten by a Beta Wolfkin inevitably sickened and died. The process usually took several weeks and presented to Human medics as rabies, which was useful. Castiel suspected that all rabies had originated from a mutation of the viral infection all Betas carried in their saliva. The virus was also undoubtedly the source of human werewolf legends. A rabid human’s behavior did ape that of a wild beast. So whilst the victims of a Wolfkin bite were not transformed into actual wolves, he could see how the medieval legends had originated.

The bite of an Alpha, however, carried a completely different viral payload.

It did not kill either Wolfkin or Dobycha and, depending on various factors such positioning, depth, duration and the age of the recipient, an Alpha could use their saliva deliberately to generate a myriad of useful effects.

For a Pok servant, a mere single scrape of his teeth over a pulse point would lock the terrified recipient into lifelong subservience. Which was particularly convenient, since Castiel’s New York Pack House had so many bedrooms that he would have been banging his head against a wall in frustration if the process of employing Pok maids required anything more than a single two-second nibble on their wrist.

The acquisition of a Pok such as the FBI Director was a far more laborious process. The thrall had to be done with considerable finesse to avoid inadvertently affecting the natural personality and behaviour of the recipient. Done perfectly, the Pok would barely even be aware their loyalty to the Volkrod was not completely of their own volition.

Such thralls were not permanent. The very nature of their delicately woven structures required them
to be refreshed at least one or twice a decade.

But the addictive nature of Alpha bites meant it was never a problem to entice a Pok to return to accept a fresh dose. The addiction could even be used as a deliberate weapon,

Karl Krushnic, Castiel’s Sire, although not generally a cruel man, had definitely demonstrated a wicked sense of humor on occasion. During the double term of one particular president of the United States, whom Karl had taken an intense dislike to, he had deliberately infected the man with a level of addiction that caused the Pok to suffer terrible, debilitating withdrawal symptoms at least once a year. Driven almost insane by his cravings, the Dobycha who considered himself the most important man in the world, would beg for a replacement bite.

Karl would make him strip naked, put a dog collar around his own neck and then crawl on his hands and knees around the Pack Hall for hours, literally licking the boots of every Volkrod in attendance, before Karl would finally relent and refresh his mark.

Castiel had never disliked anyone enough to repeat his Sire’s behavior. His deep marks were applied in private because he was genuinely fond of several of his more powerful Pok. Castiel considered the making of Thralls to be one of his duties as Alpha, not an excuse for animal abuse. Thralls protected his pack. They also, equally importantly, protected the Dobycha. If the humans became generally aware of the Wolfkin, war would be inevitable and it wouldn’t be the Wolfkin who lost. Keeping the secret of their existence from the Dobycha was an act of mercy. So he felt no guilt over the necessity to enthrall certain humans to maintain the status quo.

And when he met the particularly intelligent and useful Pok of one of his sub-alphas, he always appreciated the evidence that their marking had been done with careful precision. He found himself often evaluating those Alphas based primarily upon how delicately they handled their own most valuable Pok.

Which was why meeting Charlie Bradbury was such a delight.

The Dobycha female was bright, intelligent and as spirited as an Arabian horse. In fact, given her red hair and fiery nature, perhaps a ginger mare would have been a more appropriate metaphor. She confidently bustled around the Data center of the New Orlean’s Pack House and blithely pronounced several of her Volkrod coworkers idiots as she corrected their search algorithms.

Alpha Felipe winced and offered Castiel an apologetic smile as his Pok loudly pronounced that one of the Volkrod was obviously a reject from a puppy farm because his code made less sense than Han not shooting first.

“She’s a genius,” Felipe explained. “Her mind is unique and I value it too much to risk damaging her. I bit only deeply enough to remove her instinctive fear of Wolfkin. I may have removed it a little too efficiently for your taste, Alpha. Please forgive her any words of disrespect. She would be difficult to replace.”

He said the words in a tone of careful respect, his posture and scent acknowledging that should the Alpha of All make the choice to simply rip the irreverent human’s throat out that also would be a totally acceptable, if regrettable, outcome.

For the first time that day, Castiel’s returning smile was genuine. “My pride is not that fragile,” he told his sub-alpha. “I need the best for this task and all say your data miners are the best we Volkrod have at our disposal. The fact you are located in the city the pups were last seen in is a perfect synchronicity. If the reason you are the best is your employ of a Pok, then so be it. I want results not the stroking of Volkrod egos. Sometimes the best wolf for a job is a human.”
Felipe chuckled and released a sigh of obvious relief. “My Pack is honoured to be entrusted with your task,” he told Castiel. “I would regret the loss of my most valuable asset. She is the best tool to assist with this effort. The pokornyy is significantly efficient in tracking obscure data and I believe that tracing these pups will be difficult. To have concealed themselves for so long suggests great cunning.”

“The pups are obviously clever,” Castiel agreed. “They have managed to conceal their survival from us for twelve years. Which means they have somehow hidden themselves within the human world. They cannot be hiding within our ranks because neither have wolf-forms that could be mistaken for Betas. Yet they are Wolfkin. They cannot simply choose to ignore the pull of the moon. Somewhere there must have been sightings of them in their wolf-forms. So start here in Louisiana where O’Toole last saw them.

“I want every single local and regional newspaper throughout America trawled for reports of wolf-sightings. Every website, blog and Instagram account searched for references and photographs. Put the entire resources of the Volkrod to the task of locating them. Two wolves, one black as night and one white as snow, cannot have gone entirely unnoticed for all of these years.

“And discover his name,” Castiel added. “I cannot keep saying ‘the Omega’ as though he is some mythical creature. I want to know the name of the boy who has haunted me for more than a decade.”
Interlude: The Galla

“I have no idea what it means,” Dean admitted.

“You’re so stupid,” Sam announced, throwing the science text book towards his brother’s head and then pouting with all the angry petulance of a frustrated five year old when Dean’s only response was to duck with the easy efficiency of practice, then silently scoop the book up and redeposit it on the table between them.

Then, significantly, Dean reached for the dictionary on the shelf behind Sam’s head and shoved it in his brother’s direction. “Look it up.”

”YOU look it up,” Sam snapped.

Dean shrugged. “I’m not the one who wants to know what the word means.”

”You’re my Galla. You’re ‘sposed to always do what I say,” Sam smirked triumphantly.

Dean stiffened but didn’t flinch, didn’t allow his calm expression to fade. “Oh,” he drawled deliberately. “You don’t remember how to use the dictionary. Okay then. I’ll help you if you need me to.”

He pretended to reach over to take the dictionary back. Pride successfully prickled, his brother growled and grabbed it first, dragging it closer to himself and starting to turn pages swiftly to locate the definition of the mysterious word ‘parthenogenesis’.

Since Sam was a five-year-old with the capability of snapping into the form of an almost full grown wolf and ripping his throat out, dealing with his brother’s occasional tantrums was a challenge for Dean.

Not least because the young Alpha was bright as a button, greedy for knowledge and learned so voraciously that Dean sometimes struggled to keep up. Sam’s reading comprehension at five was already at least equal to his own as a nine-year-old, though Dean was pretty sure that was more a proof of Sam’s precocious intelligence than of Dean’s stupidity.

Whatever any of the other Wolfkin said about him.

Dean was not a Creiche. He was not Galla. He was not stupid. He was not just a pet or a servant or his brother’s whipping boy.

As much as he often felt that way.

No matter his Grandsire’s removal of his name and status, Dean had not forgotten his mother. She had always assured him he was Wolfkin, was Faelchu; and was important. Whenever he lost faith in himself, when the words he heard muttered about him cut like knives, Dean remembered the fierce love of Mary Winchester and reminded himself that his mother had believed he had worth.

It almost compensated for the fact his Alpha Grandsire was in the frequent habit of attempting to kill him.

Almost.

But he definitely knew he wasn’t stupid. The books he and Sam read together were written for the
vocabulary of young adults, which probably proved they were both advanced for their age.

Sam was just more advanced.

Besides, Dean knew he wasn’t particularly book-smart. His hands itched to do, his mind constantly whirled with thoughts, and the effort of sitting still and drowning himself in words felt even more restrictive than the narrow constraints of the world he already lived in. For another boy, escaping into fictional worlds would have felt like a way to escape his life; for Dean, books were just a different form of prison. Yet another thing to keep his feet trapped in place when all he truly wanted to do was move.

His inability to shift didn’t negate his urge to run. To move. To hunt. To fight, even. His body constantly vibrated with pent-up energy, like a pressure-cooker left constantly on the boil but allowed no respite.

And adding to that pressure, for the last few months the moon had finally begun to pull upon him. The silvery shine of its pregnant roundness singing a song that thrummed through his veins every month like a thousand hot needles that pierced his flesh and ignited his blood like lava. When the moon was full, his skin itched as though termites were crawling all over him. As though it wanted to peel away from his body to reveal whatever lay below.

Even if nothing apparently lay below that skin except the raw flesh of a Galla.

The moon sang to him and he wanted to answer its call.

Needed to answer its call.

He felt like an addict denied his addiction. Though the call was even deeper and stronger than addiction because that was a word that implied ‘choice’. The call of the moon felt more like his need for air. Not just hard to resist but impossible to live without.

Yet he had no choice because that lunar siren call still brought no visible change to his flesh. Still his form remained human and so, to the other Wolfkin, the new urges of his two-legged form were considered inconsequential. Laughable. The few times he dared challenge the pack’s refusal to allow him to respond to the call of the moon, their mocking dismissal had been even the more hurtful for their honest hilarity at the idea a mere Galla might wish to run with wolves.

The pack were not being cruel.

They simply found his request to be ridiculous.

It was as though, since Samuel’s decree, the pack had honestly forgotten he was Faelchu at all. Let alone Sam’s brother.

Then again, he wasn’t sure even Sam remembered they were brothers.

Dean couldn’t remember when he had last been called by name by any of the pack - Sam included. If he was addressed at all it was either as Creiche - which was usually just meant as a dismissal of him as ‘human’ but, obviously, had a worse connotation in that it actually meant ‘prey’ - or more normally as Galla, ‘bitch’, which wasn’t, he came to understand, even meant as a slur on his theta status but was actually intended to imply he was a ‘vaguely useful human’.

In that respect it was better to be considered a ‘bitch’ than a Creiche.

To the Faelchu, Galla was the typical name used to refer to any tame human servant. Just as
humans kept working dogs, Faelchu were in the habit of keeping working humans. To be known by the term ‘Galla’ was to be included not in the pack itself but at least into the pack hierarchy and - whilst it was not a guarantee - it at least removed the likelihood of imminent death.

Galla - bitch - was used to refer to anyone from an enthralled local Police Chief to a drug mule, a cook, a cleaner or, in Dean’s case, a nanny. Actual names were reserved only for Faelchu. Names gave status and security. Names meant you were ‘pack’. At nine years old, Dean was fully aware he was only alive at all because he had been given a name on his first birthday, that a naming ceremony had occurred. He even had a faint scar on his neck to prove it.

His name was Dean Winchester.

Except it also wasn’t.

Because his Grandfather had removed that name when he was six by declaring him Creiche in front of the pack and ordering his death.

Again.

Perhaps Dean had no memory of being sacrificed at eleven months old but the pack’s memory of that event was fresh and often vocalized. As was Samuel’s second attempt when he was six.

Sam’s act of saving his life, of preventing that execution, had given Dean a reprieve from Samuel’s death sentence but had not restored him as ‘pack’. It had not restored Dean’s ‘name’.

And at nine he was now two years past the time he should have received his second Alpha bite.

The absence of that mark on his neck was evidence to all that the Alpha considered him unworthy of even being considered Wolfkin.

So even Sam, his brother, now called him Galla.

It hurt.

But, to be honest, many of Sam’s words had begun to hurt.

Dean constantly had to remind himself that the fault lay with Samuel, rather than Sam. And because, at heart, Sam was a good and sweet pup who treated Dean with genuine affection most of the time, Dean learned to separate Sam’s general behaviour from the poison that sometimes spilled from his lips.

Dean clung to the fact that Sam refused to go to sleep unless he was cradled in his older brother’s protective embrace. That Sam often smiled and laughed and played with him in the privacy of their room and only very rarely snarled at him.

Well, rarely snarled at him with intent.

The pack house thrummed constantly with the underlying pressures of a pack at war, filled with delegations of Wolfkin returning to Samuel to report injuries and losses and failures. In that charged atmosphere, as Samuel’s attempts to regain ground against the Volkrod met failure after failure, perhaps it was inevitable that the anger and frustration that surged constantly through the pack bonds caused Sam to occasionally become a fretful, snappish child and that Dean, as his sole caregiver, was the usual recipient of that temper.

And Dean knew it wasn’t Sam’s fault that there was another constant underlying tension between
the brothers. That Samuel, cold and angry, was just waiting for the day that Sam finally declared he had tired of Dean’s company.

At five, Sam had no comprehension that every time he became overstressed, overtired, and snapped at the brother attempting to encourage him to eat food he found unpalatable or to go to bed when he didn’t want to, he literally risked his brother’s life; that each brattish utterance of ‘I hate you’, if overheard by another pack member, might have resulted in Dean’s instant execution.

So Dean’s entire life became a delicate careful dance around his younger brother’s unpredictable temper.

And Dean was no saint. He did become bitter and angry and hate-filled because no nine-year-old child of any species should live with the constant fear of imminent death hanging over his head.

But his anger, his hatred, was always aimed where it belonged; towards Samuel rather than Sam.

It was his grandfather who held the scythe over his neck, not his brother, and Dean never let himself forget that.

“Parth... parthen-o-gen-esis,” Sam said slowly, his face scrunched with effort, “is a natural form of ace... um... asexual re-prod-uct-shun in which..emb...emb...”

“Embryos,” Dean said, reading over his shoulder. “Asexual reproduction in which embryos develop in the absence of fertilization.”

“I know what it says,” Sam snapped, as though he hadn’t tripped up on the words at all. “I don’t get what it means.”

Dean sighed with relief. He’d got this.

“It means that particular Wolf didn’t need a mate to have pups. This book is claiming it’s how the Wolfkin originated. By a genetic mutation that allowed spontaneous parth...parthenogenesis that resulted in wolves with a different genetic structure.”

”Huh,” Sam said, his temper abruptly forgotten. “Is it true?”

Dean shrugged helplessly. “Dunno, Sammy. It’s just a theory. There are lots of theories. Nobody actually knows. Most of the histories of our people were lost back in Josiah Campbell’s time, during the Creiche Revolutionary War. Only a few of the documents that came over with Nathaniel survived the razing of the original Pack House. Wolfkin in other countries might know the truth but the Faelchu haven’t spoken to other Wolfkin in centuries.”

“We could ask the Volkrod,” Sam pointed out. “I bet they know.”

Dean shuddered at the thought. All he knew of the Volkrod was they were evil, demonic wolves who feasted on the flesh of Creiche babies and even their own pups sometimes. His own grandsire, Samuel, had taken a cruel delight one evening, after he had called by the boy’s room to bid goodnight to his beloved heir, in telling Dean he was ‘lucky’ to be a Galla rather than a ‘Pok’. Because if he’d been born so flawed inside a Volkrod Pack, he would have been roasted on a spit - alive - and then served up as an appetizer.

Dean didn’t know if it was true.

He definitely didn’t feel ‘lucky’.
Dean didn’t know much about anything, really. He wasn’t even allowed to accompany Sam to the data room - the pack’s treasure trove of Creiche technology filled with electronic ‘books’ called computers that somehow could be opened to provide *any* required knowledge, or at least that was how Sammy had described them to him.

All Dean really knew was that the Volkrod had killed his mother, so obviously *were* demons.

But that he *hated* Samuel Campbell so much that he sometimes hoped the Volkrod demons won the war anyway.
Chapter Seven

“Um. You sure this is the right place, boss?” Benny muttered, as he opened the car door and positioned himself protectively before Castiel climbed out.

Viktor had already emerged from the other side of the limo and was casting nervous, irritated looks at the stacked vehicles and other detritus in the yard as though he was imagining an entire army of would-be assassins lurking within.

The over-protectiveness of his bodyguards was always slightly irritating, though he was perfectly aware the majority of their concern was for their own survival rather than his. Regardless of circumstances, if Castiel was assassinated then his bodyguards would pay with their lives. Whilst he understood having that principle set in stone greatly lessened the chance of betrayal, Castiel still found it more of an inconvenience than a bonus. Particularly since the idea of ever being ‘betrayed’ was ludicrous.

Though, he knew from experience, it was possible for bodyguards to fail in the task regardless of their loyalty. And the penalty for failure remained the same.

Twelve years previously, when he’d been taken from his family’s home by the Faelchu, not every Volkrod inside that Pack House had fallen to the initial assault. But not one wolf who’d been inside that compound survived the slaughter that occurred after Karl’s return.

Campbell had stormed the New York pack house with almost his entire remaining forces. He had lost almost half of his wolves that day. Forty-one dead Faelchu in total. Thirty six corpses had been reconstructed from scattered body-parts. Five more Faelchu, still alive but too badly wounded to escape, had undoubtedly bitterly regretted their temporary survival.

But Karl hadn’t only slaughtered the wounded Faelchu. He’d executed the few Volkrod survivors too. Karl hadn’t cared that the Volkrod had been outnumbered over three to one during the attack; that only two Bratok and four Boyevik Brigades, twenty-six soldiers in total, had been left in place to guard his compound.

On discovering his youngest son, his Alpha heir, had been kidnapped, Karl Krushnic had written a message in blood that no Wolfkin anywhere would ever forget.

That it didn’t matter even if your spine was snapped in two and you were reduced to dragging yourself on your belly like a snake, you had damned well better not be alive after a Krushnic you were protecting had been harmed.

So perhaps Castiel ought to cut Benny and Viktor some slack.

He sniffed the air. Even in human form, all Wolfkin had senses far beyond those of the Dobycha but, as an Alpha, Castiel’s abilities far exceeded those of any Beta wolves. “There is only one Dobycha here. Inside the house itself. His heartbeat indicates he is aware of our arrival. He is alarmed by our presence, but not so much that he is mindless with panic,” he told his bodyguards.

He could scent gun oil and gunpowder and... salt?? Curious. But definitely no hint of silver.

And on the door itself, invisible, there was a sigil.

One the occupant was possibly totally unaware of.
One Castiel doubted even Benny and Viktor could ‘see’ since the sigil was written in a simple scent trail, a mark left by nothing more than the faint caress of an idle finger delicately traced over the peeling, faded paint of the old wooden door.

He doubted his bodyguards could even smell the faint trace of lingering perfume.

It was old.

It had been left there at least a year earlier. More probably two. And its edges were so tattered and frayed that it could have been dismissed as no more than an idle doodle to any Wolfkin not paying attention.

Castiel was paying attention.

In a looping, careful script, a fingertip laced with the scent of magnolia had traced two invisible words;

caraid dhòmhsa

The message was clear.

‘A friend of mine’.

It was both warning and plea.

And it caused Castiel’s heart to leap in his chest because this message had been left for him. The Omega had somehow always known he would come to this place in search of him.

Castiel shivered, even as he told himself it was ridiculous to feel spooked. Omegas were not prescient. They did not have the ability to actually predict the future. They were just smart, wise, wolves with a natural ability to predict the way a more instinctually-driven designation would probably act. It had less to do with intelligence than with the application of intelligence. An Alpha, no matter how clever, would never be able to outthink an Omega.

Because, to put it crudely, Omegas were driven by their intellect rather than their dicks.

The Omega had simply, logically, reached the conclusion that Castiel would eventually set off in pursuit of him.

Perhaps this sigil was not just meant as a protection for the Pok. Perhaps it was also a test.

”Whatever happens, this Dobycha is not to be harmed,” Castiel growled, his Alpha voice resonant with power, its tone laced with the threads of compulsion though he stopped short of weaving it into thrall.

As much as he himself felt compelled to respect the clear request of the Omega to leave this Dobycha unharmed, he felt he could not in conscience bind Benny and Viktor to a possibly suicidal adherence.

When Castiel’s Dedushka had died a few years earlier, Karl Krushnic had returned to their homeland to take over as Russian ‘Alpha of All’. Castiel had then automatically become the American ‘Alpha of All’. But although his status had been ascribed rather than achieved, there was a reason his family’s pack were deferred to without the need to prove merit through conflict. Something in the Krushnic genetics - or possibly a slight mutation in the virus they carried - made the bite of their Alphas far more potent than average.
There had never been a case of a Krushnic pack member or Pok breaking thrall. Even more significantly, no sub-Alpha had ever attempted a coup. For the entire recorded history of the Krushnics, to be Alpha was to be untouchable. Even by other lesser Alphas.

Whilst that was convenient for ‘business’ and at least ensured he didn’t have to worry about being stabbed in the back in his own Pack Hall, Castiel’s wolf loathed the safety his position accorded. It was unnatural to live a life free of any physical danger. Whilst he fully endorsed Viktor and Benny’s determination that Castiel would die of peaceful old age in his own bed, his inner wolf was determined to take enough walks on the ‘wild side’ to make that proposition only an ideal, rather than a guaranteed outcome.

Castiel suspected he had inherited his urge to live dangerously from his father. Why else had Karl traveled to America to ignite a war with the Campbells? Karl’s inheritance of the Russian supremacy had always been guaranteed. So the fact he spent almost four decades making war in America with both the Faelchu and the incumbent human crime families definitely suggested he felt the same way as Castiel did about just living a ‘safe’ life.

And safety was an illusion anyway, wasn’t it?

The Krushnic name hadn’t prevented an army of Campbell’s wolves from breaking into his family home a couple of months before his eighteenth birthday. The Faelchu hadn’t cared about the power of the Krushnic bite nor the centuries of tradition that accorded his family a worldwide reputation of being practically Wolfkin royalty.

Which was why, as the door to the house sprang open and he scented a faint tang of gunpowder, Castiel’s faint shiver was of excitement not fear.

“You ain’t welcome here. You can’t come in. So get the fuck off my property.”

At his side, Benny bristled and growled menacingly. Viktor mirrored his partner, but upped the ante by reaching inside his jacket for his gun.

Castiel just rolled his eyes and snapped “прервать.”

He waited for his bodyguards to stand down. Then he just stared at the man in the wheelchair for a moment before saying, “You seem to have confused me with a vampire.”

“Confuse this with a vampire, asshole,” the man said, suddenly producing a shotgun from under his chair.

Castiel didn’t even flinch. “You are smart enough not to have loaded your weapon with silver. You know I would have smelled it and ripped your head from your shoulders already.”

“Salt might not kill you, but it will still sting like fuck,” the Dobycha said. “Get the hell off my property before I blast you so full of rock-salt that you start crapping margaritas.”

Viktor snarled and took a step forwards towards the surly Dobycha who dared threaten his Alpha, only to halt as suddenly as a hound caught by a choke-chain when Castiel barked a single word of command “стой!”

This time he did weave thrall into the word. He couldn’t risk the life of this feisty Dobycha to itchy trigger fingers.

Then, knowing his bodyguards had been defanged, the Alpha ignored their alarm - they were now incapable of defying him even as they visibly shuddered in place with their distress at the order to
‘halt’ - as Castiel stepped ahead of them towards the doorway, placing himself directly in the path of the shotgun and, ignoring its threat completely, moved closer to the angry stranger.

“You know salt will not harm me,” he said, conversationally, “but it will ruin this suit, which happens to be one of my favorites, and then I might be forced to kill you. You do not strike me as the type of man who would like to die for such a trivial reason.”

“You know fuck all about me,” the man growled.

Castiel sniffed the air pointedly. “It’s faint and decades old, but you still wear the lingering stench of a Faelchu Galla marking to me. At some point in your life, you were obviously Campbell’s bitch. Perhaps that is why the Omega marked your house rather than your neck. I can understand why he wouldn’t want to place his lips anywhere near a pock-ridden scar left by Campbell.”

“Fuck you, you son of a bitch,” the man said, and fired.

Castiel staggered slightly at the impact, then straightened and glanced down at his ruined suit. He idly flicked at the powdery white dust that marked where the fabric had been pitted, and then he merely said, “I really wish you hadn’t done that.”

“Figure you’re going to kill me anyway,” the man said, with an impressively nonchalant shrug. “I might as well have the satisfaction of knowing I pissed on your cornflakes first.”

Castiel blinked and cocked his head as he attempted, and failed, to parse the idiom. Then he, too, shrugged as he dismissed the comment as irrelevant.

“I did not come here to kill you. I came for information.”

The Dobycha sneered at him. “Well since I ain’t gonna give you diddly squat, the outcome’s pretty obvious. I ain’t gonna tell you where them boys are. I don’t know. Haven’t heard from them in a couple of years anyway and wouldn’t tell ya if I had. So get it over with. If you’re gonna kill me, just damned well kill me. Don’t bore me to death first.”

Castiel could smell a lie buried within that truth, could hear the thudding of the Pok’s heart and the thunder of his blood, could smell the fear and the anger woven over a tapestry of loyalty and affection and a stolid determination to protect.

But the sigil on the door was faded enough to suggest the Omega was physically long gone. So the lie was probably only that the Pok claimed he had no idea of where he had gone to.

Perhaps another Alpha might have honed in on that suggestion of a lie. It would be so easy to sink his teeth into the Dobycha’s flesh and suck the truth out of him like the vampire he had denied himself to be. In mere minutes he could flood this defiant human with his virus, twist its strands through the man’s brain and turn him into his permanent obedient thrall or simply leave him as a mindless husk.

But the Omega ... his omega ... had spoken.

caraid dhòmhsa

Castiel had only visited the Motherland once. Karl had taken him there a couple of months after he had physically recovered from the events at Wolfsbane. He thought his sire had taken him to meet his Babushka in an effort to prove to him that the memories that haunted him were simply false echoes caused by PTSD and drug withdrawal.
Heroin didn’t have the same effects on Wolfkin as it did on the Dobycha. No opioids did. Their bodies rejected all the ‘positive’ effects of narcotics. In sufficiently high doses, heroin still caused similar negative side-effects though. Campbell had used the drug to heighten his pain, to make even a slap or a punch feel agonizing, to prevent his natural healing abilities from swiftly reversing the constant abuse he suffered at the Alpha’s hands. He had built neither a tolerance nor a dependence on the drug, yet it had taken months to eradicate its effects from his system. The flashbacks. The hallucinations. The bone-deep aches in his muscles and bones.

Perhaps it was no wonder that his Sire had given little credence to his insistence of having been saved by an ‘Omega’.

Karl had believed the best ‘cure’ for his son’s temporary ‘insanity’ would be to meet a real Omega. His Babushka. His grandmother with her eyes of blue fire and her hair of spun gold and her fur of white ice who prowled the hallways of the St Petersburg Pack House like an otherworldly Snow Queen.

Katya Krushnic had, like a typical Omega, completely failed to comply with Karl’s request she should convince Castiel his memories were false. Katya, like a typical Omega, never appreciated being told what to do regardless of how nicely and respectfully the request had been uttered.

Yet to Castiel, and Castiel alone, Katya was kind.

“Какая великая беда – слушать ушами и не слышать, смотреть глазами и не видеть,” she told him, as they lay side by side on the roof terrace that looked out over the waters of the Neva and idly watched the Dobycha cruise boats crossing below them.

*It is always a great misfortune to listen with the ears, and yet not to hear, to look with open eyes, and yet not see.*

Castiel wasn’t sure whether she was referring to himself or his father, and since he’d learned that she *never* responded to questions, he didn’t bother to ask.

She waited a long time, perhaps to be certain he would not have the temerity to do anything except listen to her wisdom, before she added;

“Когда наконец найдешь то, что хочешь, не гоняйся за ним. Просто открой дверь и жди”

*When you finally find what you desire, do not chase it. Simply open a door and wait.*

“I am not here to learn the current location of the Winchesters,” Castiel said, honestly, though it was interesting that Singer had immediately assumed that was the reason for his visit. As much as Castiel *ached* to find the Omega, his immediate priorities had shifted due to the information Charlie had uncovered.

Besides, he was only here to ‘open a door’.

“I was born at night, not last night. Why the hell else would you be here?” the human sneered.

“To learn about *Henry* Winchester. I believe that information is crucial before I even consider attempting to contact his grandsons. You are the only person likely to be a reliable source. You have my word as Alpha of All that I will demand nothing more of you today.”

The man scowled but he lowered his shotgun. “Why the hell didn’t you say so?”
Having lived his entire life fully aware his time was probably as finite as the sand in an egg-timer, and conscious that his body was as fragile as the glass encasing that sand, Dean had learned to step carefully and avoid Samuel Campbell’s attention as much as possible. It was the winter when he was eleven, going on twelve, when it seemed he had finally run out of wriggle room. He became increasingly certain his Grandfather’s scythe was finally ready to descend.

Sam was almost eight now. He had already gone through the ritual proclaiming him an ‘adult’ of the pack - which was clearly a ridiculous notion since he was still a tiny child, still years from puberty - and he was now considered to be capable of ‘reason’ and responsible for his own actions. There was some sense to it, Dean reluctantly agreed, since Sam’s wolf was now mature so, even if his human form would continue growing for another dozen years, his wolf form was fully developed save for the extra mass that time would inevitably add.

So perhaps it was just as well that the Wolfkin considered seven to be the age of responsibility for any actions taken in wolf form. It was still odd though because the rules counted only in wolf form. For instance, if Sam attacked another Faelchu in his wolf-form he would be held fully accountable. But if seven year old human Sam picked up a gun and shot that same Faelchu, he would not be considered responsible.

It both made perfect sense and yet, at the same time, was insane.

Aparently - and Dean obviously had no first hand knowledge to draw on to know whether it was true or not - when the wolfkin were in their differing forms, their thought processes were as different as their appearance. Although they retained all of their intellect in either manifestation, their minds and even their personalities could be totally different. A Wolfkin could be meek as a human but a near berserker as a wolf. Or even vice versa.

Which seemed like the ultimate form of bi-polar to Dean. If the Wolfkin truly acted and thought so differently in their human forms, then that added credence to the idea the whole transformation was the result of viral infection but implied that all of their actions in human form were due primarily to illness. That was a seriously disturbing thought. That the behaviors that differentiated Wolfkin from wolves were simply the side effects of an illness.

Besides, he didn’t really believe it. The Alpha, for instance, was a total tool in both forms. And maybe his mother had been more snappish as a wolf but she hadn’t had a personality transplant. And Sam was frequently a little bitch in either form... and Dean didn’t mean it in the Galla sense of the word.

But what did make sense to Dean was that in Sam’s mature wolf form he probably had considerably stronger instincts of self-preservation than he did as a child.

Which is why the ceremony that celebrated a Wolfkin reaching the ‘age of reason’ always involved a second marking by the Pack Alpha. The bite that - in Dean’s opinion - turned Wolfkin into no more than Galla themselves. Dean honestly couldn’t see much difference between Creiche being bitten to turn them into Galla and Wolfkin being bitten to make them obedient to their Alpha. Maybe the degree was different but the result was pretty much the same. A form of slavery to the Alpha regardless of species.

All of the Pack were Samuel’s ‘bitches’, weren’t they?
Naturally, he kept that opinion to himself.

But there was no avoiding the truth that Sam, who had always been unduly influenced by their grandfather anyway, became significantly closer to him after he received his second marking. Although Dean had always been prone to careful verbal criticisms of the Alpha, wanting to encourage Sam’s capacity for self-determination and hoping to foster a moral code in his younger brother, after the ceremony he learned that even implied criticism of the Alpha was liable to make Sam snap with temper.

Sometimes literally.

And yet still the one thing Samuel appeared to have little influence on was Dean’s continued existence. Any suggestion it was time to put away childish things such as Dean was the one thing that still caused Samuel’s thrall on Sam to fray. Maybe Sam was a spoilt, petulant bitch a lot of the time but he was 100% loyal to his older brother when it counted, and Dean thought that made up for any amount of minor pettiness on his little brother’s part.

Which was why Dean’s first suspicion when he became ill was that Samuel had simply tired of trying to convince Sam to grow bored of him and had instead decided to take a more circuitous route to rid himself of Sam’s much unwanted older brother.

Dean had been slowly sickening for a couple of months.

It had started with an odd itching in his nose. An occasional sensation of a faint smell or a taste in the back of his throat, of some sense being prickled. Whatever he was smelling, or sensing, or tasting was so vague and ephemeral that he couldn't describe it. He didn't know what it smelled or tasted of. He couldn't even say whether it was pleasant or repellent.

It was, he initially thought, perhaps just some form of developing allergy.

But as his 'sensitivity' to the smell (or taste) increased in severity, Dean became certain it was nothing to do with allergies after all.

He had been suffering near-constant, terrible cramping in his lower guts for weeks - sharp stabbing pains that felt like the worst kind of food-poisoning - and Dean soon became convinced that it was a slow, systematic attempt to murder him. He stopped eating the food delivered to their room; the food on his tray. It suddenly became extremely disturbing that he and Sam ate totally different fare.

Dean had previously never found it worth caring that his diet and Sam’s were different. That his tray was always filled with the basic omnivorous fare provided for Galla, rather than the expensive, meat-rich diet judged necessary for the Faelchu. Dean had simply accepted it as either the result of prejudice or spite or, most likely, a combination of both.

Sam, for all his snappish temper, always shared the tastiest delicacies with his brother anyway. In the privacy of their room, Sam was often willing to halve his steaks and would sometimes even share the mouth-watering desserts he was given that sadly never found their way onto Dean’s tray.

Because Sam - unsurprisingly - was never tempted to taste any of the far less mouth-watering ‘Galla’ food, Dean could see how it would be easy for someone to secretly slowly poison him without Sam being placed at risk.

The obvious suspect was obviously their grandfather.

So Dean stopped eating his own food altogether, limiting himself instead to consuming only whatever food Sam willingly shared or simply left on his tray.
Every meal time Dean would play with his own food, just pretending to eat and pushing stuff around his plate, until Sam was bored and distracted enough that Dean could sneak off and dump the entire contents into their toilet and flush away the evidence.

The cramping in his abdomen continued, made even worse with the addition of the gnawing aches of hunger, so it was impossible for him to know whether the ‘poison’ had already done too much damage to be reversed anyway.

His tongue hurt constantly, though that was possibly exacerbated by the weird cravings he developed. He found himself gnawing constantly on the weirdest of things. He worked his way through two whole boxes of the white chalk supplied with the blackboard he used for Sam’s lessons. He devoured three entire legal pads a page at a time. And twice, when the weather had brought snow, he had sat and spooned down an entire bucketload of the frozen water that had gathered on the planter outside their bedroom window, even though it numbed his mouth and had a weird taste suggesting the frozen rain had been tainted by air pollution. Then he ate a fair portion of the soil out of the window box too.

Somehow, satisfying his peculiar cravings eased his terrible aches briefly. Maybe, he thought, just because a stomach filled with soil or ice was still better than an empty stomach. But gradually it reached a point where nothing helped.

The pains grew so bad that sleep became almost impossible, until one night he tossed and turned so much that Sam tired of him completely and banished him to sleep on the floor. Sam, overtired and petulant, had not meant permanently but it was a development that Samuel greeted with satisfaction when he was advised of the fact the next morning by the Galla who always delivered the boys their breakfast. Samuel immediately arranged for a small camp-bed to be placed in the boys room.

“You’re almost eight now,” he told his heir, when Sam joined the pack in the ‘war room’ for his daily update on the campaign. “You have entered the age of reason. Just as you now are expected to attend these briefings, it is time to start putting away all childish things. A Galla does not belong in an Alpha’s bed.”

He meant the comment literally. Although Sam was just a pup still, he was of an age where - as an Alpha - he was expected to not only start participating in pack business but to need no comfort against cold or nightmares. The use of his brother as bedwarmer and comforter was no longer considered appropriate.

Dean might have objected to being forced to sleep like a hound at the foot of Sam’s bed except that it aided his effort to conceal his pain. He didn’t know what was wrong with him, only that Samuel would use any excuse of ‘sickness’ to claim him to be possibly infectious and so a threat to Sam’s health.

But as the weeks passed, as the pain continued to grow and he found himself barely able to eat and wracked constantly by fevers and chills, he began to lose a significant amount of weight. So much so that he worried his pale and wan appearance would begin to draw comment by Sam.

That particular worry turned out to be unfounded, however. Dean stopped outgrowing his clothes and instead began shrinking inside them. Yet Sam remained totally oblivious, even as Dean’s frame shrank until his skin was taut and his bones were prominent beneath clothes that now seemed at least a size too large.

It wasn’t that Sam didn’t care. He just wasn’t looking. The truth was he didn’t pay that much attention to Dean at all. Oh, he talked at Dean constantly. He just didn’t talk to him. Their
'conversations' were rarely more than Sam talking and Dean offering the odd encouraging grunt to continue whenever Sam's voice petered off.

Sam’s world was full and rich, his time stolen by his adventures as a wolf and the tales he was regaled with by pack members returning from skirmishes and the importance of being included in many of the Alpha’s meetings where only the very highest ranked Wolfkin attended. So he didn’t deliberately ignore his brother but, admittedly, had little interest in Dean’s life, which was so small and bland and... well, boring in comparison to his own.

Dean didn’t mind his brother's disinterest. His life was small and bland and boring. So he enjoyed living vicariously through Sam, since listening to Sam’s excited chatter about the world outside the walls that imprisoned him was the closest Dean came to leaving the Pack Hall.

Sam told him all about the evil Volkrod and the battles that ranged from gun battles, to car bombs, to fang against fang skirmishes in moonlit forests and dark alleyways. Of incursions and infiltrations and betrayals and, most shocking of all, that at the cost of three whole dozen of the Faelchu - half their remaining forces - Samuel had carried out a daring raid on the New York Pack House whilst Karl and his strongest Wolves had been dealing with a deliberately engineered crisis on the West Coast.

As a result of which, the Volkrod Alpha Heir had apparently been incarcerated in the Campbell’s dungeon as a hostage for the last two months.

Samuel had apparently expected the action to force Karl Krushnic to the negotiating table. Unfortunately, the Russians had not reacted as predicted. Instead of agreeing to attend a parlay to agree the cost of ransoming his son, Karl had retaliated by intercepting one of Samuel’s major drug shipments, stealing over half a million dollars worth of product, and then setting off bombs in two of Samuel’s casinos and three of his nightclubs.

Insane with fury, Samuel had sent a message threatening to send the boy back in pieces.

Karl had responded by asking exactly how many pieces? Then he had cheerfully added that three dozen would be a useful number, so he could give one to each of the Alphas at his disposal to focus them on the task of eliminating every last Faelchu from the face of the Earth.

Dean had needed to bite his lip not to laugh at that piece of information. He would have paid to see the look on the Alpha’s face at that roasting from the Russians.

With that comment, Karl Krushnic had not only made it clear he had access to more Alphas than Samuel even had Betas remaining but had set a clear warning that the death of his son would be repaid with the slaughter of every Faelchu. Even those still dwelling in their ancestral lands.

Certainly, within 24 hours of Krushnic’s communication, the Faelchu of Ireland, Scotland and even French Brittany, had apparently rapidly pledged allegiance to the Volkrod to distance themselves from the actions of their long-lost isolationist American brethren.

So, according to Sam, the Volkrod Alpha heir was now just being kept alive down in the basement and, except for Samuel using him as a regular punching bag for his frustrations, was otherwise unharmed.

If nothing else, Samuel was counting on the boy’s continued presence to prevent the Volkrod simply launching a missile at the Pack house.

Dean wondered if the Volkrod prisoner was getting as tired of living here as he was.
But he enjoyed Sam’s tales and, of course, the less time Sam spent in their room, the less Dean had to work to conceal his pain. That pain, already debilitating, had intensified until he could barely stand without wincing. His walk became little more than a hunched shuffle. To hide this, he began creeping out of their room in the middle of the night to do the few chores, like laundry, that forced him to leave the sanctuary of their bedroom and thus he managed to conceal his sickness from the rest of the pack for a short while longer.

Unfortunately, it was on one such mission that the pain, already such that he was forced to spend most nights biting hard on a leather strap to muffle his whimpers, abruptly intensified into a bolt of agony that knocked him to his knees. He dropped the laundry basket, clothes spilling onto the hallway in a multi-coloured rain, and as he knelt there, biting his own wrist to muffle the screams rising in his throat, he felt something tear beneath his pelvis, felt skin rip into a wound from which blood, rich and red, began to pour.

The cramps intensified as the blood continued to gush, thickening now, dark with clots, coppery and pungent; the scent drawing the attention of the sensitive noses of those few Wolfkin awake in the pack house in the early hours of the morning.

He never remembered the details of the immediate aftermath of his collapse but someone must have cared enough - either of his pain or the mess he was making in the hallway - to pick him up and carry him to the small infirmary in the basement. The fact that put him directly next door to the dungeon was simply a logistical coincidence.

But it was a co-incidence that changed everything, for him, for Sam and for the fate of the prisoner inside that dungeon; the eighteen year old Alpha son of Karl Krushnic.
“So, to save me wasting my breath,” Bobby Singer said, his expression surly but his tone a degree or two above frigid - which was still a considerable improvement on earlier. “Tell me what you already know.”

Now seated in the Dobycha’s kitchen, his bodyguards left to growl and mutter their displeasure outside of the ramshackle house, Castiel and the human were sharing a begrudgingly offered bottle of malt whiskey. It was a surprisingly good vintage, considering the surroundings, but far inferior to his own brand of choice. He decided, in the likely event he chose to leave the Dobycha alive at the end of the conversation, he would arrange for the man to receive a shipment of his preferred Macallan.

Being Russian didn’t mean he couldn’t appreciate a damned fine Scotch.

Castiel sighed, stretched his legs inside his slightly itchy, salt-pitted pants, and made himself as comfortable as he could on the hard, wooden, kitchen chair. He had a feeling this was going to be a very long conversation.

He hated long conversations. Hated any conversations, really.

He wasn’t a people-person... People-Wolfkin... What the fuck ever.

In the corner of the room the faucet was dripping. A slow, irritating noise that echoed through the silence like a form of torture.

Plop.

Plop.

“I know that Sam and his older brother, whose name nobody seems to know,” he muttered, his voice filled with irritation. Then he paused, his blue eyes flaring with sudden realization. “You’re his ‘friend’. You must know his name.”

Bobby glowered from under the brim of his baseball cap, his face scrunched into deep creases. “You met him at Wolfsbane, didn’t ya? You tellin’ me he never introduced himself?” he scoffed.

"He called himself Gan Ainm,” Castiel snarled. “I was calling him Gahnaynum for weeks afterwards before someone explained to me why I was getting odd looks from anyone who spoke Gaelic.”

For a moment the Dobycha’s eyes darkened with sorrow. “I’d thought you...” he began, only to trail off and then visibly shake himself before saying, “He still uses Gan Ainm. There’s a story there, but it’s not mine to tell.”

Castiel growled threateningly.

Bobby remained silent, looking totally unimpressed.

The faucet continued to drip like deliberate water torture.
The Alpha of All crumbled.

"Sam and his unnamed brother," he spat, "were sired by a Beta named John Winchester who somehow carried a recessive Omega gene, so he must have originated from an Alpha bloodline. Yet he wasn't a Campbell and everybody insists that every American Alpha bloodline other than the Campbell one was eradicated centuries ago. So that begs the question of where John actually came from."

He paused expectantly.

And Bobby just raised his eyebrows and waited.

With a huff of irritation, Castiel continued his narrative, "The entire resources of the Volkorad could find nothing more about the origin of the Winchesters except for the fact John's father was apparently a Beta named Henry. Working from that one fact, we established there is no Faelchu pack record of the birth of any Wolfkin named Henry Winchester. There is, however, a human death certificate dated 1980 for a man of that name. And also an interesting article printed in the 'Argus Leader' that states a 'Robert Singer of Sioux Falls' was the only survivor of a 1980 car crash that killed the driver of the vehicle, a man named Henry John Winchester."

Bobby shrugged. "It's not a unique name. By itself, none of that means anything."

Castiel tipped one shoulder in acknowledgment. "We found records of over three dozen 'Henry Winchesters' who fit the correct age group. Narrowing it down to this particular Henry was just a process of work and elimination. Not even that much work, considering all the rest of them were quickly established to be demonstrably human. Besides this, we established other corroborating evidence before arriving here. Although just the fact you've been Galla marked would have been sufficient evidence in itself that this isn't just another red herring."

Bobby grunted his reluctant agreement of Castiel's logic.

Castiel's lips twisted into a faint smile of satisfaction. "Since we both know Wolfkin can't be killed in a simple car accident, I imagine my questions about the incident are the same as John Winchester's were. We are certain that John visited you in 1994 when he turned eighteen. There was a two month period - directly before he mated Samuel Campbell's daughter - when he dropped off the map completely. In that same two month period the 'Argus Leader' reported two separate incidents of wolf-sightings in this area. Sightings of a particularly large gray wolf with unusual black mask markings. Which happens to be the same appearance that John Winchester's wolf reputedly had. And, since John was four years old when his sire died, I suspect he already knew who you were and where you lived. Even if he waited until he was fully grown to track you down."

Bobby harrumphed, his nose wrinkling into a sneer. "That's all you've got? And there I was thinkin' you Russkie wolves were supposed to be shit-hot at trackin' down information."
“We found you,” Castiel pointed out. Which was a slight stretching of the truth since it was actually the Pok known as Charlie Bradbury who had finally unpicked the tangled knot of possible recent sightings of the pups and then matched one of them against earlier confirmed wolf sightings in the Sioux Falls area, which had led to the connections being made between this Dobycha, Robert Singer, and both Henry and John Winchester.

Which had then opened up a whole new can of worms.

“Hmmm,” Bobby agreed grumpily. “So what? You want a prize or somethin’?”

“It is interesting that John left you alive,” Castiel said, not rising to the bait of the Pok’s deliberately disrespectful tone. “He must have been satisfied you were blameless in his father’s death, despite the story of your improbable survival of an ‘accident’ that took a Wolfkin’s life. That naturally points suspicion firmly in your direction, yet John clearly decided you were not complicit with whoever faked the accident.”

”Does my wheelchair look fake to you?” Bobby demanded.

“You look like someone who was deliberately hobbled,” Castiel replied honestly. “As though someone was willing to believe you were safe enough to leave alive but also wanted to be sure you couldn’t easily run.”

“Henry was my friend,” Bobby snarled. “That’s why I survived. He saved my damned life.”

”Why?” Castiel demanded. “How and why would a Wolfkin ever consider a mere Dobycha their ‘friend’?”

It didn’t even occur to him he was being rude until Bobby snidely replied, ”Maybe he just wasn’t a speciesist asshole.”

Castiel stiffened slightly, but still cleared his throat and said, ”I apologize. I am unaccustomed to conversing with ‘humans’.”

"As equals, you mean," Bobby huffed.

Castiel shrugged awkwardly. There was no point in denying it.

Bobby narrowed his eyes but seemed to accept the apology for what it was, since he gave a sigh and said, “We grew up together. Hell, I was with him the first time he shifted. We were ten at the time. He was sleeping over at my place, just like he had dozens of times before, but this time the moon rose and he suddenly turned. We both freaked out over that one. Henry had no idea he was even Wolfkin ‘fore that happened. His mom had been living in town for decades, pretending to be human, working as the damned town librarian, would ya believe? Stunning looking woman. All the men in town drooled over her. She did a hell of a lot for encouraging literacy in Sioux Falls. Mind you, it definitely would have put a weird spin on the weekly library Story Times if anyone had found out she was a werewolf. Anyway, point is, she hadn’t gotten ‘round to giving Henry the talk. Though, I can see how anyone would put off telling their kid about the whole ‘the birds and the bees and the werewolves’ crap.”

Castiel was stunned. “Henry was the pup of a rogue wolf?”

Was it really that simple? Had one of the Campbell Alpha-line Betas gone rogue decades earlier? If her existence had then been erased from the pack records - as usually happened with ‘traitors’ - then perhaps John and Mary had been distant cousins.
But no. That couldn’t be the explanation because although a rogue female Beta could have mated with any other rogue Beta and birthed Henry outside of the pack, the next generation of pups would still have been born feral. John would have been born locked inside a wolf-form. The virus could not survive two generations without direct interaction with an Alpha host. Unless, by coincidence, Henry’s mother had met another feral Alpha-line Beta, but since there was only one American Alpha line it would have been another rogue Campbell and with that amount of inbreeding Samuel’s grand pups would probably have been born with two heads or at least a pronounced overbite.

Perhaps he'd only seen the Omega as a pup, but even at twelve years old it had been highly evident the boy's genes were superlative. The boy had been coltish, far too thin for his height, and paler even than Castiel’s Babushka as though his skin had never been kissed by sunlight. But he’d been glorious regardless. There was no way he had been the product of inbreeding.

“All the Winchesters were rogues,” Bobby replied, shrugging one shoulder carelessly. “Right the way back to the seventeenth century. John was the first of them to ever rejoin the Faelchu, and by doing so he was completely corrupted by Campbell, poor bastard, so I figure the Winchesters were right to try to keep to themselves all them years.”

Castiel ignored the muttering about John. He was stuck on the impossibility of the claim that the Winchesters had been rogues for generations. The Pok was obviously confused as to what the term ‘rogue’ meant.

“You’re claiming an entire pack survived the original Campbell cull and then hid themselves from the rest of the Faelchu somehow? That they lived in secret for centuries?” he asked incredulously.

Bobby blinked at him. “Pack? Don’t you know what ‘rogue’ means?” he asked, looking sincerely nonplussed.

Castiel decided he had clearly just fallen down a rabbit hole. He took several deep breaths; reminding himself that he needed the information this Pok had, so shooting him was not an option.

He didn’t think the Omega would like him doing that, anyway.

The faucet dripped loudly in the corner.

PLOP.

Maybe he should just shoot the goddamned faucet.

He took a steadying breath and tried again. “Not an actual ‘Pack’ then. Just one single rogue Alpha family line?” he demanded. Perhaps that made sense. If that family had continually tracked down rogue Betas to mate with, the family line could have survived. Though in doing so, surely the family would have inevitably expanded back into a legitimate pack anyway.

Bobby frowned in thought for a minute or two. “Don’t think that’s an appropriate term, under the circumstances,” he finally said. “Bit sexist really. Or is political correctness only a human curse? Makes sense, I guess, that your lexicon is based on more traditional values. Do the Volkrod use the term ‘Alpha’ as a generic term for top dog, regardless of designation?” he queried, with seemingly genuine interest.

Castiel counted to ten, then growled, “Will you please just tell me who Henry Winchester’s mother was?”

“That’s the wrong question,” Bobby said. “What you should be asking is what was she? Because
Henry Winchester was the pup of an Omega, not an Alpha.”

Castiel shook his head in denial. “That’s not possible,” he said firmly.

Bobby snorted. “What do you know about Omegas anyway?”

Castiel stiffened at the audacity of the Dobycha. “I am Alpha of All,” he pointed out.

“I asked what you know about Omegas, not your damned job description,” Bobby snapped, rolling his eyes in exasperation. “I’m wondering now whether the Volkrod are as damned ignorant as the Faelchu. I mean at least they’ve got an excuse to have forgotten a shit-ton about Omegas, given they went three hundred years without one being born in their packs. But I figure you Volkrod guys must have produced a fair few Omegas over the last few centuries.”

“Our family has often been so blessed. My paternal Babushka was Omega,” Castiel said, with quiet pride. "She was the most magnificent wolf I have ever met."

“Hmmm,” Bobby hummed thoughtfully. “And did you have a Dedushka too?”

Castiel blinked slowly. “Of course,” he said.

Bobby snapped his fingers impatiently. “And that answers me, I guess.”

“What does?”

“You said ‘of course’, like it was a given. Like Omegas are not heterogeneous.”

Castiel frowned. “That’s a theory based on legends and superstitions. The science behind the idea is suspect at best.”

“Is it?” Bobby asked, dryly.

“It’s an unproven theory,” Castiel insisted.

"It was an unproven theory, maybe. But then you have the totally improbable and yet provable existence of the Winchesters to consider, don’t ya? There definitely ain’t nothin’ theoretical about them.”

Castiel was not a stupid man. The Dobycha was correct. As improbable as it seemed, parthenogenesis was possibly the most logical explanation for Henry’s existence.

Because he had just, belatedly, picked up on the significance of what Bobby had already told him. Henry, despite being a Beta, had not shifted until he was ten. Which, if true, was definitely proof of something bizarre having affected the Winchester bloodline. The only Wolfkin who shifted for the first time at puberty were Omegas. For a Beta like Henry to have only shifted for the first time so close to his own puberty, he had to have been carrying far more switched-on Omega genes than Alpha ones.

Castiel thought his tentative acceptance of the idea must have shown on his face because the grumpy human snorted and returned to his tale.

“Henry’s sole parent was an Omega. Deanna was the one who told me all of this. She was also the one who marked me as ‘Galla’. I was never Campbell’s bitch. Neither, for that matter, was I ever Deanna’s really. She didn’t mark me to put me in thrall. She did it simply to save my life. She knew if any of the Faelchu discovered I had witnessed Henry’s shift and had learned of the
existence of the Wolfkin, my life would have been forfeit without a Galla mark.”

Castiel blinked slowly as he absorbed this further proof. If the Dobycha had been marked by Henry’s mother and had survived, then Deanna must have been either Alpha or Omega because a Beta’s bite was invariably fatal to a human.

But how had she been either?

“It’s how the Winchester bloodline survived through the centuries,” Bobby continued. “A guy named Johan Winchester was the only Wolfkin of any competing Alpha-line who survived Nathaniel’s original cull. Nathaniel couldn’t kill Johan because he was Omega. An act that heinous would have shattered Nathaniel’s thrall over his pack. They would have burned him alive.”

Castiel nodded his agreement of that likelihood.

“But one lone Omega wouldn’t have been seen as a threat anyway,” Bobby continued. “It should have been the end of the Winchesters one way or the other. As far as Nathaniel was concerned, Johan’s only options should have been to die pupless, to mate with a standard Beta leading to feral pups within two generations or to surrender and agree to mate with Campbell. Obviously that was never going to happen, given that Nathaniel had slaughtered Johan’s entire family. Which, I guess is where biology stepped in and Johan’s body remembered it didn’t actually need an Alpha to reproduce. From then on, the Winchesters lived packless. They didn’t need Alphas anyway because the Winchester bloodline was preserved within an Omega line.”

Castiel frowned thoughtfully. Was it possible? Theoretically, it was. An Omega line could be as robust as an Alpha one. More robust, really, since Omegas theoretically didn't even need the addition of external genetic material to reproduce. “Omegas carry Alpha genes as a recessive,” he agreed. "Alphas and Omegas have mirrored genes. It’s sexism that we even use the term ‘Alpha’ line. The truth is, genetically, both Alphas and Omegas are interchangeable hosts as far as the virus is concerned.”

Bobby smirked. “You’re smarter than you look.”

Castiel growled at the insult. “And you’re improbably well informed for a Dobycha.”

"I’m sure you mean worryingly well informed. But I’ve known most of this since I was a teenager,” Bobby reminded him. “Not only have I always kept the secret of the Wolfkin but I’ve put a lot more effort into researching this shit to fill in the gaps than the Faelchu ever did.”

"Tell me what you have learned,” Castiel urged.

Bobby smirked and began to orate. “Johan begat Josiah, who begat Henry, who begat Joanna etcetera until Henry screwed the pooch by being born a Beta. Truth is, it was a miracle he was born at all. Deanna was not the first Winchester Omega who struggled to reproduce, but she was definitely the one who proved such a restricted gene pool couldn’t continue indefinitely. She was not a particularly healthy woman. I don’t know why for certain. It’s not like she could have gone and gotten her genes sequenced. But I suspect, after several centuries of parthenogenesis without any fresh genetic material being entered back into their family, genetic degradation was ultimately always inevitable.

"Deanna was already in her sixties before she finally managed to conceive - not that you'd have known that to look at her - and when she did finally pup, she only birthed a Beta. And that was it, game over. The Winchester line was going to hit a dead-end unless Henry mated back into an Alpha bloodline ."
“Which he did not do,” Castiel pointed out.

“Gotta admit that was less a conscious decision than it becoming a moot point. His mom died when he was sixteen. Natural causes. She was almost eighty by then and though that isn’t that old for a Wolfkin, like I said earlier, she was never physically robust. With his mom gone, Henry started feeling angsty about having no pack. After three hundred years, Henry wasn’t really feeling the whole ‘the Campbells are all bastards who deserve to die’ emotion. He was just a kid who had grown up believing he was human, who had suddenly become a ‘werewolf’ with all the nightmare connotations that went with it. Poor guy thought he was a monster. So the idea of there being a whole community of Wolfkin out there was attractive as hell to him. The fact some ancient Campbell had done his family wrong felt like water under the bridge and, with his mom gone, it’s not like anyone was around to condemn him for the decision.”

“So why didn’t he approach Campbell?” Castiel asked curiously.

"Love, lust, one or the other. I don’t know. Before he set off for Kansas, he went chasing the moon one night and purely by chance met and mated a rogue Faelchu Beta. The pair of them turned up the next day, both a bit embarrassed. The girl was already knocked up, so Henry decided he had been given a ready-made family and gave up the idea of approaching Campbell.

"Poor Sarah died when she whelped John. I half suspect it was John who inadvertently killed her. Poisoned her from the womb. As far as I can tell from the research I’ve done since then, Henry should only have ever mated a wolf that bore Alpha-line blood. ‘Course, he didn’t know that at the time. I don’t think Deanna had even known to warn him. The Winchesters had forgotten as much about Alphas as the Campbells had about Omegas.”

”Nathaniel Campbell caused even greater harm to all the American Wolfkin than I had realized,” Castiel said.

Bobby poured more scotch into both their glasses.

"You ain't even heard the half of it yet," he said.

Chapter End Notes

I made a deliberate choice here to claim Deanna as the name of Dean’s Winchester-grandmother. Canon doesn’t offer a name for a Henry’s mother, for one thing. More importantly, Dean would be unlikely to ever choose to reclaim a name that had Campbell connotations.

Gan Ainm, significantly, means ‘no-name’.
Interlude: the Scent of an Omega

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Alyssa O’Neil was five years old when the Volkrod first arrived on American soil. So war, in one form or another, was all she had known. But she had never experienced any of the fighting first hand. She wasn’t a warrior. She was a Healer. A role which had afforded her far more status of late than she cared to hold. Now the Campbell pack had been reduced to a few dozen members, keeping them all healthy - and patching up severe injuries that even a Wolfkin’s natural healing abilities struggled to handle - had become an almost full time job.

She had been born in Florida within the McAllister Pack, one of Samuel Campbell’s allied sub-packs and, as such, had only met her Alpha twice during her puphood. On her naming day and again at the ceremony celebrating her reaching of her Age of Reason - which had not actually taken place until she was nearly twelve, since Samuel had always waited until there were several young Wolfkin ready before bothering to travel to his sub packs for such ‘trivial’ reasons.

It was his way of reminding the members of his sub-packs that they were of little importance to him. Certainly they were completely at his mercy. Three hundred years earlier, there had been an actual McAllister Alpha-line. But since the time of Nathaniel, Alyssa’s pack was formed only of Betas who were totally dependent on the occasional visit of a Campbell Alpha.

She trained as a paramedic at a Creiche run First Responder school near Tampa, then moved to Kansas in the spring of 1996 to learn the medical knowledge that related specifically to Wolfkin anatomy from the Campbell’s ageing healer. She always intended to take that knowledge back to her pack in Florida but, just a few months after she arrived, the rest of the McAllister Wolfkin defected to join the Volkrod - one of the many acts of ‘betrayal’ that had led to Samuel being forced to sign the surrender accords with the Russians.

Alyssa privately thought it served Samuel right for having been such an absentee Alpha. The Campbell Pack accused the defectors, such as her family, of being cowards and traitors. Alyssa thought the situation was far less black and white. The Volkrod hadn’t simply offered an ultimatum of ‘join us or die’. The Volkrod had rewarded the McAllister Pack’s surrender by providing them with a shiny young Alpha of their very own. The fact that Alpha spoke Russian was a small price to pay for the whole pack no longer living in fear of an absent Alpha one day allowing them to descend forever into a feral state.

But the poor timing of her family choosing to accept the bite of a Volkrod Alpha while she was in residence at Wolfsbane meant Alyssa was consequently left stuck inside the Campbell pack with no way to return ‘home’, since her family were now considered the ‘enemy’.

Had she trained in any other profession, Samuel Campbell would probably have killed her just to make a point and set an example. But as a medic she was highly valuable. Few Faelchu were suited to studying undercover in Human schools because of their inbuilt prejudice towards ‘mere’ Creiche. So, not one to waste an opportunity, Campbell renewed the mark he’d placed on her when she was a child and wove her loyalty tightly into the Campbell pack. By the time he’d finished his thrall, Alyssa had almost completely forgotten she’d ever lived anywhere except Wolfsbane.

So the only relevance of any of the above is that, despite taking over as the primary Faelchu healer several years earlier, Alyssa had never treated Dean for any ailments and had arrived at the Pack after he had been born. She had been in attendance for Sam’s birth, but not for Dean’s. And
because Dean never ran with the pack and, since his mother’s death several years earlier rarely even left the room he shared with his brother, Alyssa honestly had almost forgotten the boy existed at all.

All she knew about the pup was the general rumor that he was theta, had no shifting ability and was locked, bizarrely, in a Creiche form so was considered Galla by the rest of the pack. The only surprise she had about the situation was that he had been allowed to live at all. As a healer she found it abhorrent that flawed pups were subject to ìobairteach, so she was pleased the pup hadn’t been sacrificed. But she didn’t understand why it was so.

So when she was woken in the night by one of the Pack House guards carrying the boy, who was covered in blood and barely conscious, her immediate thought was that he had been attacked as Creiche. Her second was that he was so skeletally thin it was amazing he was alive at all. Her third, as she stripped him of his clothes and began checking him for wounds was relief.

Combined with a vast amount of irritation at her entire pack and particularly the Alpha. Just because she was thralled to obey Samuel didn’t prevent her deciding he was a complete jackass.

"Leave him, Tymon,” she snapped at the guard. “I’ll take it from here.”

"Should I wake the Alpha?” Tymon asked. “I mean I know the Galla is not pack, but he’s still Alpha-kin. The Alpha probably will want to know the pup’s dying.”

Alyssa rolled her eyes impatiently. “He’s damned well not dying on my watch, though it’s a sodding miracle he hasn’t starved to death already. It’s menorrhagia on top of already severe anemia. He probably just needs fluids and blood and some damned iron. But I don’t have the necessary knowledge to be sure. I don’t even know whether I can use Beta blood to treat him since he’s Alpha kin. I definitely can’t believe none of you idiots ever bothered to mention his primary gender is intersex. If I’d known, I would have begun monitoring him as he approached puberty.”

“The Galla is a theta,” Tymon said, with a confused shrug. “Why would anyone care what primary gender someone is anyway? Only Creiche place importance on primary genders. Wolfkin don’t care whether someone is male, female, both or neither. The only important thing is their designation.”

"Because,” she snapped, “whether someone is Wolfkin or Creiche they can have differing medical needs depending on their primary gender. This pup could have died because of unaddressed and fully avoidable issues due to his primary gender. Do you honestly think there’s no physical differences between, say, a male and a female Alpha? Secondary gender might be a Wolfkin’s most important gender, but it doesn’t exist in isolation.”

Tymon stiffened and frowned at her mullishly. “Secondary genders are the only important genders because they are fixed,” he insisted. “Primary genders can be self-identified. Secondary genders can’t. A Beta can’t simply claim to ‘identify’ as an Alpha, for instance.”

Alyssa rolled her eyes impatiently. “I’m not talking about sexual identity you moron. This is about his physical welfare. So go stuff your political correctness where the sun don’t shine. I don’t care if he’s Galla. I wouldn’t even care if he were Creiche. It’s irrelevant that he’s considered the least important member of the pack. Pack is still pack. We owe him a duty of care. I need to go do some research and find someone who can give me some professional advice.”

xxx

Dean woke in a bed that any other Faelchu would have complained was too firm, under covers
they would have found too stiff and sterile.

For Dean, who had been sleeping for weeks on a camp bed with a single itchy wool blanket and no pillow, it felt like waking into luxury.

Though probably the best part of waking wasn’t the sensations he felt, but those that were missing. For the first time in almost two months, he wasn’t in pain.

Well, there were still a couple of niggling aches but that was all and they were so minor they were barely worth mentioning. There was a slightly uncomfortable throbbing ache in his left arm, where two needles were inserted into his flesh and taped flat against his inner elbow. One of them had been capped off, but not actually removed. The other was feeding some clear liquid into his veins from a bag suspended on a frame attached to the bed. His other slight ache was between his legs, but it was only a dull throb rather than the knifing agony that had caused his collapse, so he was taking the far fainter pain as a win.

More surprisingly, Sam was with him.

In wolf form.

Sam’s shaggy black wolf was seated with his butt on the floor and his head resting on the bed just inches from Dean’s arm, his eyes swirling a constant kaleidoscope of hazel and red, as though his emotions were spinning wildly between relief and fury. Those eyes were huge and liquid and fixed firmly on Dean’s face.

His posture, in any other wolf, would have suggested sorrow and guilt and concern.

Since it was Sam - who Dean loved desperately but was convinced was a self-centered little bitch with a total lack of empathy - he was either imagining things or he must have been a hell of a lot sicker than he’d realized.

"Hey," he said to his little brother. “I’m okay. I feel fine now. Sorry I worried you, Sammy.”

Sam just whined low in his throat and his eyes widened into even more dramatically contrite, puppy-like sorrow.

Dean found Sam’s apologetic posture confusing, confounding and altogether so out of character that he decided he simply didn’t have the energy to try to figure it out. Maybe he was dreaming this whole thing. Maybe he was still lying in the hallway outside the laundry room, bleeding out.

Or maybe he was dead and this was some kind of weird-ass heaven.

The heaven part wasn’t completely beyond belief because the whole place smelled so damned good he wanted to just wallow there forever.

What the hell was that smell?

He didn’t even realize he’d asked the question out loud until he was answered by the soft voice of a totally unfamiliar middle-aged woman.

“Magnolia Grandiflora,” she said. “I remember the scent from Florida, though it was never this intense, this gorgeous.”

Dean flinched, and Sam growled lowly, his lips lifting to reveal terrifyingly sharp teeth.
“Forgive me, dòchas. I didn’t mean to startle you. I must advise the Alpha you’re awake.”

Sam’s growl intensified, even as the Beta scuttled away looking totally spooked.

Dean blinked after her, wondering whether this whole damned scenario was a dream after all.

The smell was Magnolia?

He didn’t think so. The smell in his nose was not floral. It was earthy and potent.

So unless Magnolias smelt like ozone and petrichor, of rich loam, of rain dampened soil; the sharp luscious scent of Geosmin, then whatever the beta could smell was not what was filling his nose.

#

With the benefit of hindsight, Samuel felt like an idiot.

It should have been obvious.

Well, maybe not from the beginning.

When Dean was born nobody had given a damn what sex he was. His genital anatomy was of no interest to the Campbell Pack. All they’d wanted to know was whether the pup was their desperately needed Alpha. Scenting the pup and finding it to not even be a Beta but a totally ‘scentless’ Theta, had been such a blow that he had wanted to howl at the moon. He hadn’t given a shit whether the pup was boy, girl or a damned moominpig. The pup wasn’t an Alpha. So it was worthless to him.

He’d blamed himself at first. It was his mistake. John Winchester obviously wasn’t Alpha-line after all. Rather than correcting the problem of Mary’s genetic degradation, John had simply exacerbated the problem by adding beta-line genes into the mix. When Dean subsequently failed to shift, Samuel could only assume the problem was even worse than he’d initially suspected.

If there had been any other option, any other Alpha-line Faelchu in America, Samuel would have simply ripped John’s throat out, put a bullet in the throat of the abomination called ‘Dean’ and would have tried again.

Instead, feeling old and defeated, knowing his only chance of an heir now depended on mating his daughter to a Volkrod Alpha (and that felt even more crushing a humiliation than simply accepting the Campbell line would end with himself) Samuel had given in and had signed the accords.

Even now Samuel didn’t think any of the decisions he’d made in those first four years were wrong. He had acted purely on the available facts. It wasn't like he had a damned crystal ball.

But now, facing the reality of the truth, he realized he had made a fatal mistake in not reconsidering Dean’s presentation in the light of Sam's birth.

Sam’s presentation as an Alpha had proven John Winchester to be Alpha Line - albeit nine months after John's death - so all the decisions Samuel had originally made about Dean, based on the theory he had flawed 'beta' genes, had been completely incorrect.

Why hadn't it even occurred to him to reassess the boy in the light of that new information? Had he really been so blinded by four years of hating and loathing the pup that he had been incapable of even considering the need to take a step back and reconsider?
Yes.

It appeared so.

Because in those few months between Sam being born and Samuel igniting the war, the Faelchu had been ostensibly 'allies' of the Volkrod. Samuel could have reached out to the Volkrod to ask whether they had any experience of Alpha-line pups being born intersex, theta and unable to shift.

And he now knew that despite that enquiry proving conclusively to the Volkrod that the Faelchu were hopelessly ignorant of their own species, instead of having most of his pack dead and the Russians snapping at his heels - instead of having Karl Krusnic's heir chained beaten and bloody in his dungeon - Samuel would probably have been able to negotiate the return of the minimum of the entire mid-west in exchange for the promise of a betrothal between Castiel Krushnic and Dean, his OMEGA grandson.

An Omega.

What the ever loving fuck?

Samuel, like all of the American Faelchu, had always believed Omegas to be nothing more than legend. Fairytale from the old country. Like dragons and fairies and leprechauns.

Why wouldn’t he have? Their only books - admittedly a tiny and slightly singed collection from Nathaniel Campbell’s original library - mentioned Omegas only alongside mythical creatures and the tales of heroic and equally fictional Alphas. Samuel had always assumed Omegas were simply used as literary deux ex machinas by the writers of those tales.

Pack under threat from immortal Wolfkin-eating dragon? No problem. Pack Omega offers themselves as a virgin sacrifice to the dragon, only for the beast to fall head over heels for the ‘unworldly beauty’ of the Omega and then turn out to be a misunderstood enspelled Alpha who is then transformed back to Wolfkin form by the ‘power of love’.

Pack under threat by a myriad of unforeseen natural disasters? No problem. Pack Omega has prescient vision and saves everyone. Then, usually, runs off under the moonlight with the pack Alpha before they live happy ever after with a dozen pups.

Samuel had always assumed Omegas to be the alien space bats used to resolve every conflict and fill in every nugget of missing Wolfkin history. How did the Wolfkin survive for thousands of years without the Creiche ever becoming aware of them? Oh, it was the mystical power of the Omegas. How did a group of Betas survive being cut off in the arctic tundra for several generations and manage to rejoin the forces of the Viking Alpha Ingolf just in time to wrest victory from defeat? Oh, they just happened to have an Omega with them.

Twelve, hell even eight, years earlier, Samuel would have been thrilled to realize Omegas truly existed.

Now it was not only too late, it was a disaster.

The primary fault for which lay with that stupid bitch Alyssa. Samuel cursed the day he’d decided to keep the medic in the pack instead of sending her home to the treacherous McAllister Pack, cut up into a thousand pieces.

Samuel had made a point of eating his breakfast before opening the note she had sent to him first thing that morning. So by the time he had read it, it was already too late. She had told everyone the news. Everybody in Wolfsbane knew what Dean was. The unbelievable truth had raced
through the Wolfkin, carried by a thrilled initial excitement that had already turned to angry mutterings of dread.

Dean Winchester, first born of Mary Campbell, was OMEGA.

A mythical holy Wolf who had been sent to them by the Gods - and since when had the pack even believed in Gods? - even before Samuel had made the mistake of signing his surrender. A surrender that would never have been demanded of a pack with an Omega.

The current war, the deaths and sacrifices since the breaking of the accords, none of it would have come to pass if Samuel had not been blind, looking at his grandpup with eyes that could not see.

THAT was what his whole pack was now muttering.

And it wasn’t fair. How could he have known? Not one of the books had ever even suggested Omegas didn’t shift until after they reached puberty. That one single clue, taken with the rest of Dean’s physiology, would have changed everything.

But none of them had known before today.

Alyssa had made a totally unsanctioned decision to reach out to consult with the medic of an Irish Faelchu Pack, the first - totally forbidden - communication with their ancestral homeland in centuries. A communication that should have been impossible, given his thrall over her, except for the corruption caused by her damned Creiche medical training.

Alyssa had managed to convince herself that their pack’s fixed unbreakable rules of isolationism did not count in the case of a genuine medical emergency.

So they all now knew:

Dean wasn’t Theta. He was Omega.

He wasn’t an intersex abomination. He was Omega.

He wasn’t unable to shift. He was simply taking his sweet time about getting around to doing it.

And stinking out the whole of Wolfsbane with a floral perfume so richly layered that Samuel could barely breathe. Could barely think.

Never, in his life had Samuel even dreamed that a scent could steal his entire capacity for rational thought.

And now Dean was lying in the basement infirmary, snatched back from the brink of death, because he had spent his entire puphood starved of all the nutrients that Omegas needed in abundance.

Apparently, even if Dean had been raised as a normal Wolfkin he might have suffered certain health issues. Omegas weren't ‘delicate’, but they had unique physiologies that had very specific nutritional needs.

In treating him as a Galla, as a Creiche, Samuel had not only shown ‘disrespect’ to a designation considered ‘holy’ by the Wolfkin, but had enforced a Galla diet on him that had left him so severely anemic that without a transfusion from Sam, the blood loss of his first menses could have killed him.
So now Samuel’s heir, Sam, was also in the infirmary.

But not because he was ill.

Alyssa, on being told Dean needed blood only from an Alpha line Wolfkin, had gone not to him, the Alpha, but to Sam. She’d taken the blood from his wolf, since he was too young to be a donor in his child form, and apparently the moment the young Alpha had transformed he had picked up his brother’s new scent and was now preventing anyone except the medic from entering the infirmary.

Even Samuel himself.

He’d tried, of course. Because the Omega’s current scent both lured and repulsed him. Below the scent of Magnolia there was still a dark undertone of sickness and blood. The heavy sickly, coppery stench felt like a dagger into his own guts, a bone deep ache caused by grief and guilt and fury. He wasn’t sure how it was possible to simultaneously feel so guilty that he wanted to claw his own throat out and yet also so outraged by the unfairness of the situation that he wanted nothing more than to bury the evidence of his guilt by ripping Dean’s throat out.

And over all of that, as pervasive as a thick clinging fog, a scent as sticky as honey, wrapping around his raw nerves like a soporific drug. Not heavy perfume like a rose but soft wild layered floral notes. Sweet yet sharp as champagne, or freshly cut fruit, or a mixed bouquet.

The scent of Magnolia.

The scent of an Omega.

A scent that seemed to enchant Sam enough that Samuel’s own attempts to weave Alpha thrall into his voice commands drew nothing but whimpering resistance from the youngster. Ears flat against his head, fur raised in hackles - although Sam whined with distress at his inability to comply with his Alpha’s demands to stand down and allow him passage - still Sam stood his ground and blocked the doorway with snarls and growls. Nothing less than an actual physical attack would grant the older Alpha entrance until Sam calmed down and Samuel had enough problems already without physically assaulting his own heir.

Especially as Sam’s defiance appeared instinctual rather than deliberate. There was no suggestion of lust/mate/desire in the younger Alpha. Just fear and confusion and protect/protect/protect as though Samuel’s presence was causing a symphony of alarms to scream inside of Sam’s head, and all around them that thick heavy perfume stealing the ability to think coherently from both of them.

And Samuel cursed himself for the number of times he’d told Sam that Dean needed to die.

It was no wonder Sam’s wolf had taken over and was refusing him entrance.

All he could do was wait for the boy to exhaust himself and return to human form. As a ‘boy’, Samuel would be able to reason with him. Control him. And get access to Dean.

Because Samuel’s only hope of retaining control of his pack was if he could get the Omega under his control. If he could bite Dean, mark him, weave a thrall over him then maybe it wasn’t too late to turn this situation around.

If not for the rage of his pack, and his fear of how they were already pulling against his thrall, he would solve the problem simply by mating the Omega himself. Although Dean was only eleven - or maybe twelve, Samuel couldn’t remember for sure - he had hit puberty so he was obviously mate-able. Samuel didn’t give a shit about superstition or religious bull crap. Holy or not, Pup or
not, he couldn’t see how a mating bite from an Alpha wouldn’t swiftly put the Omega under his control. Even another Alpha could be put under thrall if they submitted, so Samuel couldn’t see why an Omega would be any different.

And though Samuel was sadly certain his own wolf instinctively wouldn’t allow him to knowingly harm an Omega, he was reasonably certain it wouldn’t require any violence to get the job done. Dean didn’t know what he was either, did he? He was currently nothing more than a touch-starved perfect storm of innocence, ignorance and naivety. The pup would probably be so damned grateful to be offered any affection by anyone that Samuel would probably be able to make a mating a done deal before Dean even figured out what was happening.

Unfortunately Samuel’s problems were far larger than a single Omega or his fraying control over his pack. Samuel’s primary problems were insanely violent Russian wolves who had put a price on his head. Mating Dean himself wouldn’t solve the Volkrod problem.

But Dean did offer an elegant solution to Samuel’s woes.

He was holding Castiel Krushnic, an eighteen year old Alpha who - if he could just clean him up a bit, get some of the heroin out of his system - was a nice-looking, virile young Alpha who would probably smell like an all-you-can-eat buffet to an Omega.

To be honest, throw the two of them together and lock the door and the outcome would be pretty obvious. Half dead or not, he couldn’t imagine the Volkrod whelp would display any self-restraint or that Dean would offer any resistance.

Krushnic would have to accept a ceasefire if his son was mated to a Campbell Omega.

And if, by chance, Dean did object to the mating, it would possibly work out even better. Samuel could claim the act as rape, and then the entire Krushnic empire would come crashing down as a consequence. There wasn’t a Pack in the world that Samuel wouldn’t be able to call on for assistance if his Omega grandpup had been violated.

So, whatever the outcome, Samuel could convince his remaining pack members that everything had worked out for the best anyway. It wasn’t like any of them knew enough about Omegas to contradict him if he wove them a tale of how it was only after presenting that an Omega became ‘holy’.

In fact, in view of his pack’s sudden, unexpected and highly irritating transformation into religious idiots it might even be possible to convince them that Dean had never previously been Omega at all. That his sudden transformation was actually a gift from the ‘gods’ to save them.

Maybe Dean could become Samuel’s convenient Deus ex machina.

There was only one member of the pack who had enough knowledge to argue with him and she could be easily dealt with.

He sent a message for Alyssa to meet him in the dungeon because he was a ‘little concerned about the health of the prisoner’.

He didn’t waste time when she arrived. He ripped her throat out before she even realized he had put her under thrall. He wiped her blood all over Castiel’s face and chest, before dropping her body at his feet where she would be found later. Just another victim of the evil Volkrod; a demon so wicked that even chained and drugged and battered half to death he had still been capable of ‘murder’.
An act that would add far more veracity to the idea of Castiel also being a sexual predator, if that was the angle Samuel would need to play.

Then, satisfied he had found a way to cover all bases, Samuel trotted off to take a shower.

Chapter End Notes

dòchas - hope

At this point it might be necessary to point out the LACK of tags for sexual assault/rape etc... Samuel’s evil plotting aside, this was not how the brief Wolfsbane Dean/Cas encounter went down.
Dean is a child. Castiel is not a monster.
And Samuel is not half as clever as he thinks he is 😊

Oh, and in view of the fact I brought in a character only to use ‘em and bump them off same chapter, I was so tempted to name Alyssa O’Neil, Léine Dhearg instead.

léine dhearg - red shirt
Chapter Eleven

The two men, Wolfkin and human, sat in a peculiarly companionable silence for a few minutes as they savoured the taste of the whiskey and let its golden warmth take the edge off the subject under discussion.

Then, possibly too irritated by the dripping faucet to genuinely enjoy the momentary peace and almost quiet, Bobby sighed deeply and set his glass down on the table.

“It wasn’t just Nathaniel. Sure, he started it, but the whole goddamned Cambell family have always been assholes,” he continued, his expression more sorrowful than angry. “Might not be totally their fault. Maybe the assholery is genetic but the restricted gene pool definitely didn’t help matters. Their Alpha genes were strong enough to take precedence in pups born from any Campbells mating with Beta-line wolves, but that caused its own issues. If male Campbells of any designation mated with Beta-line females, the females died in childbirth. Just like poor Sarah did. So whenever the Alpha of any particular generation took half a dozen attempts before producing an Alpha heir, he would leave a trail of dead Beta-line mates in his wake. The fact that generation after generation of Campbells were willing to pay that price definitely suggests some innate sociopathy in the Campbell bloodline.”

Castiel frowned as he considered that. “Female Alphas wouldn’t have caused any harm to Beta-line mates, though. Perhaps the Campbells continued primarily through a matriarchy.”

“Not according to the pack records I tracked down,” Bobby said. “At least 80% of the Campbell Alphas over the last three centuries have been male. So I guess that’s another explanation as to why the numbers of all the American Faelchu stayed so small. With every new generation of Alphas, several Beta-lines were getting seriously reduced or even snuffed out entirely. But, aside from that not inconsequential problem, having a single Alpha Line also caused a shitload of genetic issues in the Campbells. The genetic degradation was possibly even worse than it was for the Winchesters.”

Castiel thought about that for a moment, then nodded his understanding.

“With parthenogenesis there is no dilution of the genes. A degradation over time, naturally, but no introduction of competing genes. So the Winchesters remained ‘pure’ even if they inevitably became gradually weakened. The Campbells, on the other hand, were constantly having their genes diluted. The Beta pool available to the Campbells was relatively small, all things considered. So not only were they weakening themselves by only mating with Betas, rather than Alpha lines, but it would have been inevitable, over the centuries, for the exact same recessive Beta genes to keep being reintroduced into the Campbell line until they became dominant. Hit the same gene sequence over and over with multiple copies of the exact same weaker genes and eventually those weaker genes will take precedence. I imagine it became less likely for a pure Alpha to be born with every passing generation.”


The unexpected comment caused Castiel to choke on his whiskey. “What?”

“Oh, not in person,” Bobby admitted. “He was the bastard who gave the order though. Henry contacted the Faelchu four years after Sarah died. He had to. Unlike Henry, John was born as a normal Beta. He started shifting before he was even six months old. By the time he was four, Henry knew it was going to be impossible to continue concealing him from humans without the
support of a pack unless he was prepared to stick his son inside a cage for every full moon indefinitely.

“Gotta be honest, Henry did do that at first. Henry found handling his own shifts a problem but at least he was an adult capable of reason and stealth. John was just a toddler who was shifting into an almost full sized wolf. Henry was terrified John would end up getting shot or run over or even, God-forbid, captured by humans. But Wolfkin need to run with the moon. It soon became obvious that locking the pup up was screwing with John’s head. Every month it became a little more difficult to convince him to turn back into a human form after the moon had waned.”

Castiel shuddered. “I can’t begin to imagine how difficult that would have been. Perhaps it’s a mercy that the pups of rogues become feral. It always seemed limiting to me that the virus couldn’t survive away from Alpha hosts. But considering the near impossibility of raising pups away from a pack structure in what is fundamentally a Dobycha world, it seems more likely that the virus naturally extinguishes itself to avoid exposure.”

Bobby shrugged his agreement. “I imagine the virus mutated at some point in history into its current form for precisely that reason. The increased numbers and societal development of humans meant the Wolkin either had to drop under the radar or declare all out war. Considering viruses aren’t sentient, they still sure as hell are good at finding ways to survive a hostile environment. Anyway, that’s why Henry felt he had no choice except try to be accepted into Campbell’s pack. But the timing sucked donkeys. It was 1980 and that was the year when your daddy arrived.”

Castiel cursed as he understood the significance. “So a strange adult Beta, with no believable explanation for his origins, approached the Faelchu at exactly the same time as an invading force arrived in America. Campbell must have assumed Henry was the pup of an Alpha Volkrod sleeper. He wouldn’t have been able to imagine any other explanation as to how Henry could have been born outside of a pack and still have managed to sire a non-feral son.”

Bobby smiled sadly. “Exactly. He didn’t even give Henry a chance to offer a proper explanation in person. The minute he hung up the phone, he gave orders for Henry to be killed and for John to be taken alive in the belief they were both Volkrod Alpha-stock. Samuel was too arrogant to imagine the Russians would try to infiltrate his pack with a mere Beta-line wolf anyway, and since, just like the Winchesters, the Campbell line was suffering genetic degradation, John’s existence offered an opportunity to stop the rot. Samuel had bedded almost every female in his pack and yet had only managed to sire one pup, Mary, and she was a Beta. Samuel needed John to be Alpha line. Slip him into the pack, mate him to Mary, produce an Alpha heir, and claim the offspring to be proof of the continuing potency of the Campbell genes.

"The so-called car crash was set up to cover Henry’s murder because he was openly living as a human in a pretty tight-knit community and the Faelchu didn’t want anybody asking questions if he simply disappeared. Henry had always hidden John’s existence though, so no human authorities knew to look for him. And I was left alive as a ‘witness’ because Henry assured Campbell’s attack hounds that I was ‘Galla’ and was under compulsion to protect the Wolfkin so would support the narrative of the accident and add veracity.”

"He co-operated in his own murder to protect you and his son,” Castiel surmised.

"He was my friend, and a good man, and a good father. John’s survival was all that mattered to him. And the last thing he did, before he surrendered, was whisper something to John. I firmly believe that he thrallled him to come and find me as an adult to learn his true history. I know Henry was ‘only’ a Beta, but his genes were primarily Omega. I believe, just like his late presentation, he had certain Omega abilities. He sure as hell managed to make me stand by and allow my best
friend to die.”

"And John *did* come to visit you when he was eighteen,” Castiel said thoughtfully.

"He did,” Bobby agreed.”But it was already too late. Maybe it was *always* too late for John though. As a product of Henry's already degraded genes having been further diluted by mating with a beta-line female, he was never gonna be the brightest spark in the woodpile anyway. He’d spent his formative years being caged every month. Then he'd been taken in as a tiny pup, raised by the Campbell pack and poisoned by Samuel's mark. He barely remembered his father and had never met his grandmother. Since the Campbells had birthed no Omegas since arriving in America, John arrived here believing them to be nothing more than myth and legend and he completely rejected my version of his history.

“Take it from me, there is very little more annoying than someone asking you questions and then *arguing* with your answers. He was a tiresome, boring little *superior* bastard. He made *you* seem like Ms. Congeniality in comparison.”

"Ms. Congeniality?” Castiel recreated incredulously, torn between annoyance and confusion.

Bobby just snorted. “If he hadn’t been Henry’s son, I would have kicked him off my property the first time he opened his mouth and told me I didn’t know what the hell I was talking about. He had such a dogmatic *stupid* faith in his existing limited and narrow world view that he didn’t *want* to learn the truth. He only heard what he wanted to hear. So, I figure he only came here at all because of Henry’s compulsion. He sure as hell wasn’t prepared to swallow unpalatable truths from the mouth of a ‘Creiche’.

"I warned him not to mate Mary Campbell,” Bobby added. “I told him his best choice would be to leave America completely because everyone knew the bite of a Campbell was like taking poison into your veins. He didn’t listen. For one thing, he already wore Samuel’s bite so even the thought of turning against him made him feel nauseous. He didn’t want to leave the States and, more importantly, he’d been in love with Mary since they were pups. I imagine Campbell deliberately encouraged that relationship.

“*But John did* accept the probability that Henry’s death had been ordered by Samuel. And although he laughed at the idea of Deanna being an ‘Omega’, and just assumed as a human I had no idea what I was talking about, he eagerly grasped the idea he was carrying *Alpha* genes.

"He decided his best revenge upon Samuel for his father’s murder - because he still couldn’t bring himself to act directly against him - was to mate Mary and sire the next Campbell heir himself. I did point out it was shit poor revenge if that was what Samuel wanted anyway,” he grumbled. “And given how it all turned out, it looks like I was right. John was a fool but I don't know how much of that was Samuel's influence as opposed to the fact John was never playing with a full deck anyway.

"But then I met John’s boys and I started to wonder whether the whole goddamned thing was fate after all. Maybe nature always tries to heal herself. It took three hundred years but *finally*, two separate Faelchu Alpha lines merged again, slotting together like jigsaw pieces, somehow immediately patching the genes together to correct the damage in both gene sequences to produce absolutely perfect examples of both an Alpha and an Omega.

“Those boys are both stunning, Alpha Krushnic. Both as humans and as wolves. It broke my heart to meet them. To know that Deanna had died before learning her legacy would live on in those boys. And I swear I will expose the whole goddamned lot of you before I allow the Volkrod to harm either of them.”
"I am not trying to harm them," Castiel growled. "Neither of them. And definitely not the Omega. There isn’t a Wolfin alive who would bring harm to an Omega. That’s the part I don’t understand," he admitted. "Why the hell did Samuel Campbell waste half of his Betas kidnapping me to use as a hostage? He had an Omega grandson. My father would never have attacked Wolfsbane if he’d known an Omega was in residence. Perhaps there was never any possibility of peace with Samuel by that point, but the Volkrod would have tolerated him and would have gifted Kansas to the Faechu in perpetuity. No Wolkin pack would ever willingly allow an Omega to be rendered homeless or packless. The Omega was Campbell’s golden ticket. Yet he never used it, and that makes no sense. If Campbell been willing to negotiate a possible betrothal between his Omega and myself, my father would probably have given him considerably more than just Kansas."

Bobby frowned in confusion. "I thought all Omegas are ornery little cusses who never do as they’re told. That’s why De... um... why Deanna hated listening to advice. That don’t fit with the idea of arranged matings."

Castiel looked startled and a little shocked. "A betrothal isn’t an arranged mating. It’s an agreed meeting. An opportunity to be considered a suitable mate. That is all. Like all Wolkin, Omegas are olfactory-driven. And they are extremely choosy about their mates. It’s a problem, really. There’s a considerable power imbalance between Alphas and Omegas, due mainly to the different ways they react to each other’s scents. An Alpha’s scent barely even registers to an Omega unless they are highly compatible and worth consideration as a mate. If an Alpha doesn’t smell ‘right’ to an Omega, they barely smell at all and don’t have a chance in hell of being chosen.

"Omegas, on the other hand, smell glorious to all Wolkin. But one of the reasons Omega have always been set-apart from other Wolkin - treated as untouchable - is to reduce the chance of unsuitable Alphas being harmed by being inadvertently scent-marked by them."

Bobby rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "You’re suggesting the Omegas are treated like they are ‘holy’ because they are considered dangerous?"

Castiel shrugged. "To Alphas, they can be. If an Omega scent-marks an Alpha, then it’s highly probable the Alpha will develop a life-long obsession with that Omega’s scent and then struggle to ever successfully mate with a different Wolf. So a betrothal to an Omega is high risk for the Alpha because of the chance of being marked but rejected."

"That doesn’t sound like a good thing," Bobby chuckled. "You’re saying your father would have given Campbell a small fortune just for the opportunity to let you get totally screwed up by the Omega?"

Castiel’s lips quirked into a slight smile. "I admit it probably sounds incomprehensible to a human. For a Wolkin Alpha, the risk is definitely worth it. And Omegas aren’t capricious. If an Alpha doesn’t smell right to them, they make their disinterest clear from the outset. And although a scent mark doesn’t require a bite, it still requires actual skin on skin contact in addition to intent, so the chances of an inadvertent scent-bond occurring are very low. So a betrothal is seen as a highly valuable opportunity even without a guaranteed positive outcome. Everyone knows Omegas do as they please, but just the possibility of a successful future mating would have made my father soften to the Campbells considerably."

"So, I’m gonna have to ask, ‘Cos those boys are as close to sons as I’m ever going to get,’” Bobby said. "If a scent bond requires skin-on-skin contact and my kid was only twelve years old, why the fuck are you sitting here in my kitchen stinking like a rejected prom-date?"

Castiel stiffened and his eyes flashed red as he glared at the Pok. "I was wounded. Extremely
weak. The Omega physically helped me to walk out of that house. That is all. It was a stressful dangerous situation and the Omega was very young. I imagine he did it inadvertently.”

"A mistake, huh?" Bobby replied.

"I cannot afford to believe otherwise," Castiel admitted, with quiet dignity.

"So, let me get this straight. The kid broke you out of that house, saved your life and, while doing so, ‘accidentally’ stamped a mark of ownership on your ass?"

"As I said. It was a dangerous, emotionally charged situation and he was very young," Castiel replied. “And, to be honest, I don’t remember the incident in detail.”

"So you being here isn’t an attempt to make good on that implied promise?"

"I clearly failed to convey the situation to you correctly. Even if the Omega did scent mark me deliberately - which I highly doubt - the only direct consequence is my inability to take a different mate. It has set no obligations upon him to fulfil that role.”

"So, basically, you are his Bitch, Mr. Alpha of All," Bobby snorted.

Before that moment, Castiel had imagined he would respond to such a disrespectful statement with extreme prejudice. For some inexplicable reason, he unexpectedly saw the humor in the situation.

"It appears so,” he said, with an aggrieved sigh.

"Yeah, well, happens to the best of us,” Bobby chuckled. “I felt that way about Deanna and she was over five times my age and never treated me as more than a vaguely endearing puppy.”

For a moment the two men locked eyes with an understanding that overcame the differences in their species, age and status. Then Castiel shook himself and said, ”The most inexplicable part of this whole story is that ‘Gan Ainm’ was born at least three or four years before his Alpha brother. He must have already been born when Samuel signed the accords that he then broke after his heir was born. So why the hell did he sign in the first place? Didn’t he realize that my Sire would never have imposed the tithe if he’d known? No Wolf would ever set a tax upon a Pack Hall housing an Omega. It would have been seen as practically stealing food out of the Omega’s mouth.”

Bobby’s lip curled ironically. “Yeah. An Omega is a gift that keeps on giving. John’s firstborn was like a golden goose wasn’t he? Odd that Samuel didn’t take advantage of that, for sure.”

Castiel narrowed his eyes suspiciously. "I have the distinct impression you know more than you’re telling.”

"Ain’t my story to tell,” Bobby replied bluntly. “You want to know about ancient history, fine. You want to know about the boys? You can ask them yourself.”

"Well, I would if I could,” Castiel replied drolly. “But you said you don’t know where they are.”

Bobby shrugged. “I ain’t lyin’. I know what an Alpha bite can make me do. You think I’ve let them boys tell me any info when someone like you could always drag that shit out of me?”

Castiel shook his head. “I believe you. I didn’t at the beginning of this conversation but it is clear to me you are perfectly aware of my abilities so would have deliberately avoided that knowledge. But I am reasonably confident you know how to get hold of them.”
He raised his hand for silence before Bobby protested.

“I gave my word to you, so I will be leaving now, Mr. Singer. You will come to no harm from me today. I ask only that you pass a message on to them. If the opportunity arises, of course,” he added, with faint sarcasm. “I would appreciate it if you might pass my personal apologies to the Omega. The attack on Wolfsbane occurred the instant I was sighted outside of the house. I did not break my oath. I simply reached my pack too late to prevent the launching of the missiles. Tell him I am exceedingly pleased to learn that both he and his brother survived. Tell him that as soon as I learned of their survival, Sam Winchester was declared neprikasayemyy. Untouchable. Both are welcome within the Volkrod.”

Bobby nodded. “If I hear from them, I’ll let them know what you’ve said.” Then he chuckled softly, and added, “If I did have a way to get hold of them - and I ain’t saying that I do - but if I did, I think it’s gonna take more than some pretty words to get them boys to give you a chance. It’s been twelve years. Plenty of time for ‘Gan’ to have set his scent on some other poor bastard. You might need to show a bit more effort if you want him to remember why he marked you in the first place. Just sayin’.”
Interlude: the Scent of an Alpha

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The middle-aged female Beta didn’t return to the infirmary.

Which was a problem for Dean, primarily because nobody else returned either.

Well, that wasn’t strictly true because on three separate occasions Dean heard Samuel trying to gain access but Sam, who still was refusing to shift out of his wolf-form, wouldn’t let him in.

Samuel not coming in was not part of the problem. That was a distinct and very welcome bonus in Dean’s opinion. The problem was that the bag of fluid that had been dripping into his arm had drained dry and Dean wasn’t sure what to do. He didn’t even know what the fluid was for, but once it stopped its gradual flow into his arm he definitely started feeling less comfortable than before.

For ‘less comfortable’ read ‘slightly woozy’ and Dean didn’t think he could afford to faint again with danger all around him. Knowing his luck, he’d wake up next time in the dungeon next door.

Hell, whichever wolf had deposited him here had probably just made a mistake. Had been told to take him to the basement, maybe, and had misunderstood the exact destination. Maybe the wolf who had picked him up and carried him here had been new, or something.

He carefully climbed out of the bed and rose to his feet, which was the first time he noticed he was dressed in clean brushed-cotton pj bottoms and a soft plain white tee that was so crisply colored he doubted it had ever been washed. The clothes didn’t belong to him, for all they fitted him almost perfectly. Dean couldn’t ever remember wearing anything except ill-fitting hand-me-downs faded with age. He didn’t have a single white item that wasn’t either a weird dirty grey or the peculiar pinkish color that spoke of laundry disasters.

New clothes were for Alpha pups.

Not for Dean.

Just as medical treatment was for pack members.

Not for Galla.

Was it possible the middle aged Beta woman simply hadn’t known who he was? He hadn’t recognised her. Maybe she was new too. Maybe the Campbell pack had stumbled across some Faelchu who had spent the last eight years in hiding or something. Maybe nobody had explained to them that Dean had no value to the pack; that he wasn’t worth saving.

Standing up pulled the tubing taut but didn’t dislodge the needle from his arm, and allowed him to read the writing on the depleted bag.

Saline.

Huh.

Wasn’t that salt? Why on Earth was he having salt-water pumped into his veins? Even if he couldn’t shift, he was still a wolf; not a fish. He had absolutely no idea why salt water should be
used as a kind of medicine but it had clearly been doing something good and he could see another full, seemingly identical, bag lying on a table just out of his reach. It seemed reasonable to assume the bag was supposed to be swapped out, but he didn’t see how he could reach it without pulling the needles and tubes out of his arm, and then he had no way of reinserting them.

He wondered whether Sam’s wolf would respond to a ‘fetch’ command, then considered the size and sharpness of Sam’s fangs and decided that was a piss-poor idea even if his brother didn’t take offence and decide to bite him in retaliation for treating him like a dog.

He was going to have to convince Sam to shift back to human form.

But then Sam wouldn’t be able to stop Samuel getting inside the room.

Still, he could hear the sound of a lot of Wolfskin milling around outside, many of them in wolf-form, all muttering and griping and yipping and whining. So the infirmary being breached by at least one of them was probably only a matter of time and Dean was pretty sure at least one of those Pack members were going to point out that he was just a Galla so shouldn’t be receiving medical treatment anyway.

So he needed to take advantage while he still could. Whatever was wrong with him - and he was less certain now of his poison self-diagnosis - this saline stuff was definitely helping. As was whatever the other needle had been for. He was suspecting he’d received a blood transfusion, given the color of the liquid inside the short amount of capped off tubing. Which made sense, he guessed, considering his vague yet vivid memories of the mess he’d made outside the laundry.

“Sam,” he wheedled. “Look, you’ve done a great job, buddy, But now I need you to shift back. Just for a few minutes, okay? I need some opposable thumb type help now.”

Sam’s wolf whined, snarled, turned in several circles, then sat down in the middle of the infirmary and let out a mournful howl.

From a distance, but not a far-enough distance, Sam’s howl was joined by at least a half-dozen echoing cries of support and commiseration.

Dean’s skin prickled and he shivered. He didn’t know what the hell was happening, but none of it felt good. Surely, any minute now, someone was going to stop taking no for an answer and come bursting through that doorway and kick his butt for getting Sammy so upset. Because, let’s face it, the only possible reason anyone was outside the room at all was their concern over the distress of ‘the Alpha Heir’ and Dean was realistic enough to figure out that the blame for Sam’s distress was going to come down on his head.

He gave an involuntary little whimper of his own, at the thought of whatever punishment was inevitably coming his way sooner or later. Sooner was definitely more probable. His whimper came out sounding peculiarly like a whine.

Sam howled again in response, his eyes flashing red/hazel, red/hazel like traffic lights.

“Okay, Sammy. Okay,” Dean soothed, feeling slightly panicked himself.

Sam stopped howling but stubbornly remained in his wolf-form and it was clear any further attempts to get him to shift would only agitate him further.

Dean didn’t know why Sam found even the idea of shifting back to human form to be so stressful, but he wasn’t willing to force the issue. Maybe he could do the old shuffle-hop with the entire bed.
Sammy’s wolf might have been a drama queen, but it was smart. No sooner had Dean started his attempt to drag the bed towards the table than Sam realized what he was trying to reach. Dean winced as the huge black wolf’s mouth opened and descended with flashing teeth, but then Sam stopped, a moment before his fangs pierced the plastic and, instead of biting down to pick the saline bag up, he used his head to swipe the bag off the table onto the floor.

It landed with a loud plop, but didn’t burst, and then Sam used his muzzle to push it across the floor until it was within Dean’s reach.

Then Sam turned and raced back to the doorway, where several of the Betas had gathered, drawn by the sound of Sam’s earlier howls. He greeted their presence with snarls and growls and they scuttled backwards with hasty apologies.

Dean smirked as he listened to his brother angrily driving the Betas away. He had no idea what was going on. He also had no idea, even, of what was wrong with him. But, as he attached the fluid and allowed the electrolyte-rich saline to drip into his veins, he decided that, no matter the ultimate outcome, nothing was going to take away from his delight in witnessing Sam’s wolf snarling and snapping and howling to protect him.

All too often he had begun to doubt his brother had any true affections for him.

Just a week earlier he remembered feeling seriously sorry for himself because his twelfth birthday had arrived and passed totally unnoticed. He hadn’t expected anyone else in the pack to remember his birthday - ever since his mother’s death, that kind of thing had lost significance to anyone except himself and Sam - but this year even Sammy had forgotten. Dean knew it was stupid to feel as hurt as he had. It hadn’t really mattered, had it? And Sam was busy with all his important Alpha-heir stuff. So Dean hadn’t even said anything.

But it had still hurt.

Yet it appeared that whatever had caused him to collapse had frightened Sammy enough to drive him into his wolf-form, in which there was no artifice only instinct. Perhaps ‘human’ Sam often pretended indifference, but wolf Sam clearly felt an impassioned amount of affection. Knowing that did more to ease Dean’s lingering aches than even the saline did.

Sam cared. Sam actually cared.

Huh.

And, yeah, sure there would be a price to pay later when Samuel somehow made all of this out to be Dean’s fault - as he inevitably would - but, whatever happened, at least he would know that underneath Sam’s frequent acts of thoughtless indifference there really was some real, genuine brotherly affection.

So he settled down on the bed again, letting the fluid drip into his arm, letting himself enjoy the temporary reprieve as Sam guarded the door, and he almost managed to convince himself everything would work out okay and he wouldn’t end the day with Samuel ordering someone to shoot him.

Again.

A little later he heard more sounds of distressed Betas, And his heart thudded back into overdrive and he jerked upright in panic - expecting this to be the signal that Samuel was finally going to burst into the room - but this time the commotion was nothing to do with him or Sam. The noise
seemed to be coming from the other side of the basement, from the location of the dungeon.

In which, Dean belatedly remembered, the Volkrod prisoner was apparently being held.

His face scrunched as he concentrated hard, trying to hone in on the sounds, attempting to
distinguish the actual words being spoken and, to his surprise, he found it far easier than he’d
expected. Maybe it was that he was feeling so much better, after having felt so ill for so long, but
he didn’t remember ever having been able to hear so well. He found himself able to tease words
out of the cacophony and, weirdly, not only the actual ‘word’ words.

He could even interpret the pitch and lilt of the Wolfkin who were in wolf-form. and that,
honestly, was weird as hell. He’d never previously been able to understand the language of the
wolves. Well, not the nuances. The primary emotions like anger and impatience and disgust and
contempt had always been pretty self-explanatory but he’d never previously realised that the wolf
song was as rich and layered as any human language, in its own way.

Was this a puberty thing? Was better hearing a side effect?

He wasn’t a complete idiot. He did understand that a large part of what had put him in the
infirmary had been a natural part of his physical development - though why it had made him so
ill still made no sense - but he was pretty sure he had crossed some line out of puphood into a more
adult phase. Maybe the pack would never consider him worthy of an ‘Age of Reason’ ceremony,
but Dean was pretty sure he had tipped significantly over the threshold towards maturity anyway.
And maybe the hormonal changes were affecting his whole body.

The idea made as much sense as anything else that was happening.

Which was a pretty low bar.

But regardless of why he could hear the distant conversations, and understand even the emotional
pitch of those being in wolf-form, what was truly important was that he could hear them. He soon
understood why the female beta hadn’t returned. She had apparently been murdered by the
prisoner.

Huh.

Though, reasonably, he wasn’t sure ‘murder’ was the right word under the circumstances. As bad
as he felt for the woman’s death - she had seemed nice enough during their brief encounter - it
seemed to Dean that someone being held by enemy forces in the middle of a war was probably
practically obliged to do his best to escape, even if that cost lives.

He winced as he clearly heard the sound of fists against flesh. It sounded as though the prisoner -
the Volkrod Alpha Heir if he remembered correctly - was being punished.

The wet slap of knuckles against flesh made him wince with sympathetic pain.

He didn’t know if it was the sound, the slide of slick sweat and blood, but somehow with each blow
that fell, the smell that had been tickling his nose since he’d woken increased in intensity. It was
the same vague scent that had been haunting him for weeks, the ozone rich smell of rain falling on
dry loam. it had been strongly potent since he’d woken in the infirmary. And now it seemed to
intensify with each blow.

But the scent was shifting, souring, as though the smell that was teasing his senses with such
delight was somehow, impossibly, being damaged by the violence he could hear. As though,
somehow, the scent - so rich and wonderful he could almost taste it on his tongue - was being
irreparably harmed.
He couldn’t stand it.
The sound of it.
The scent of it.
The bone-deep conviction of the wrongness of it.

He moaned, a guttural growl from deep in his throat, and the sound startled him with its wolven timbre. He couldn’t remember ever producing a sound so Wolf-like, so distressed.

He tried to repeat it, needing to know if it had been real, and a groan rumbled out of his chest like the shifting of earth by a deep quake. A rich vibration that thrummed through the infirmary, displacing the air and filling it with the unmistakable sound of distressed wolf.

_Huh_, he thought again, and then paused, stunned into silence.

A silence broken swiftly by sounds of equal or even greater distress from the Betas congregated outside of the infirmary and then Sam was whirling like a dervish, all snarling teeth and snapping jaws as he left the doorway and began chasing the would-be interlopers down the corridor to the right, in the direction of the staircase back up to the main house.

Dean didn’t even stop to think. He saw the open doorway, the empty corridor to the left that led towards the dungeon, and ignoring the sound of Sam’s warning snarls to his right, he ran out of the room, completely forgetting the needles still embedded in his flesh until they ripped out with a sharp pain that, instead of distracting him, somehow focused him on the sound of greater pain ahead of him.

And, even as he ran down the hallway, he saw that there were more Betas milling outside the dungeon entrance, some in wolf form, more in human, two of them holding the broken body of the female beta between them, and all looked at him with some weird combination of horror and awe.

They all moved as he approached, but not to intercept him as he expected. Instead they all flinched away from him, several even cowering like whipped curs and two actually dropping to their knees and throwing their heads back, exposing their throats in some weird parody of submission.

Dean didn’t have time for a ‘what the fuck’ moment, but he filed it all for later consideration. He was back to definitely believing this whole damned experience was a dream.

Perhaps that is why when he burst through the open door, instinctively shivering from the vibrating echos of the silver-lined door frame, he didn’t hesitate from yelling “STOP.”

He vaguely recognized the Beta who was striking the seemingly insensate prisoner. He didn’t know the Beta’s name but he remembered seeing him in the War Room on the day Samuel had sentenced him to death for the second time. He had been one of the wolves who had snapped and snarled at him for his temerity in entering the room at all.

Which was odd, because he had been in wolf-form then and was human-form now, and Dean had never previously been able to identify a pack member regardless of physical presentation, but he filed that away too as irrelevant.

He fully expected the Beta to turn and strike him for his impertinence. His only genuine hope was to distract the Beta with the satisfaction of beating on _him_ instead, at least for the brief seconds it
would take for Sam to race after him into the dungeon. Dean doubted he’d suffer more than one or two punches before Sam was there to prevent any more damage.

But instead of striking him, the Beta froze, color draining out of his face, and he stumbled backward, away from the prisoner and Dean.

“Tá brón orm,” he muttered, his eyes skittering away from Dean’s as though he couldn’t meet his gaze.

Sorry?

Had the Beta actually said ‘sorry’?

To him?

Okay... the idea he’d woken up in an alternate universe was beginning to seem a distinct possibility.

A loud snarl rippled through the air behind him, as Sam finally bounced through the door. The Beta’s nerve, whatever was left of it, snapped and he raced out of the room, skirting past Sam’s snapping jaws with a yelp of fear.

Sam’s entry seemed to break through the prisoner’s haze, his Alpha possibly reacting to Sam’s presence with a low, guttural growl of his own.

Though the way the Volkrod was held, his arms chained tightly above his head, meant he couldn’t shift without dislocating his front limbs.

It didn’t prevent him from raising his chin off his chest and lifting his head, with a groan of effort, until his glowing red eyes met Dean’s.

The prisoner’s face was puffy and swollen, his jaw and eye sockets darkly bruised, his lip split in several places. Blood was trickling from those cuts, though the dark brownish stain of dried blood matting his faint dark stubble and sweat-glistened chest was clearly not his own.

The man was naked, and Dean winced with empathy at his stark bones and sunken flesh. He knew all too well how it felt to be hungry, and it was obvious the prisoner was eating almost as poorly as Dean had been. Though the substantial difference between them was not just age. Despite the evidence of recent starvation, the Volkrod had a stolid density that spoke of years of excellent nutrition. His muscles and density were too great for a mere two months of brutal captivity to erase.

And he was Alpha.

Significantly and unmistakably Alpha.

Dean had never seen a naked human-form adult Alpha before.

Huh.

So this was what Sammy would grow up to look like.

That was good to know. Dean seriously doubted he’d survive long enough to actually see an adult Sam, so it was kinda nice to transpose his brother over this stranger’s body and imagine the pup fully grown.
But then he felt weird because, scientific interest aside, he really didn’t want to think about his brother as a naked adult and, woah, he was staring at the guy’s junk and that really wasn’t cool, no matter how fascinating it was to see what it really meant to be an Alpha.

Then he blinked as he wondered what a female Alpha looked like. Were female Alphas intersex? Did they have cocks too?

He squirmed slightly, as the ache between his own legs seemed to throb in response to the thought and... uh... yuck... this was all kinda yuck.

He shook himself and returned his gaze to the far more interesting, and far less yucky, sight of the Alpha’s red eyes.

They flashed for a moment, almost luminous, and then, despite the obvious pain the Alpha was suffering, they softened and faded from red into an almost more dramatic vivid blue.

“Красивая Маленькая Омега. Я наконец-то умер и попал на небеса?” he mumbled.

“Huh?”

But those mumbled words of incomprehensible Russian seemed to have drained whatever remaining strength the young Alpha still had. His eyes closed and his head slumped once more and then he simply dangled from the chains apparently unconscious once more.

Dean drew in a deep steadying breath. The dungeon smelled heavily of sweat and blood and stagnant water and bodily waste. But those sharp top notes couldn’t conceal an undercurrent of damp loam. It was a smell of rot, but not the bitter rank smell of decay. It was the rich scent of gentle rain, of clean compost, of freshly potted plants, of wet leaves slowly dissolving on a shady forest floor, earthy, sweet and seductive.

It was, he realized belatedly, the smell of this Alpha.

On his tiptoes, he discovered his nose was level with the prisoner’s neck.

His tongue slipped out and he reached slowly, tentatively, to where a single bead of sweat glistened like a teardrop at the base of the Alpha’s throat. Sparkling like a tiny diamond on flesh dark with grime and dried blood.

Blindly following some instinct, he touched his tongue to the tiny watery jewel, tasting the salt that burst in his mouth, and then without conscious thought, without any specific motive except the need to follow his instinct, he licked delicately at the Alpha’s skin.

It tasted of soil, of rain, of the pain of snow he had shovelled down his throat, slightly tainted, slightly sour, totally and utterly addictive.

Huh.

He stepped back, away from the unconscious Alpha, his eyes unfocused.

"Omega,” someone breathed behind him and he swirled to face them, totally unaware his eyes were now glowing, his green irises lined with a flaming halo of gold.
“Красивая Маленькая Омега. Я наконец-то умер и попал на небеса?”

‘Beautiful little omega. have I finally died and gone to heaven?’
Chapter Thirteen

“Alpha Felipe is very unhappy with you,” the Pok said, her voice far too cheerful to add much credence to her words. “He says it’s very bad manners to steal your host’s favorite Pok. He told me to ask you that ‘next time you stay, can you just be satisfied with taking the guest soaps and the bath robe rather than the staff’?”

Castiel thought about that. He probably ought to send a case of Macallan to New Orleans as well as to Sioux Falls.

Then he asked a question that wouldn’t even have occurred to him before his meeting with Robert Singer. “Are you unhappy with me?”

Charlie Bradbury faltered and looked at him uncertainly. “You’re the Alpha of All. You say you want someone’s Pok, they only ask ‘how fast do you want them delivered?’ My opinion on the matter was neither required nor requested. You apparently need my help but you also needed to return to New York. So here I am, in New York. With you.”

Castiel was the Alpha Of All, so he definitely absolutely did not squirm uncomfortably before saying, ”It has occurred to me, belatedly, that I probably should have asked whether you minded being ‘borrowed’ for an indefinite period and relocated to the other side of the country. Is there, perhaps, someone you would have wished to accompany you here?”

She blinked at him a couple of times, as though wondering whether he was a pod person.

It was a valid concern. Castiel was somewhat wondering the same thing. He was wishing he hadn’t even said anything now.

But then the Pok smiled. Slow and sweet. “I’m good,” she said. “But thank you for asking.”

And then Castiel was pleased he’d asked after all.

"So,” Charlie said. “I received your dossier and read all the details you put together during my flight here. Your visit to Sioux Falls clearly came up trumps.”

“It was most certainly an illuminating visit,” Castiel agreed. “Between the other potential sightings you found and the information I received from Robert Singer, we have some avenues worth investigating.”

Charlie nodded her agreement. “So we’re looking for Sam and Gan Winchester. Aged 20 and 24. Living amongst humans and, so, obviously needing to hide their Wolves. My team and I picked up several potential matches between 2009 and 2018. Some based on photos, others on anecdotal evidence. But there have been no sightings of a pair of similarly colored wolves at all since then. So for the last two years they’ve either moved totally off-grid or are living somewhere that wolf-sightings won’t draw attention. Or they’ve split up, maybe. I’ve been searching for a pair, not lone wolves.”

"His name isn’t Gan. Gan Ainm was just a pun. Like calling himself Anon,” Castiel pointed out.

"I know and chances are they’re both living under pseudonyms anyway. But it’s hard to just keep calling him ‘the Omega’, so until we know better, I suggest we stick with Gan.”

Castiel shrugged his agreement. It would ease conversations, at least. "If they have split up, it’s
going to be far harder to find them. And my gut resists that idea anyway. No Wolfkin would voluntarily choose to be alone and I don’t see how an Omega could even survive alone. It’s more likely you need to increase the search parameter to include packs than reduce them to single wolf sightings.”

"You think they’re hiding inside a pack of real wolves?” Charlie asked.

"We are real wolves,” Castiel snapped. “But no. Not living as wolves but running with them perhaps. Hiding in plain sight. Though that would require a location where wolves are expected to be. So where don’t wolves draw attention from humans?” he asked. It seemed to him that if he was hunting for Wolfkin living undercover as Dobycha, then it was going to be a Dobycha who would have the best perspective on the situation.

"Canada,” she suggested. “It would be easy for them to slip back and forth over the border. Alaska would be the safest place, maybe, but only if they wanted to live like ferals. Wherever it’s best for their wolves to live, is inevitably going to be problematic for them to blend-in as humans. To hide as humans they really need large populations to disappear into. But cities and wolves don’t mix. So we maybe need to look at mid-sized towns on the assumption they are living as humans most of the time, in places with a large enough population for them not to stand out too much, so... um... Idaho, Minnesota or Wyoming, would make more sense maybe.”

Castiel still frowned, even as he nodded his agreement. “I still think the fact they aren’t Gray wolves should have caused some attention. We’re living in the age of Instagram. People post pictures of their lunch online. I would have thought two wolves of such unusual size and color would be far more noteworthy than a pizza.”

"Good point,” she agreed. “So maybe we need to think outside the box. What do we know about Sam and Gan? Other than their designations, I mean.”

"Not much,” Castiel growled.

"Fair enough, but maybe we know more than we think. They’re smart and they have excellent genetics, right? So they’re likely to be book smart, too. You said Deanna was a librarian. So odds are that the boys have inherited intellectual as well as native intelligence. And even if Sam was only eight when he left Wolfsbane, he would have experienced at least a year of being directly trained by Campbell as his heir. As improbable as a human like me finds it, a seven year old Wolfkin would have absorbed a lot of knowledge in that year. And what are Wolfkin good at? Criminality.”

Castiel arched an eyebrow at her.

"Oh, roll your eyes all you like,” Charlie scoffed. “My point is that these weren’t just two normal orphans ending up on the streets. A couple of humans that age would either have been picked up by the authorities or would probably have ended up getting drawn into prostitution or something equally terrible. A pair of Betas would have probably gone feral to avoid starving to death. But an Alpha and an Omega? Even at that age they would have been smart enough to run rings around any humans.”

Castiel hummed his agreement but he was still mithered by the pups’ ability to conceal themselves so well. “I agree they would have had certain advantages. Both are capable of thralling humans, so are unlikely to have faced any situations where they couldn’t simply charm their way out of trouble. Though it’s very unusual for pups so young to display that kind of self-control in traumatic situations. Instinct can overwhelm intellect in even adult Wolfkin. My biggest surprise is that you didn’t find a single incident relating to wolf or even ‘big-dog’ attacks linked to any of the
sightings.”

Charlie nodded her enthusiastic agreement. “Exactly. The first thing I did, every time I located evidence of a possible sighting of them, was trawl for reports of ‘dog-bite’ incidents and I checked the logs of every call to the local police and the US Fish and Wildlife Service for several months on either side of each sighting. But I drew a blank every time. And to put that in perspective, every single one of your pack houses is obliged to run damage control at least a couple of times a year because _someone_ is careless.”

”At the risk of sounding sexist, those incidents invariably involve Betas,” Castiel pointed out. “Perhaps Alphas and Omegas are both naturally less likely to lose emotional control. Since both designations are usually raised within the security and safety of a Pack environment, the theory has never been tested before.”

”Yeah,” Charlie agreed. “I mean it’s like you guys lost a couple of little actual princes, isn’t it? And looked at like that, it’s amazing they had any survival skills at all. I mean they must have both been completely pampered and sheltered by the Faelchu. Particularly Gan.”

”I imagine the Omega would have been totally unequipped for survival outside of a pack,” Castiel agreed sadly. “He would have spent his entire existence up until that point being treated as though he were practically a living deity rather than just royalty. Sam Winchester must be a truly remarkable Alpha to have managed to take care of Gan. It’s one of the reasons my siblings are so concerned that I have declared him untouchable. They believe if Sam could protect and conceal an Omega when he was only eight, then he must have grown into a _seriously_ dangerous adult.”

”So maybe I’ve been looking at this problem wrong,” Charlie mused. “I’ve been trying to imagine how a twelve year old could have kept the pair of them off the radar, but really it must have been Sam all along. And he was only eight.”

Castiel nodded his agreement. “Omegas are totally unworldly. My Babushka was the _wisest_ wolf I ever met but I doubt she even knew how to boil water. She had no _practical_ skills. I have no idea whether that is nature or nurture. It could simply be that Omegas are incapable of mundane tasks because they are never expected to perform them. Or it may be innate. My vague memory of Gan is that he was almost ephemeral. Skin almost translucently pale and so slim he appeared almost frail. Fragile and delicate as the finest, most valuable porcelain. Even his wolf was as fine-boned as a Borzoi. But very beautiful.”

He sighed slightly, then offered her an almost shyly embarrassed smile.

”Okay,” Charlie chuckled. “So Gan is a fragile wraithlike ingenue. And Sam is a badass mother who may or may not be gunning for your job. Check. So let’s think about what they would have needed twelve years ago. Money, obviously. And false identities. Somewhere to live, safely, without human authorities picking them up as unaccompanied kids. We know they definitely _didn’t_ go feral, because they visited Robert Singer as grown human-form adults. We know they definitely didn’t go feral, because they visited Robert Singer as grown human-form adults. So, presumably, at least one of them has learned to drive. Most probably Sam. So, again, money, false identities, driving license, ability to buy or at least steal a vehicle. Absolutely everything we know Sam managed to achieve is completely improbable, given that O’Toole only stuck with them long enough to get them out of Kansas.”

Castiel nodded his agreement. “Though he claims to have seen them in New Orleans four years later.”

”Claims?” she asked sharply. “Is he still alive?”
Castiel shrugged. “Possibly. He was my only source of information, and it occurred to me I might regret actually killing him. I told Luke to just throw him into the oubliette. I expect he survived the fall.”

Charlie swallowed heavily. “Okay. Oubliette doesn’t sound good. But, on the other hand, this was an asshole who dumped a couple of kids on the streets and fucked off to save his own ass. So I’m not going to lose sleep over it. On the assumption he is still alive, can I talk to him? I might be able to pick his brains for more information than you did. Sometimes people talk to me because I’m not the scary wolf-person.”

Castiel chewed his lower lip with uncharacteristic hesitance, then said, “With your permission, I would mark you before you begin your work here.”

Charlie looked both surprised and apprehensive. Surprised he was asking for permission but definitely wary of the suggestion. “I, um, don’t need to be compelled to help you,” she said, with careful respect. “I never really fitted as a human. I actually enjoy living inside a pack. I get to do a lot of cool things without ever worrying about getting thrown in jail.” She flushed then, looking a little embarrassed. “I know being ‘Pok’ isn’t much of a pack status but Alpha Felipe never treated me as being less important to him than a Beta.”

Castiel’s expression didn’t soften, but his voice did. “I was not intending a compulsion bite. I simply wish to mark you as my personal property. It will ensure your safety within these walls. I will require you to perhaps... I believe the expression is ‘rattle some cages’. My personal mark will grant you access to all areas. It will grant you a unique status within the Pack Hall.”

"Oooh," Charlie breathed. “You’re going to make me a prislugoy?”

"A прислугой, yes. A personal servant rather than a Pok.”

To a non-pack human the distinction might not have seemed immense. But Charlie understood the huge difference. It would make her the human equivalent of Alpha-kin, in that if she inadvertently caused offence to any other pack member they would be obliged to raise the complaint with the Alpha of All, rather than deal with her themselves. And that meant she no longer would have to worry about trivial shit. She would have to do something serious for anyone to bother Castiel with a complaint about her behavior.

"Then yes, please,” she said. “Because my mouth has a habit of getting me in hot water sometimes.”

"I noticed in New Orleans,” Castiel said dryly. “Hence my suggestion. You will find the New York Wolfkin tend to be more traditional, more... self-important. None are likely to appreciate being told they are ‘idiots’ by a Pok. However, they most probably will benefit hugely from the experience. So I would rather protect you than curb your spirit.”

"You’re not what I expected,” she admitted.

A totally unexpected smile flitted over the Castiel’s lips. “Most of my family disapprove of me altogether,” he admitted. “Sadly for them, I am Alpha so I don’t actually require their approval. My brother Gabriel is the only one whose opinion matters to me. You’ll meet him later. I believe he’ll like you.”

Xxx

”Anael called while you were out of town. She’s uncovered a couple of meth operations running
out of Nevada. She’s cleared out the distributors but wants the okay to go postal on the manufacturing sites,” Gabriel told him, a couple of hours later, when they met in the privacy of Castiel’s garden.

Castiel shrugged lightly. “Of course,” he agreed. “But tell her to contact Alpha Tsukanov in Las Vegas out of courtesy before she acts. He may wish to assist.”

Handling his siblings was always a delicate business. As Betas they were lower on the totem pole than Castiel’s sub-Alphas. But they were Alpha-line Krushnic Betas. They were as likely as he was to pup the next Alpha heir. More likely, probably, under the circumstances. So they needed to be treated with careful respect by those sub-Alphas. Just in case.

It led to some awkward situations sometimes, when it was necessary to take operations into ‘another’ Alpha’s territory. Castiel’s brothers and sister needed his permission to encroach on a sub-Alpha’s Territory because their pack authority was not in their designation but in their roles as his representatives and Alpha-kin.

“Thank god for that,” Gabriel breathed. “Cos I already told her to go ahead and do that but I was wondering if I’d made a mistake.”

“How so?”

Gabriel shrugged lightly. “Dunno. You’ve just been kind of off, lately. I thought you might be...um... less inclined to come down so heavy on the Dobycha.”

Castiel glowered. “You think I have gone soft?”

Gabriel swallowed nervously.”You just seem a bit... less temperamental lately.”

Castiel pursed his lips. “I am feeling a little indifferent, perhaps, to general pack business,” he admitted.

”Grief,” Gabriel pronounced.

”What?”

“Well, anti-grief, maybe. Dunno. it’s like half of me expected you to be racing around like a puppy chasing its tail. The other part of me thought you’d go all terminator chasing down John Connor. None of me foresaw this reaction. It’s all a bit broody Russian, isn’t it?” Gabriel suggested.

”We are Russian. Your point, however, totally escapes me.”

”So okay, I didn’t understand at the time, but now I know you’ve spent the last twelve years mourning a broken Omega mate-bond. And suddenly you’ve found out your mate isn’t dead after all and, yeah, you’re searching for him but it’s all calm and low key and ... weird.”

”He’s not my mate,” Castiel pointed out.

”He marked you. I know he did. Because now I know he is a real Omega, the whole broody Magnolia mourning crap finally makes sense. Only your current reaction doesn’t. You almost seem, I dunno... depressed rather than all gung-ho about going to ‘find your man’.”

“He marked me,” Castiel admitted. “He claimed me. I’ve known that all along, for all everyone tried to convince me it wasn’t true. But he probably didn’t mean it. He was a child and it was
obviously either an accident or he changed his mind or, and this is my only genuine hope, it wasn’t
an accident at all but he was too worried about his brother to approach me even after he reached
maturity. That’s why I am hoping he responds to my message that Sam is welcome here.”

"Which is all well and good if he responds. Though I personally think letting a Campbell-blood
Alpha into the Volkrod is a serious error of judgment. But you’re the Alpha of All. It’s your call.
Sam Winchester aside, I can’t see a problem here. The Omega saved your life. Why would he have
done that if he wasn’t intending to make a claim?"

"Our father was already surrounding the compound. He was demanding my release and their
surrender. If they had refused to hand me over, you know our sire would have fired those missiles
anyway. It would have broken his heart, perhaps, but he would have rather seen me dead than
allow Campbell to continue torturing me. I have only the vaguest recollection of being released, but
what I do remember is it was the Omega who came to free me and he said he would get me out of
the building - in defiance of his Alpha - in exchange for my oath that Sam Winchester would be
spared. That’s what I’ll never forget. That he didn’t ask for mercy for the rest of the pack. He
didn’t even mention his own survival. Just that of his brother. He didn’t save me because he’d
claimed me, because he honestly didn’t expect to survive himself."

Gabriel shrugged. “That doesn’t mean anything. He’s Omega. He was never at risk, well not as
long as you got outside to warn Dad he was in the building. So maybe he didn’t mention his own
safety because he didn’t need to. Okay, it all went wrong and dad fired before you had a chance to
stop him, but the principle is the same.”

"The principle is that I gave him my blood-oath and broke it,” Castiel snarled.

"You were face-down, passed out on the lawn when the missiles hit the building. It’s hardly your
fault. What I really can’t figure out is how come O’Toule managed to get both pups out of the
building and away to safety in those few seconds between you coming out and the explosions
starting. That’s the part of that day that makes no sense to me. But all that being said, it still
doesn’t explain why you are just sitting here on your butt instead of leading the packs to chase him
down. There are almost ten thousand Volkrod at your disposal, Castiel. Send them out to visit
every goddamned town and city. Use their noses to sniff the Omega out.”

"I am not just sitting on my butt. I have every resource actively seeking his location electronically.
I do not wish to hound him. If I send physical search parties he is bound to panic and bolt.
Besides, Katya told me not to ‘chase’ him. She told me to just open a door and wait. I need to find
him, so that he knows I have found him but I also need to make it clear I am still not forcing his
hand,” Castiel said. “How can I impress him by not chasing him if he doesn’t believe I even know
where he is? And also, there’s no point opening the door if he doesn’t like what he sees on this side
of it. I have to make sure that this is a pack he wishes to join.”

Gabriel blinked at him a couple of times, then snorted. “Now the прислугой thing makes sense.
Well, kinda. Why on earth do you think it’s going to bother him how we deal with our humans?”

"I don’t know. Gut instinct, maybe. He didn’t mark that door to say Singer was his Pok or even his
Pris. He specifically said ‘friend’. Just as his grandsire, Henry, clearly considered Singer to be a
friend. So, I don’t know why, but I have a feeling it’s important that he sees we are not like the
Faelchu.”

"The Volkrod have never been like the Faelchu,” Gabriel pointed out. “The Campbells treated most
of their Galla like shit. They never even fed them properly. We have never abused humans. Well,
okay, we’ve done some pretty fucked up things to human rivals in the name of business, but we
never hurt actual innocents.”
"I know," Castiel agreed, and chose not to pursue the subject any further with his brother.

But he still had the oddest conviction that his Omega would judge him harshly for not according respect to Pok such as Charlie and Bobby.

Because he remembered the final sentence the Omega had spoken to him.

Words that had haunted him for years.

Words he had always assumed were a warning to him not to break his oath but now, on reflection, seemed more to be a far more encompassing order.

"Hey, don’t turn out to be an Alpha dick, okay?"

Hardly the words of romance or love, let alone any confirmation the scent bonding had been a deliberate choice on Gan’s part.

But an order from his bond-mate regardless.

And so, Castiel was endeavoring not to be someone the Omega might consider a ‘dick’.
“Omega,” Samuel Campbell breathed, from the doorway of the dungeon, his voice peculiarly raspy and his expression a twisted mask of hunger.

In the years that followed, Dean replayed that particular moment in his head over and over. Wondering whether everything that happened next would have turned out differently if he had understood what his grandfather was saying to him. If he had understood the reason the gnarled old Alpha was looking at him as though he was a walking Happy Meal.

Dean had read Sam enough bedtime stories to, of course, know what the term ‘Omega’ meant to the Wolfkin. It was the name of a mythical creature, like a unicorn, and many of Sam’s favorite books starred ‘Omegas’ who were, apparently, like some kind of Uber-Alpha with mystical powers. Mythological Omegas were like the Wolfkin holy grail. An Alpha was the First and therefore the Best. And Betas were made to serve them. But then the wolf gods had decided, fuckit, we can do even better and they tried again. So they made a new and better Alpha. An Omega was the Last creation of the Gods. The BESTEST. Or something like that.

They were also totally fictional.

The word ‘Omega’ was also, however, used in many of Sam’s science texts about wolves. In wolf packs, the word Omega also meant ‘last’, but it sure as heck did not mean ‘bestest’. It meant lowest. Least. A Wolf so low in the pack ranking that it was barely a bit of dirt on the foot of the next lowest wolf.

So naturally when Dean turned to face the Alpha who hated him, who had spent his whole life trying to kill him, and heard the word ‘Omega’, the idea it was meant as a compliment did not even cross his mind.

And the look of hunger on Samuel’s face only suggested that the Alpha was fully intending to rip his throat out and make a snack out of his intestines.

Which is why everything that happened next was not his fault.

At least, that is what Dean told himself in the years that followed.

xxx

After Sam had driven him away from the infirmary for the third time, and he had dealt with the Alyssa problem and only needed to wait now for her body to be discovered, Samuel retreated to his War Room to assess the amount of damage limitation he was going to have to do.

He was clutching the torn, bloodstained, faded tee that Dean had been wearing when he collapsed. When he presented. Despite bringing the garment to his nose and sniffing it occasionally, Samuel had almost forgotten he was carrying it. It felt more like an attached appendage. Something he couldn’t put down even if he tried.

As much as he knew he had to fine-tune his plan of how best to contact the Volkrod and, more to the point, ensure he had something to contact them about, he was far too incensed for much rational planning. Every single pack member he had passed that morning was giving him the stink-
eye and, although they swiftly quietened at his approach as if the fact they immediately stopped talking didn’t prove him to be the topic of their conversation, he had heard snippets of enough abruptly halted complaints to know that there wasn’t a pack member who wasn’t cursing his name.

How the fuck dare they?

He was the goddamned Alpha of All!

Rationality seemed to have gone out of the window for the whole pack. Despite the fact the Volkrod had first arrived in America sixteen years before Dean had even been born, the Faelchu were no longer only claiming that Samuel’s failure to identify Dean’s designation had caused the second war to start, but were now spouting the totally nonsensical idea that the entire conflict with the Volkrod could have been avoided if not for Samuel’s wilful blindness.

When people were being that irrational, it wasn’t even worth trying to reason with them.

Even Ewan and Patric, his only two remaining lieutenants now that his pack had been so depleted, were glowering at him sulkily from across the table rather than offering him any useful advice.

So now it was totally imperative that he took control of the Omega and applied his compulsion mark. He needed to thrall the pup into announcing his full public support of Samuel’s reign. It was the only way to repair the cracks forming in Samuel’s control of the Betas. Cracks? Hah... more like fissures. His whole pack was imploding because of the Omega.

He reminded himself constantly that having an Omega was a miracle. A good thing.

It didn’t feel like a good thing.

It wouldn’t be anything except a terrible thing until he managed to get the Omega under his control.

And managing to handle the Dean conundrum without directly confronting Sam in a physical altercation was a problem of its own. Samuel was beginning to seriously consider the idea of just knocking the pup out with a tranquilliser dart and dealing with the consequences later.

Considering it seriously enough that he had already prepared a couple of darts filled with doses suitable for an eight year old and had loaded his gun with them before locking it away again in the hope it wouldn’t actually become necessary. Surely at least Sam, his heir, would be capable of understanding that Samuel was doing all of this for him. For the Campbell legacy.

Not that he even owed the pup an explanation.

He was the goddamned American Alpha of All!

And it was possibly because he was in that state of mind - a state of aggrieved self-pitying fury - that he made the biggest mistake of his life when the Galla that called itself Brendan O’Toole arrived at the door of the war room, pale with fear, dripping with fresh sweat, smelling of old blood, and gasping for breath. Surprised by the unexpected arrival, and too distracted by his problems to consider the consequences, Samuel stupidly didn’t dismiss his lieutenants before listening to what the Galla had to say.

“They’re here,” O’Toole choked out, between his desperate gulps for oxygen. “At least three hundred Volkrod in armored vehicles. They even have tanks. It’s a fucking army. They’ve surrounded the compound and cut us off from the outside world completely. They’ve cut the main power and phone lines.”
"We have power," Samuel drawled carelessly, waving his hand at the bright overhead lights and narrowing his eyes at the Galla as though considering whether it was simply insane or whether this was some deliberate attempt at a distraction.

The Galla shook its head earnestly. "The emergency generator kicked in immediately. But it will run out of fuel within an hour or two. They’ve even got a vehicle with some kind of satellite dish that is jamming cell-signals."

Startled, and somewhat disbelieving, Samuel reached for his iPhone to check. What he saw made his blood run cold. The Galla was right. In the corner of his phone, the ‘No service’ message was obvious.

“They powered right through the perimeter fences and are currently breaking down the inner fence to allow their vehicles through. They’ll probably reach the main compound within the next half hour or so. We tried to raise the alarm from the perimeter guard station but couldn’t get through to the house before we were overrun. Most of your Galla guards are dead. The rest have been imprisoned.”

"So how did you escape?" Samuel demanded suspiciously.

"I didn’t. I was locked inside the guardhouse like every other survivor. But they needed someone to bring you a message and chose me. Karl Krushnic is outside, leading the attack. He says he’s tired of waiting. He’s equipped with two Buratino rocket launcher vehicles and says you have exactly one hour to hand over his son, your heir and yourself, or he will destroy the entire compound. With his son inside, if necessary."

"He is willing to accept the surrender of the rest of the Faelchu. But he is demanding your death and that of your heir."

Samuel staggered slightly. How the fuck dare they? He was the goddamned American Alpha of All. The fact Krushnic was demanding Sam as well as him said everything. Sam was only eight years old. Even Krushnic wouldn’t have been bold enough to demand the death of a pup without having gained prior approval from his sire, the Russian Alpha-of-All. Who in turn would have sought agreement with the decision from the other major World Alphas.

To set a death sentence on an innocent heir - a mere pup - was a ‘God-level’ judgement. A decision that an Alpha-line was so corrupt that its infection needed to be torn out by the root. Had Sam been just a year younger, he would have been considered immune to such a judgment because it wasn’t necessarily his blood condemning him. It was the assumption Samuel had already ‘corrupted’ him with his bite. Somehow the Krushnic demons had managed to convince the entire Wolfkin community that the Campbell Alpha-line was so tainted that it was irredeemable.

But Samuel had an ace in the hole.

He had proof the Campbell line was not tainted and god-cursed, if you believed in that kind of shit... as the Russians obviously did.

He had an OMEGA.

Fuck the Russian assholes and their ridiculous medieval religious ideas. He could use that religion against them. So fuck Karl Krushnic. Fuck the entire Krushnic Pack. They could forget any idea of a mating between Dean and Castiel. Samuel no longer wanted to make peace with the Volkrod. He intended to destroy them. When the other international Alpha of Alls learned of the existence of a Campbell Omega, they would almost certainly condemn the Krushnics rather than the Campbells.
Samuel would be vindicated.

But, just in case, he would mate the damned Omega himself and, as an Omega-mate, under the exact rules they were condemning him under, he would become untouchable anyway.

It never even occurred to him that Dean might say ‘no’. It wasn’t as though the pup would know any better. He would probably leap at any opportunity to escape his Galla status and become part of the pack. Hell, this was going to feel like Christmas morning to the boy.

And with that realization, the vague undercurrents of personal doubt that were niggling at him - because, let’s face it, even the American Alpha of All was not completely immune from feeling a certain amount of awe over the idea the boy was Omega - Samuel convinced himself there was no better way to respect the Omega’s status than to gift him with the position of being his mate.

Yes, he told himself.

This was a perfect synchronicity.

And it wouldn’t even matter if the Omega turned out to be too closely related to give him viable pups, because he had Sam as an heir anyway.

So he sneered at the Galla who had dared give him the message, and at the treacherous lieutenants who were staring at him now as though the only way he might become the answer to their prayers was by being burned alive on a stake.

It was time to take back control of his pack.

"He’s probably bluffing, because nobody would destroy their own heir, but it doesn’t matter if he isn’t. Because he doesn’t know we have an Omega," Samuel proclaimed, sniffing at the scent of the tee in his hand as though imbibing the bouquet of a fine vintage wine. “That’s our get out of jail free card. Fuck Krushnic. Patric, go cut one of the prisoner’s legs off. Carve an Omega sigil into it, wrap it in this cloth that stinks of Omega for proof and throw the whole thing to the Volkrod. That will halt their assault soon enough. They won’t risk attacking us. Especially not to save a lamed Alpha.”

He threw the torn tee-shirt at his Lieutenant.

It was another error. The moment the Beta’s nostrils flared at the pungent Magnolia scent, his eyes glazed slightly and then he shook his head stubbornly. “There are too many of them, Alpha. They don’t need missiles to defeat us. They can storm the compound on foot and take the Omega for themselves. Then they’ll slaughter us all. And what if the Omega is harmed in the assault? No matter how careful the fighting, he could still be hurt and then we’ll not only die but the sky wolf will deny heaven to us. You’re our Alpha. You’re supposed to protect us. You caused this. You need to do the right thing now. Harming the Volkrod heir is an insane plan. All you will buy is our deaths. At least if you accept his offer the last of the Faelchu will survive this day.”

Samuel’s eyes flared red and he roared with fury.

Although his anger terrified his Betas, instead of dropping into submission as they should have, they both simply broke and ran from the room.

Shit.

His control over them was crumbling even faster than the compound’s defences.
Fine. He would cut the whelp’s leg off himself. After he’d done that, his pack would have no choice except to support his decision to mate with Dean because there would be no going back.

But he no longer could trust his pack. So, aware he was vulnerable if anyone got hold of Sam before he’d completed both deeds, he turned to O’Toole and cast a tight thrall over the human.

Then he opened the locked drawer beneath his desk, reached in and withdrew the tranquillizer gun.

“Take this and follow me. You’ll need to shoot Sam if I can’t talk him down. He’s in wolf form and this is a tiny dosage, so the minimal amount of silver in the dart won’t permanently harm him. But he’s young so it will shock him enough to cause him to shift and it should knock him out for an hour or two until he expels the poison from his system. There’s a storm drain leading from the side of the house, it leads under the lawn, and it comes back up outside the compound near the garages. It’s wolf-height, so you’ll have to crawl, but it will get you away from here. Take a car and get my heir the hell out of Kansas while I deal with this problem. Call me once you’re over the border and I’ll let you know when it’s safe to bring him back.”

xxx

“Omega,” Samuel said, and Sam’s hackles rose.

In honesty, he had no idea why they rose. This was his Alpha. His grandsire. The wolf he spent most of the day, every day, following around like a faithful puppy.

But all day his instincts had been screaming at him that his brother was in danger and that the danger had a name, and that name was Samuel. And with each attempt Samuel had made to breach the infirmary, Sam had become increasingly upset. And the more upset he became, the less he could think at all, but still his wolf snarled and snapped and howled at him protect/ protect/ protect and so he had stopped even trying to figure out the why. He just allowed his wolf to take over.

This time, though, something was different.

Darker.

Weirder.

The danger was different now, though Sam had no idea how, or even why he knew that. But the sound of Samuel’s voice, the tone of his voice, was wrong/wrong/wrong. And the scents around him were wrong too. His brother’s smell, Dean’s new smell, Dean... because he remembered now, that his brother was Dean - though he couldn’t understand how he hadn’t known that before - Dean’s new smell, the smell that somehow reminded Sam of his mother even though he barely remembered her at all, and of the smell of spring flowers, and the sharp bite of crisp apples. Dean smelled of all things good.

If hugs had a smell, they would smell like Dean.

But a single word from the Alpha, his Alpha, and Dean’s wonderful crisp, huggy smell was suddenly souring, like a rich berry turning abruptly from lush sweetness as it suddenly spoiled into decay.

And it somehow reminded him the other smell, the smell of the other Alpha, the way the young strange Alpha had smelled wrong and bad and scary but now... didn’t. The enemy who smelled somehow like his brother too now. Only faint, barely noticeable and yet there. As though Simply in touching him Dean had marked his territory, and fixed this thing as his, even if this thing was Alpha, was enemy, was...
Was hurt. That was the sourness underneath the strange Alpha’s Dean-scent.

And now Dean’s scent was souring too, turning into something bad and wrong and scary too, and the reason for the sourness had a name, and that name was Samuel and... and that meant Samuel, Alpha, Alpha, Alpha... was... was hurting Dean, just by speaking, just by looking, just by being there, hurting, hurting Dean.

He had to leave. Samuel had to leave. The Alpha had to leave because... because he was making Dean smell wrong.

xxx

“Omega,” Samuel Campbell breathed, from the doorway of the dungeon, his voice peculiarly raspy and his expression a twisted mask of hunger.

And it was as though time slowed for a moment.

Dean saw something glinting in Samuel’s hand. A knife. A huge serrated hunting knife with jagged teeth like a saw. And seeing it, and Samuel’s hungry gaze, Dean thought his death had finally come.

But he saw Sam stiffen, saw his fur rise, heard the growl rising in his baby brother’s chest and he knew Sam was going to leap at the Alpha, the Alpha with the knife, and in his head he could already hear the howl of pain, the blood spilling from his brother’s chest, as the knife meant for him pierced Sam’s chest.

And so he ran, not at the Alpha but past him. Fleeing through the doorway, praying that if he ran fast enough, just got past the Alpha, then Sam would follow him, would also run past that blade.

He had no destination in mind, no true hope of escape, knowing just in running he was being Creiche, being prey, and Samuel would give chase because he was wolf, and that was what wolves did, but Sam would be safe, would be...

And he’d forgotten the corridor was filled with Betas, both human form and wolf, all blocking his way, preventing his escape, preventing Sam’s escape, and now he was trapped, Sam was trapped, with Samuel behind them and the pack ahead of them, and there was a Galla... a Galla with a... a gun?

Aimed at... at Sam?

“Shoot him,” Samuel snarled, his voice thick with thrall, and he saw the Galla jerk and pull the trigger.

He leapt and twisted, turning back, throwing himself at his brother, not caring that he was swandiving face first towards a black wolf that was so scared and stressed and furious that Sam would probably bite him without even realising what he was doing.

And he felt the impact even before the sound.

His first thought was, huh, I thought getting shot would be more painful.

”Not the Omega you fool,” Samuel yelled.

Dean thought he heard the gun fire again, but he wasn’t sure because that was when the pain roared through him like a forest fire, as though liquid flames were ripping through his flesh, as his
blood turned to lava inside his veins.

He screamed, but what came out of his mouth was a howl, and he felt his flesh tearing, ripping, peeling and he was bleeding, howling, dying, and then...

...then he was wolf.

And then, anticlimactically, he took one single howling step before the silver in his bloodstream hit his heart and he collapsed.

He was twelve, not eight, so the dose intended to knock Sam out for a couple of hours only stole his consciousness for slightly less than twenty minutes.

But a lot happened in those twenty minutes.

The first was that O’Toole, who had shot Sam with the second dart, took advantage of the confusion of an entire pack racing around in complete mindless panic over ‘their’ Omega being shot, to grab Sam - who was now an eight year old boy again - and, still in thrall to Samuel’s command, the Galla raced out of the corridor and up the staircase, holding Sam’s body to his chest, and headed for the entrance to the storm drain.

Nobody followed him.

None of the Betas cared about the heir. Not when the Omega, their Omega, was lying sprawled on the floor in a tangle of white limbs, his almost iridescent white fur dissolving back into his body as he slipped back into human form. But the memory of that snowy perfection remained in stark evidence of his holy status.

The second was that Samuel found himself surrounded by a pack of furious Betas demanding to know why he had allowed Dean to be harmed - because since the Galla had been acting under thrall, the blame lay fully on Samuel’s shoulders - only for Evan and Patric to arrive outside the dungeon and tell everyone about Karl Krushnic’s ultimatum.

And then the wolves all panicked at the realization they had allowed Sam to ‘escape’.

But before they could enact their plan to race after the Galla and tear Sam from his arms, Dean woke into the middle of that furious, near rabid mutiny with Samuel being surrounded by the snapping, snarling teeth of his own furious pack and the sight of Dean coughing and choking and dragging himself to his knees brought all of the Faelchu to a shuddering halt. They froze in a tableau of awe, flinching and cowering and whimpering their uncertainty.

Dean woke with the memory of shifting. With the memory of fur white as snow. With the understanding that ‘Omega’ had not been meant as an insult. With the totally improbable, impossible realization that the reason Samuel was under attack was that he had allowed Dean to be harmed.

He was, apparently, a ‘unicorn’ after all.

He was, apparently, holy.

He was, apparently, precious and special and valuable and to be treated only with care and respect.

He was not Galla.

He was Dean Winchester, Omega of the Campbell Pack, they all declared.
Dean was still blinking in complete bewilderment when Samuel Campbell took advantage of the pack’s distraction to attempt to wrest control once more. Now the fury of the Betas had been abruptly damped by their relief that the Omega appeared unharmed, they were calmer, more capable of reason, more susceptible to his Alpha voice.

"Dean, my boy," Samuel purred, his voice resonant with Alpha-power, a deep layered construct honed by sixty years of practice. "Come here, Dean, my beautiful boy. The gods have blessed you to be the tool of our deliverance. Come to me and take your rightful place at my side. Reclaim your name and your status. COME," and the last word was so powerful that every Wolfkin there trembled and whimpered and staggered. Several of the Betas began to stumble towards the Alpha themselves, as the compulsion woven into his voice reasserted his thrall over them all.

Dean was twelve years old.

He had spent his entire life in terror of the Alpha. In terror of all the Faelchu. He had fantasized so many times that he might wake up one morning and discover his whole life was nothing but a bad dream. That everything was just some terrible mistake, some awful misunderstanding, that he wasn’t flawed and useless, that he wasn’t a mongrel; wasn’t Galla.

Like the fairytales he had so often read to Sam, he had sometimes scrunched his face up in desperate prayer as he’d gone to sleep at night, begging the wolf gods to send some heroic Alpha to save him, to declare him something precious, to steal him away from the Faelchu, to rescue him and take him somewhere he was wanted.

He had prayed for the return of his name.

This, surely, was the answer to his prayers.

Six years after declaring him Galla, his grandsire had finally called him DEAN.

He was wolf.

He was Faelchu.

He was pack.

He was Omega.

He was fucking pissed.

Too fucking late, you assholes, he decided.

At twelve years old, so frail he could barely stand on his own two feet without swaying, the Campbell Omega looked the Campbell Alpha in the eyes and said, “Go fuck yourself. I already have a name. My name’ is Gan Ainm. I have a status. It’s Galla. And if you need ‘deliverance’ then get off your ass and save yourself.”

Samuel staggered, his shock palpable. In his entire life no-one had ever spoke to him with such disrespect.

“I AM ALPHA,” he roared. “YOU WILL SUBMIT.”

Several of the Betas, buffeted by the power of Samuel’s thrall, collapsed to their knees and whimpered.
Dean felt *something*. A tingling aching thrum in his blood, a stabbing ache in his limbs, a blazing spike of pain in his forehead. A completely unfamiliar, irresistible compulsion, a need to... to...

"SHUT UP," he screamed at his grandsire.

His words bounced and echoed through the narrow corridor like the rumble of thunder.

And the American Alpha of All opened his mouth to speak and...

... couldn’t.

Samuel stood there, his face infusing with color, his eyes wide with fury as his mouth worked desperately but no sounds emerged. Not even a whimper.

He visibly began to panic and then, as though pushed beyond sanity by this inexplicable humiliation, his eyes blazed scarlet and already moving towards Dean he began to shift, his canines extending, his hands sprouting claws, his flesh rippling as black fur sprouted.

And, in complete mindless panic himself, as though the Alpha was nothing more than a disobedient dog, Dean yelled “SIT... STAY!”

And the charging black wolf that was the American Alpha of All collapsed back on his haunches and froze in place, trembling in silent rage but incapable of moving as the Omega with the scent he had been inhaling all day from the torn tee, the scent that had touched the thin membranes of his nose and had buried deeply inside, marking him, *owning* him, commanded him to desist.

Huh, Dean thought. He hadn’t actually thought that would work. He didn’t know how long it would work. He wasn’t even sure he was strong enough to even stay on his feet for much longer.

But more important than any of that was, ”Where’s Sam?”

The Betas fell over themselves explaining, their postures fawning and submissive and, honestly, even more sickening than Samuel’s glowering if impotent fury.

On hearing that the whole ‘gun’ incident was just a complete misunderstanding and that the Galla had been tasked with getting Sam out of the compound. Dean’s first emotion was relief.

It wasn’t an emotion the pack shared.

Karl Krushnic’s price to save the pack was Castiel, Samuel *and* Sam. So the Faelchu Betas wanted to chase after O’Toole and their four-legged fleetness would probably easily catch up with a man crawling on his hands and knees whilst dragging a child. And, even if they didn’t actually catch him themselves, they would still tell the Volkrod that Sam had escaped. So the Volkrod demons would know to chase after him.

Because Samuel had been judged to be irreparably tainted and Sam, as his heir, had also been sentenced to death for their grandfather’s crimes.

Sam’s life had been declared forfeit.

And that, Dean realized, was a problem.

If even a single Faelchu survived, they would be able to tell the Volkrod that Sam was alive.

Dean had to ensure that *everyone* believed Sam was dead. And that meant he had to make sure that the missiles *did* hit the compound and that there were no survivors.
“I have an idea,” he told the Faelchu and, because everyone knew Omegas are wise, they listened to him.

He would take the Volkrod heir out himself, he told them. Unharmed, or at least without further harm. He would take him to Krushnic, identify himself as Omega and let the Russian Alpha know that the pack were willing to hand over both Samuel and the location of Sam. That way, the Volkrod would be convinced not to attack.

You’re Omega, they agreed. Karl Krushnic will listen to you. You can save us all.

And Dean agreed and assured them it was true.

That he would save them all.

Then he entered the dungeon and told the young Alpha he would release him in exchange for Sam’s life.

He couldn’t understand how the conversation with the Alpha hurt so much more than his lies to the pack. He wasn’t even lying to the young Alpha. He was intending to save him. He did want the promise. The blood oath. No matter that, if everything went right, it wasn’t a blood oath he would ever need to call upon because the Volkrod would believe Sam had died. That even he had died. But extra insurance never hurt anyone. At some point in the future, he might need to depend on that promise.

So why did it hurt to much to know he would never see this strange Alpha again?

The Alpha was too weak to walk alone and Dean couldn’t ask for help because he couldn’t risk any witnesses. So he shifted into wolf form. His wolf was as skinny as he was but it was fully grown and had the benefit of four legs which made him far more able to keep his balance as he supported Castiel’s weight.

He led the Alpha far enough away from the house to be sure he wouldn’t be harmed when the house exploded.

Then he licked softly on the side of the Alpha’s neck.

Sleep / Sleep / Sleep, he sighed.

And the Alpha, already barely conscious, simply keeled over and collapsed face down in the grass.

Dean turned to face the distant invaders, staring until a faint cry told him someone had caught sight of his glowing eyes in the dim light of the encroaching darkness. Then, even as the flashlights of the Volkrod began to swivel in the direction of the lawn, Dean loped away towards the storm drain.

He caught up with O’Toole just before the end of the tunnel, just as the ground shook around them with the impact of the missiles, and discovered that Omega thrall worked on Creiche too.

And as he climbed into the backseat of the car O’Toole took out of the garage, as he cradled the unconscious body of his brother, he stared out into the night sky, at the orange flames indicating the destruction of the last three dozen Faelchu, and Dean’s only regret was that he would never see the young Alpha again.
Chapter End Notes

Which just goes to show there are several versions of every story and few individual witness accounts give more than slices of the ‘truth’.
Chapter Fifteen

Charlie had not minded being seconded to the New York Pack House. But she hadn’t exactly been happy about it either. She’d only visited New York once, when she was very young, and remembered it as a place that heaved thickly with humanity. It was not a place for Wolfkin or a Pok who’d grown accustomed to the thick trees and slow waters of humid bayous.

Twenty-Four hours after arriving, she was already dreading the day she’d have to leave.

For one thing, she’d completely forgotten that New York was a State, not just a City. Although the Krushnics owned a huge brownstone in NYC from where they conducted most of their business with the Dobycha - where, indeed, she had first been reunited with Castiel, the Alpha of All - the brownstone was their place of work. And despite her being swiftly allocated one of that building’s multitudinous bedroom suites, one as luxuriously equipped as any five star hotel, she soon discovered the building was not where they lived.

Which should have been obvious, really, considering it was she herself who had pointed out that cities and wolves didn’t mix.

A couple of hours after her meeting with Castiel - after depositing her bags in her room and trying desperately not to squee over stuff like having a personal jacuzzi, a wide wrap-around balcony with panoramic views of the city and the kind of broadband that made her think she’d died and gone to heaven - Charlie found herself taking a two hour train ride until she was almost 90 miles north of NYC and in a town named Poughkeepsie.

A Pok was waiting for her at the station. He was a taciturn older man, with a grizzled beard and stiffly formal manner who grunted his disapproval of the notion she might simply jump into the passenger seat beside him rather than riding in the back of the limo-like luxury of the white Jaguar XF that looked stupidly like a wedding car to Charlie.

She was Castiel’s прислугой - his prislugoy - which, according to this ‘Rufus’ meant she should be riding in the back like a Wolfkin, not sitting up front like the ‘help’.

Charlie, always irrepressible and determined to establish her relationships correctly with the other Pok right from the get go - ignored him completely and piled into the front of the car with a wide, friendly grin. She appreciated the security Castiel had offered her by granting the ‘rank’ but only because it gave her safety from any particularly short-tempered Wolfkin. She had no other desire whatsoever to set herself apart from the other Pok.

Rufus glared and huffed under his breath for a minute or two. But he also relaxed his posture considerably, tension leaching out of his shoulders and his fingers relaxed on the steering wheel. So, despite his pretence of grumpy disapproval, Charlie knew with that one act she had softened his attitude to her completely.

The Wolfkin had a strict hierarchy and it was easy for Pok to fall into the same mindset, ranking themselves based on their perceived value to their ‘masters’. But doing so was a mistake in Charlie’s opinion. While it made sense for a Pok to convince the Wolfkin that they had particular value, using that acquired status to lord it over other Pok was just asking to get stabbed in the back.

Rufus drove her to the Krushnic Pack’s ‘compound’. A sprawling guarded estate surrounding a historic mansion. Two hundred acres of stately trees and rolling hills set on a bluff overhanging the Hudson River. A place where wolves could run and pups could play and the only human witnesses
were the tame Pok who cared for them.

It was also the location of the ‘oubliette’.

Charlie had prepared herself for the worst. The connotations of the word alone had been enough for her to imagine some hellish pit into which O’Toole had been thrown. Her imagination had added spikes on its floor to ensure he had not only broken his limbs but had probably ended up impaled to die in slow agony.

The Oubliette, like the American Alpha-of-All himself, turned out to be all bark and no bite.

Yes, O’Toole was in a ‘dungeon’ from which escape was impossible. Yes, it was an underground shaft carved from sheer rock. But it was actually just an unused well, one that had run dry decades earlier and, rather than fill it in, the Wolfkin had turned it into a holding cell.

And ‘thrown’ had been a misnomer too. Because when she had said she needed to ‘interrogate’ the prisoner, one of the Pok guards had unlocked the grate capping the well and had thrown down a sturdy looking rope ladder. Several minutes later, out of breath and slightly grimy, O’Toole had climbed out, looking remarkably well fed and, save for some old faded bruises, also appearing to be totally unharmed.

“I had imagined you were being tortured,” she admitted, after O’Toole had been shackled, then frogmarched inside the mansion and deposited in a room that contained a large conference table and very little else.

“I am,” O’Toole snarled. “They’re boring me to death.”

Charlie thought about that, then shrugged her empathy. Now, though, Castiel’s ‘offer’ made sense.

”The Alpha requires information from you,” she said.

“Tell the fucker to blow me,” O’Toole spat.

“I am authorized to, at my discretion, ‘compensate you with penguins’,” she said. At O’Toole’s look of complete confusion, she chuckled. “I was similarly bewildered until this moment,” she admitted. “I think the Alpha has an odd sense of humor. He’s offering you books in exchange for co-operation.”

”I’d rather have my freedom. Or at least a change of accommodation,” O’Toole said.

Charlie shrugged. A sentence of solitary confinement, while harsh, was considerably more civilized than the punishment she’d imagined the man was suffering. And probably less than he deserved. O’Toole was too dangerous to be allowed his freedom unless put tightly under Castiel’s thrall, and Charlie could see why the Alpha was taking his time about getting around to doing so.

Truth be told, Castiel would be more instinctively driven to snap the man’s neck than thrall him. So he was probably just leaving O’Toole to stew until his irritation at the Galla was sufficiently muted to prevent Castiel’s wolf simply applying a permanent solution to the problem.

Castiel was a huge surprise to her.

She didn’t kid herself he wasn’t an immensely dangerous man. She knew what had happened to the Colombians in New Orleans. When necessary, the Alpha of All was brutally cruel.

But considering he was one of the most powerful Alphas in the entire world, he was remarkably
benign by nature. Forbearing. Actually the word she wanted was ‘humane’, but that seemed a totally inappropriate term with which to describe a Wolf.

Inappropriate... but fitting. Rather than delighting in his power and using his Wolf to justify wallowing in it, Castiel struck her as someone who constantly strived to suppress his wolf-instincts. Even Alpha Felipe, as kindly as he had treated her personally, had only worn a thin veneer of humanity over his wolf. Felipe was often just as much of a ... a dick as every other Alpha that she had met.

Castiel, peculiarly... wasn’t.

"Take it or leave it," she told O’Toole bluntly. "I doubt you have enough information to warrant a comic strip, let alone a novel. If you don’t want to deal, I’ll just tell them to throw you back in the hole. Only, this time, they might accidentally forget to let you use a ladder."

"You wouldn’t be such a bitch."

Charlie gave him her best game face. “Try me,” she said.

O’Toole glared at her but crumbled. “What do you want to know?”

"Everything you remember about the Campbell pups. Tell me what happened after Wolfsbane."

“I honestly don’t remember much about it. I was under compulsion. I wasn’t really thinking, so I barely remember doing. I know I drove north to Nebraska. Stopped in a place called Franklin. Tiny city. Barely a thousand people. Parked up near Limestone Bluffs. Don’t remember that much more about it, except it was a fucking long walk back to town to steal myself a car."

"You left the original car with the pups?"

“Yeah. Stupid, considering neither could drive, though I figure the reason they had me dump it and them in a tourist area was so they could use it as a shelter while they figured out what to do next. I don’t remember giving it a lot of thought. Looking back, I figure they must have thralled me because I never questioned it and I literally forgot all about them. I couldn’t even remember why I was in Nebraska at all. It wasn’t until I stumbled into them in New Orleans that I even remembered they existed. And then I forgot all about them again until a couple of years ago. By which time I’d avoided the wolves for so long it didn’t matter. Well, not until that fucker Luke Krushnic caught me. I hoped the information would save my life. Well, I guess it did but I’m not exactly grateful."

"That makes sense,” Charlie said, ignoring his self-pity. “Thralls wear out if they aren’t renewed. If you hadn’t seen them in New Orleans, I expect the thrall would have worn off at least five or six years ago.”

O’Toole just shrugged.

"So tell me about New Orleans. How did you find them?"

"I didn’t. They found me. Or the Alpha did, at least. Sniffed me out by pure chance I think."

"You met Sam Winchester? He was alone?" she queried with a confused frown. Surely the boy had only been twelve at the time.

"He wasn’t alone, but I never actually saw the Omega except at a distance. The Omega wasn't much bigger than I remembered him being. Slim rather than skinny, longer hair, but not very tall
and clearly nervy. I guess the Alpha had no choice except to step up to the plate, huh? I didn’t
know anything about Omegas the day I took those pups outta Kansas. But from what I learned
later, they are nothing like the other wolves. Kinda highly strung like racehorses aren’t they? And
yeah, that’s how I registered that Omega in New Orleans. Sensitive. He sure stayed out of the way
when the Alpha was putting the scare on me.”

“Sam was violent?” She asked, feeling sick. What if the pup was as insane as Samuel Campbell
had been reported to be? What did that mean for Gan? What would it mean for Castiel if he found
him? What if, and the thought made her shudder with very human despair, Sam was abusive
to the Omega in his care?

O’Toole thought about that, then shook his head. “He didn’t hurt me. But, kid or not, he just wasn’t
the kind of guy you wanted to say ‘no’ to. Intense, sure, but he didn’t have that thousand yard stare
you see in stone cold killers. He just made it damned obvious that refusing his thrall wasn’t an
option.”

“Can you describe him? His physical appearance at twelve, I mean?”

O’Toole shrugged again. “Dunno what to say. He was pretty tall for his age and kinda built for a
twelve year old. But I guess that was the Alpha in him. I definitely would have taken him for his
brother if he hadn't been so obviously Alpha. I mean he kind of looked like a strapping fifteen or
sixteen year old. Brownish hair. Green eyes. Good looking kid. Very good looking. Had this big
white smile and easy manner, but he was cold too. All pretty surface charm, like a velvet-sheathed
knife. He had power, you know? The kind of cocky confidence all Alphas have, I guess.”

“So by New Orleans they could both have been passing themselves off as a couple of fifteen or
sixteen year olds?” Charlie demanded. That was important to know. It would alter her search
parameters considerably.

“I reckon so. Still clearly kids, but not little kids.”

“How were they dressed?”

O’Toole looked confused.

“I mean were they in goodwill crap or did they look cared for?”

The Galla’s expression cleared as he understood. “I never got a clear look at the Omega, but the
Alpha was clean and neat, dressed in good jeans, Nike’s, tee, brown leather jacket, short spiky hair.
Had a bit of a mini James Dean vibe about him. Like I said, cocky little Alpha. Definitely looked
more like some spoiled rich kid playing rebel than like he belonged on the streets. I mean he’d
turn heads, but not for the wrong reasons. Wouldn’t have drawn a second glance from a fed.”

“So they had access to money, food, and were managing somehow to keep themselves clean which
suggests they had access to proper accommodation. I just can’t figure out how they did it.”

O’Toole snorted. “You’re a Volkrod Pok. You have no fucking idea how it was to be a Faelchu
Galla. You don’t know you’re born, darlin’.”

“What do you mean?”

“I can see it just by looking at you. I bet Krushnic treats you like some pet. Like some pampered
poodle.”

“I have specific value to him,” Charlie admitted, a little embarrassed to admit it. “I don’t imagine
the Pack’s housemaids share the same freedoms as I do."

"That’s my point. To the Faelchu it wouldn’t have mattered if you were smart as Einstein. The Faelchu treated all their Galla like they were shit under their shoe. They called us ‘it’. You think Sam fucking Winchester, Campbell’s heir, gives a shit about ‘human rights’? I bet he kept himself and his Omega alive by simply taking whatever he needed. He probably left a trail of dead bodies behind him from the moment I left him in Nebraska."

xxx

"It’s not true, of course,” she told Castiel on her return to NYC, as she caught him up to date with what O’Toole had told her. “I’ve found no evidence of unexplained deaths either in Franklin in 2008 or New Orleans in 2012."

“Of course you haven’t,” Castiel agreed. “Sam was clearly too smart to do anything that might draw attention to himself. But I suspect O’Toole had a valid point about Sam not caring about using humans. At that age he shouldn’t have been able to cast a thrall that would last six years. Even I struggle to thrall for more than five. So perhaps he had enough self-control to simply compel human assistance and then erase all memory of it.”

Charlie’s eyes widened with understanding. “Like he wouldn’t have needed to mug someone for money, for instance. He could have just walked into a store and convinced the teller to hand money over, then wiped their memory of doing so. As long as he never got greedy, never took so much money it would register as a theft rather than a change-error, no one would ever realize they’d been robbed.”

"The same with hotels,” Castiel suggested. “Either of them could have easily thralled receptionists into giving them keys.”

Charlie frowned thoughtfully. “I think hotels would be going too far. Too many potential witnesses noticing two young boys being alone. But motels would make sense. Lone receptionists, occasional maids, no lobbies to walk through, nobody paying particular attention to who is coming and going.”

"So Sam probably kept them moving constantly, never spending more than a few days in any one place, never staying anywhere long enough that their small thefts and unpaid motel rooms would register as more than human errors,” Castiel suggested. “But that leaves us practically nothing to go on. Nothing in their behavior would have left a trail. They could have spent the last twelve years just continuing the same way.”

"Yes and no,” Charlie replied. “Because somewhere along the way Sam must have learned how to drive because they had to have tired of thumbing lifts and shit. Besides, you implied that they drove to Bobby Singers.” She frowned then. “How did they even know to find Bobby? Is that something Campbell would have mentioned to Sam?”

"Possibly, though it would have been counter-intuitive if Samuel was trying to claim Sam’s Alpha genes were purely Campbell in origin. Why would he have wanted Sam to learn about Deanna, especially if he believed her to be a Volkrod Alpha? The last thing Samuel would have wanted is to admit he was using the genes of his enemy to create his own heir.”

"Point,” she agreed. “So that means they found out about Bobby in some other way. Maybe instead of trying the seemingly impossible task of tracing them from the point they left Wolfsbane, we should concentrate on trying to figure out how they located Bobby Singer.”
"I don’t think we can afford to miss out on any of the timeline. It’s been twelve years. Somewhere, at some point during that time, Sam must have slipped up. We just need to keep digging until we uncover a clue."

"You’re the boss," she agreed cheerfully. Then she sobered a little. "so nothing from Bobby yet?"

Castiel shook his head.

"It’s only been 24 hours though," Charlie pointed out. "And maybe he can’t contact them. Maybe they have an arrangement where they call him periodically, from burner phones or whatever. That would be safer and I get the distinct impression Sam is all about safety. So no news isn’t necessarily bad news."

"I require your assistance, not ‘pep talks’," Castiel reminded her grumpily.

But he still looked slightly happier for her having said it.
Interlude: a touch of madness

“I don’t see why I can’t just walk in a store and get a real computer,” Sam whined. “It’s nearly Christmas and I want a MacBook Air.”

Dean rolled his eyes. “Do I look like Santa? Christmas is for Creiche and you already have a real computer. Frank gave you a perfectly good computer. I don’t see why the hell you need a new one at all.”

Sam, who at twelve was all coltish limbs and resting bitch face, had become a Grand Master of the art of sulking. “OS X Mountain Lion. It’s been out for two months. I’m the only kid in school with a cobbled together piece of Linux crap.”

"That crap will save your life, kid,” Frank declared. “You think Gates is the devil? Jobs is the new Prince of Hell. You think Apple have launched an operating system that’s going to be permanently updatable online because they’re trying to make your life easier? It’s the perfect tracking system. You boys want to let them start tracking your movements? Knowing where you are every single time you go online?”

"I use Tor,” Sam pointed out snottily, with all the cocky confidence of a twelve-year-old who knew more than he should and yet far less than he believed he knew. “And a VPN.”

"Which works on Ubuntu,” Frank argued. “Almost foolproof on Windows, ‘cept we all know any piece of shit Gates produces has inbuilt trackers. But Macs leak. They sit there looking all pretty and harmless like your brother. Then they completely fuck you over when you least expect it. Again like your brother.”

"I’m not pretty,” Dean snarled.

But he still preened a little at the implication he was badass.

Both Sam and Frank rolled their eyes at him, then returned to glaring at each other as Sam’s irresistible force hit Frank’s immovable object.

"I can build you a dual-boot hackintosh, I guess,” Frank eventually suggested with obvious reluctance.

Sam looked intrigued for a moment, then his face clouded over again. “I just want a normal computer. An off-the-shelf one that looks cool instead of the Frankenstein creation of the damn King of Paranoia.”

Frank looked inordinately hurt.

Dean could see Sam’s point. The laptop Frank had cobbled together for him might have been powerful enough to launch a NASA rocket and apparently was guaranteed to make his online activity untraceable. But it was an ugly piece of shit.

"How about we compromise,” he suggested. “We get you something ‘normal’ for school, and you use the computer Frank built for ‘other stuff’?”

Sam thought about that, then shrugged and nodded his agreement. “That would work. Something small and light. Like a MacBook Air.”
The kid was like a dog with a bone, Dean decided. “Dunno what’s wrong with windows. I’m not driving all the way to Detroit just so you can be a geek-snob.”

“There’s an Apple store in Partridge Creek,” Sam wheedled. “It’s less than an hour away.”

“Not a chance in hell. Every time I hit I-94 I get pulled over for a license check. Assuming I get hit in both directions, it’ll take so long to get there and back that I’ll end up being pulled by the local cops for curfew violation too. I’m not spending the whole day thralling every fucking cop in Michigan just so you can satisfy your inner nerd.”

Sam shrugged innocently. “You drive, I’ll handle the cops.”

“Yeah, that is SO not happening. One Frank is more than enough,” Dean sneered.

Sam had the grace to look slightly ashamed of himself. Frank just looked hurt again. Dean sighed.

“So, okay, Frank turned out to be a good thing,” he admitted. Both Sam and Frank brightened. “But let’s not push our luck. From now on we keep our heads down and you keep your evil superpowers in your pants, capiche?”

“I’m an Alpha,” Sam protested, his voice deepening into resonance and his eyes flaring a faint halo of red. “You can’t tell me what to do.”

And Dean, who loved his brother, who spent every waking hour of every damned day protecting his brother, didn’t even hesitate. His voice snapped out of him like a whip, his eyes blazing gold, “umhlú”, he demanded.

Sam whimpered, the scarlet edges fading from his irises and he flinched and cowered slightly. “Tá brón orm.”

Frank looked uncertainly between the two brothers, then hesitantly suggested, “Um, I could drive us to Partridge Creek?”

And Dean, who always felt inordinately guilty whenever he forced Sam to submit, sighed and gave in. “Okay. Sure, Sam. If you really want to be ‘that guy’, you can have a damned Mac.”

Sam’s smirk was so wide, Dean was pretty damned sure he’d been played.

For over four years, he and Sam had been working out the steps of a difficult dance and still they tripped and fell occasionally. As Sam grew towards puberty his personality was weirdly fragmented. There was bookish, nerdish Sam; the boy Dean preferred to think of as REAL Sam. Real Sam was sweet much of the time, sulky a lot of the time, but loveable all of the time.

And there was Alpha Sam.

Who was a bit of a dick.

Fortunately, real Sam rarely slid over into Alpha Sam. Not even when the moon pulled on them both and they slipped into their wolf forms. Alpha Sam was not the identity of Sam’s wolf. ‘Alpha Sam’ was like indelible scar tissue left from Samuel’s influence. Faded, faint, but never actually erased. Like a viral infection lurking inside Sam’s bloodstream, always waiting for the opportunity to take over.

From the moment O’Toole had left them near Franklin, Dean had been fighting that infection. It was a constant daily battle. But over the years either the infection had weakened or Dean had
grown stronger.

He suspected it was some of the former and a lot of the latter.

Maybe if Sam had never been bitten by Samuel, Dean would never have learned to truly control his own wolf.

Often, in the small hours of the night when sleep escaped him and he found himself just slipping out of wherever they were staying to simply lie on his back in dew dampened grass and stare up into the night sky, he would wonder not only what might have been different if the Faelchu had accepted him from birth to be ‘Omega’ but what difference it would have made if Sam hadn’t been dual marked.

It was all speculation, obviously, but Dean still was pretty sure that the wolf he was, the wolf he was becoming, was almost purely due to the combination of both of those influences.

The only way to keep Sam safe was to keep his Alpha under submission.

And that meant Dean had to be able to make Sam submit.

But he was always hyper aware that he did not want to ever become a ‘dick’ himself. Dean had to assume that since Samuel’s blood ran through his veins too, and that at least some of Samuel’s saliva had entered him during his naming ritual, he was carrying the infection too. Albeit in such a tiny dose that maybe it had worked more like an inoculation than an infection.

Huh. Maybe that had been the reason Samuel’s Alpha-voice had barely worked on him. Why Sam’s Alpha voice didn’t work on him at all.

Regardless of reasons, though, Dean had chosen to accept the responsibility of parenting his brother. And being a parent included the need to curb unacceptable, dangerous behavior. So Dean had been forced to reach inside of himself to find a way to do so.

Balancing between encouraging Sam’s growth into self-determination and the very real need to keep Alpha Sam suppressed was a fine and delicate - and often exhausting - balance. And sometimes Dean slipped and fucked up.

Which was how Frank Devereaux had become such a happy accident. So, Dean guessed, sometimes when things got fucked up they turned out for the best anyway.

Dean had fled New Orleans as soon as he’d recast his thrall on O’Toole. He was terrified Sam’s control over his fear would snap and he would hunt the Galla down and kill him the moment Dean turned his back. The whole time he’d been handling the Galla, Sam had been hovering in the background like a dark wraith. Shivering and trembling with the urge to simply shift and tear the human’s throat out. He’d flitted around the edges of the room like a vengeful spirit, lurking in the shadows, and if not for Dean’s earlier barked order to submit, Sam would undoubtedly have snapped.

And, honestly, Dean hadn’t said ‘umhlú’ to save the human.

He’d said it to save Sam.

He had a weird but pervading conviction that if Sam ever lost control of his Alpha enough to kill someone in cold blood, he might be incapable of ever locking it away again. Real Sam would be gone, erased from existence, and Alpha Sam might be all that remained.
Because Alpha Sam was powerful.

Frank was evidence of just how powerful Sam was.

They had fled New Orleans and travelled to Port Huron in Michigan, an 1100 mile journey that had taken over a week, rather than the couple of days Dean had anticipated, because of the amount of time Dean had to waste continually thralling the traffic cops that pulled him over and the motel clerks whenever he stopped to rest. There was an irony in the fact that thralling a cop left him so exhausted he then had to thrall at least one or two other people to find somewhere safe to rest, which obviously then meant he was even more exhausted.

Though, admittedly, he found controlling humans to be far easier at sixteen than he had at twelve. Even though experience had given him a delicacy of touch that often meant the process took longer. He no longer forced compulsion on someone only to then yank the memory out of their head like brutally ripping off a band-aid. Now he knew how to carefully weave a desire to help. He no longer compelled. He... seduced. He couldn’t think of a better word for it. He charmed people into wanting to assist him and wanting to forget him, and he was always careful to leave them with the warm contented buzz of knowing they had been ‘good’, even if they didn’t remember why.

They had gone to Port Huron specifically to locate Frank Devereaux.

Sam was full of odd knowledge.

He had a mind like a sponge and - due to his year of attending Samuel’s meetings in the War Room - was a walking font of strange, arcane knowledge. Unfortunately, he rarely remembered he knew something until Dean expressed a specific need for it. So benefitting from Sam’s knowledge was reliant on Dean asking the right questions. The process had consequently been one of much trial and error.

But in New Orleans, when Dean had dealt with O’Toole and had then bemoaned the fact they needed to stop simply flitting from place to place because the more times they moved, the more chance of them bumping into Galla or, more worryingly, Volkrod, who might pick up their scents and identify them as Wolfkin, but that actually attempting to settle anywhere would require shit like false I.D.’s, Sam had suddenly blurted out Frank’s name and address.

Frank had been Galla since before the Volkrod had arrived in America. The Michigan sub pack had used him to produce all the false documentation for their local operations and he’d been so adept at it that even neighbouring packs had learned to take advantage of his services.

He’d been a casualty of one of the early battles when the Volkrod had first arrived in 1980. But it hadn’t been Frank who lost his life; it had been Frank’s Galla wife and their sons. Oddly, considering the Volkrod were supposedly heartless demons, when they had sublimated the Michigan Faelchu and taken over the state, the Russian Wolves had allowed the grieving Devereaux to simply leave and return to the human world. Except for thralling him to keep the existence of the Wolfkin secret, he had been gently dismissed from servitude.

Sam knew of him because he’d overheard Samuel and one of his lieutenants discussing the viability to travelling to Port Huron and snatching Frank back as a useful asset.

Dean had driven to Port Huron in search of new identities for himself and Sam. What he’d found, thanks to Sam, was a weird and wacky substitute ‘father’ for them both.

Sam hadn’t thralled Frank on purpose. He definitely hadn’t meant to do it with such brutal
efficiency that Dean was still gradually working out a way to carefully untangle the threads of the compulsion because he felt literally sick over the way they had inadvertently enslaved the man.

But Devereaux had met their arrival with a shaking hand holding a gun loaded with silver bullets.

Dean had been satisfied the man had no intention of actually shooting. He’d learned over the years how to unravel the spoor of human scents, to sniff them like the bouquet of wine, to swiftly establish a human’s emotions and intent. Frank Devereaux was scared, was paranoid, was perhaps even insane. Yup. There was definitely more than a touch of madness there.

But he wasn’t dangerous.

Alpha Sam acted so quickly that it was over before Dean could stop it.

From some dark twisted place inside of himself, Alpha Sam had yanked out his memory of Frank’s dead sons and had thrown a wicked compulsion over the Galla.

Real Sam felt genuinely bad about what he’d done, so Dean had forgiven him. He’d also vowed to himself he would never allow Alpha Sam to escape again, even if that meant he had to keep his brother firmly on a leash forever.

But the bottom line, sadly, was that what Sam had done turned out to possibly be the only reason both of them would survive to adulthood at all.

Because instead of returning to their prior life; instead of continuing to move from town to town, like itinerant thieves in the night, stealing and lying and moving from motel to motel, always running, always hiding... Sam and Dean Winchester became Tom and Dan Devereaux, ‘beloved’ sons of an admittedly insane and peculiar but very kindly Galla.

A Galla so skilled in false documents that they had no problem sliding into a verifiable existence as humans and so skilled in surveillance that it was easy for them to continually slip under the radar of the Volkrod. A man with such a reputation as an antisocial oddball that Sam and Dean never had to worry about nosy neighbors or interfering friends querying their sudden appearance.

Which was why, against all odds, Sam now was managing to attend an actual honest-to-god Creiche school and get a proper education.

Dean didn’t bother enrolling himself into school. Frank simply faked him a GED. He didn’t have time or patience to sit still in a classroom. He’d spent twelve goddamned years trapped in a single room. It was time for Sam to be the one who sat in a room all day and for Dean to be the one who came home every night with tales of adventure.

And, best of all, Real Sam was thriving at school. Real Sam loved learning. Real Sam turned out to be the most boring little bastard Dean had ever met...

...and Alpha Sam was sublimated almost completely.

So everything was good.

Except for the fact the little brat was demanding a MacBook Air, of course.
Chapter Seventeen

Despite Charlie Bradbury writing search algorithms that mined every online source in America for sightings of the Winchesters, when the first real breakthrough came it was purely by chance and the source of the information was not even digital. It was an article featured in an old-fashioned paper copy of a magazine that was published only in Europe.

And the connection was so nebulous that the only reason it was made at all had more than a little to do with novocaine.

It happened thusly:

Gabriel, chief advisor (and older brother) to Castiel, the American Alpha of All - Pakhan of the Russian Syndicate that ran almost every organized crime in the United States, also known as the Volkrod - was an unrepentant and shameless addict.

The Wolfkin were in charge of the manufacture, distribution, and supply of almost every illicit drug in the Country - despite the constant efforts of human cartels to cut a slice of the action for themselves - and were primarily successful because Wolfkin were largely immune to the effects of those drugs. Even at the highest doses, most drugs that made humans ‘high’ simply made Wolfkin feel like shit.

So drug addiction was not, generally, a Wolfkin trait.

In truth, addiction in any form was not one of their traits. It was almost unheard of for a Wolfkin to be addicted to anything including, but not limited to, drugs, alcohol, gambling, or gluttony. Their primary focus was always on Pack status, not personal gratification.

Gabriel was the exception to the rule. He had a terrible, overwhelming, and often nearly incapacitating addiction. One that not only distracted him frequently during daylight hours but also caused him to rise often in the middle of the night for a hit of his own favorite drug.

Ironically, considering he had access to every schedule of drugs listed by the FDA, Gabriel’s drug of choice wasn’t even illegal.

It was sugar.

And his addiction was so great that had he been human, he undoubtedly would have been diagnosed with type-2 diabetes before he was even out of his teens. Despite the obscene amount of calories he ingested daily in the form of candy, Gabriel didn’t even evidence the consequence of well-deserved obesity. His disgustingly efficient Wolf metabolism worked tirelessly to burn off the sugar in his body. Even though, if sugar were alcohol, it could easily be claimed that his blood was invariably 90% proof.

Wolfkin were not invulnerable. They felt pain and injury. They could be cut and bruised; shot and stabbed; their limbs could be broken and they could be killed. But not easily. Getting ripped apart by a bomb or a grenade was obviously going to kill a Wolfkin just as swiftly as it did a human being. But in comparison to a human, Wolfkin were pretty damned invulnerable.

Most injuries that would prove fatal to a human being were easily survivable by a Wolfkin. They healed with almost preternatural speed, their flesh sealing injuries so swiftly that dying of blood loss was almost impossible. The process of shifting forms alone was often a sufficient way to completely eradicate the worst effects of any bodily injury. Bodily harm suffered in their human
form usually only became seriously life-threatening if they became so depleted of strength that they became too weakened to shift forms entirely.

Which, as it happened, was the primary reason Samuel Campbell had kept Castiel chained in such a way that shifting was impossible.

But although many injuries were ‘magically’ repaired simply by switching back and forth between wolf and human forms - as long as the wounded part of their anatomy was mirrored in both forms - extreme injuries, and some underlying damage from many more minor ones, lingered persistently in both physical manifestations until healed by time or medical intervention. That was why Wolfkin medics were so highly valued. The considerable advantage of Wolfkin immunity to the effects of most drugs became a double-edged sword when they were suffering from genuine pain.

Wolfkin had only two specific vulnerabilities. The obvious one was silver. The far less known one was their genetic prevalence for pseudocholinesterase deficiency. The reason that particular enzyme deficiency had never joined the general myths and legends about ‘werewolves’ was that it was only specifically relevant to the fact they struggled to process minor drugs such as Novocain. Which meant, basically, that they worked. But, over the centuries, although humans had shot Wolfkin with everything from rocket launchers to silver bullets, it had never occurred to anyone to simply tranquilize them with a dart filled with a minor local anesthetic rather than the far more obvious ketamine.

The other reason it was far less known, was that toothache was not an affliction that the average Wolfkin tended to suffer from.

Gabriel was not an average Wolfkin.

He suffered from toothache a lot, due to his almost criminal sugar intake. Whilst his general health and appearance had not been affected, his human-form teeth had suffered some severe consequences even though his wolf-form fangs were perfect. Because wolves have 42 teeth and humans only have at best 32, the teeth of Wolfkin were not mirrored, so switching back and forth between his human and wolf form did not help to correct the damage. His teeth were not interchangeable, so they existed separately in his two distinct forms - just as changing to human form would not heal a tail injury. So, whilst Gabriel’s excellent Wolfkin metabolism handled 90% of the effects of his addiction, that pesky little 10% meant he spent a lot of time at the dentist.

So much so that Gabriel’s personal favorite Pok was a human dentist named Balthazar Roche who was listed in Gabriel's cell on position one of his permanent speed dial.

All of the above is the reason Gabriel found himself sitting in Balthazar’s Tribeca waiting room at four am on a Sunday morning, three weeks after Charlie’s arrival in NYC, waiting for a novocaine injection to kick in and numb his jaw whilst Balthazar sobered up enough from a night of debauchery to perform a miracle on one of Gabriel's molars after an unfortunate incident involving a rock candy dildo and a particularly fetching young Beta visiting on a Pack-exchange from San Francisco.

Balthazar, whose accent wavered dramatically between French, British and nasal Brooklyn - depending on his audience and his state of inebriation - was both an excellent dentist and a cocaine-snorting dilettante and consequently filled his waiting room with obscure publications from European countries in an attempt to appear more sophisticated than he actually was.

Which was the only reason Gabriel found himself flicking idly through the March edition of a British magazine named ‘Prospect’ filled with totally boring articles on crap like Bosnian politics - of which Gabriel had very little knowledge and even less interest - before finally settling on an
article in the magazine’s ‘life’ section, a half-page Freelance piece on the moving of some Ontario wolves onto Isle Royale in Lake Superior some six years earlier.

None of which, actually, was a surprise to Gabriel. The Volkrod paid a surprising amount of attention to the welfare of their four-legged cousins and had financially backed that particular migration of Canadian wolves to support the almost extinct pack living on the Isle Royale Nature Reserve. What caught his attention was the writer’s segue into a probably highly fanciful tale of having stumbled across a huge Arctic wolf whilst she had been camping near Thunder Bay in 2014.

An Arctic wolf that had been suspected to have been responsible for the return to the campsite of a small child that had been lost in the woods several hours earlier, causing a huge manhunt and mass panic, only to end with an unharmed child and a mythical creature supposedly fleeing off into the darkness.

While the story sounded more Lassie than Brother's Grimm, so was cutely entertaining enough to keep his attention, Gabriel would have dismissed the whole thing as evidence the author was either a blatant liar or had been even higher than Balthazar at the time.

Except for her improbable description of the wolf.

It wasn’t just her claim to have seen an Arctic Wolf on the shores of Lake Superior that caught his attention. It was her insistence that the wolf had been huge. Far larger than a standard gray wolf.

Arctic wolves were not huge.

Arctic wolves were substantially smaller than Gray wolves.

It could have been nothing, he told himself. It was probably just a piece of fictional bullshit the writer had added to add extra color to her narrative. It was nothing except unverifiable nonsense. Fairytale nonsense. An urban myth written by some bored British housewife with delusions of becoming the next Jack London, maybe.

But the wolf in the article was reputedly the size of a Wolfkin.

And the color of an Omega.

So Gabriel was already back in the Pack House, waking Charlie with the news, before he even remembered he had run out of the dentists before even getting his damned tooth fixed.

This led to a particularly frustrating morning, made even worse by the throbbing pain in his molar, as Charlie tried and failed to find any single piece of corroborating evidence that the incident had ever happened.

The obvious answer was to jump on a plane, fly to England and interrogate the writer directly. Unfortunately, landing on British soil without specific permission from the Vrka - most specifically the Vrkan Alpha-of-All, Kali - would be likely to get him shot.

Besides, Gabriel and Kali had a history and it hadn't ended well. That, added to the fact the Vrka hated the Volkrod on principle and, yeah, that plane trip wasn't happening.

Prejudice and xenophobia were not only Dobycha traits. And, bizarrely - although economics probably was the cause - the Wolkfin tended to follow the discriminatory attitudes of the Dobycha cultures they lived amongst. So, because Russia and Pakistan had a long-standing bilateral peace agreement, and Pakistan and India were largely hostile, the Volkrod were not welcome in the
countries run by the Indian Vrka.

"So let's fly to Thunder Bay," Charlie suggested. "We can check the story out on the ground. As you said, it's more than likely to be a complete fabrication but if there is any truth to it at all, maybe we can find a local to confirm the incident happened. Of course, if it did happen that opens up a whole different can of worms, doesn't it?"

"How so?" Gabriel asked.

"A story like that: a seriously good news story with a missing kid and a happy ending? That wouldn't have just made the local news. That should have hit the national feeds. The Volkrod should have been all over it at the time, especially happening so close to Isle Royale where you guys were paying particular attention. So how would a couple of kids make it go away? And why the overkill?"

"We already know Sam is accomplished at thrall. He obviously thralled all the witnesses, including the writer, and that's why she's only remembering and telling the story now," Gabriel suggested.

"Well that's obvious, Sherlock," she sneered, rolling her eyes. "I'm not talking about the wolf part of the story. I'm talking about the missing kid. That story should have still rolled, even if the way she was found was never explained. Kid lost in woods, huge manhunt, everyone fears the worst and then the kid turns up without even a bruise or a scratch? That's news. It should have flooded the net. And even if the story was taken down even faster than it was posted, the wayback machine should be able to find at least some archived pages."

The Beta narrowed his eyes and frowned at her thoughtfully. "You're talking about some serious hacking."

"Possibly better hacking than even I could manage," she said, too seriously worried to sound as though she was bragging.

"You think Sam Winchester is some mega super hacker as well?"

Charlie shrugged. "We don't even know if it happened at all. But, no, if it did go down that way, then we aren't talking about something that could be accomplished by a fourteen-year-old, no matter how smart. We're talking about a real hacker. So that means Pok. And that suggests Sam was already creating a Pack. What if the reason we haven't seen or heard from the Winchesters isn't that they are frightened of the Volkrod but that they aren't ready yet? What if Sam is plotting revenge?"

"That's a leap and an escalation," Gabriel pointed out, rubbing his sore jaw.

Charlie gave an embarrassed laugh. "I know. I'm well aware I've got a far too overactive imagination." She sighed then. "I'm just worried about Gan," she admitted. "Sam's been so clever, so good at hiding himself, and then - if this is true - Gan, the sweetheart, messed up completely by saving this little girl. And so I'm worried sick that Sam might have punished him for doing so."

Gabriel looked at her in horror. "He's an Omega. Nobody 'punishes' Omegas."

Charlie bit her lower lip. "Yeah, but by 2014 Sam had been packless almost as long as he'd been alive. What if he had forgotten as much as he remembered? I mean, didn't you tell me the original Isle Royale wolves had been a Canadian Alpha-line Wolfkin and his family who ended up cut off on the island by Spring and turned feral just in the nine months it took for a new ice bridge to form back to the mainland? Clearly insanity can descend that quickly, even in an Alpha, without the
buffer of a pack."

"They got trapped there the winter all the Canadian Alphas were lost in one way or another. Maybe it wasn't just the weather. Maybe their virus mutated into something destructive," Gabriel suggested. "I don't know. I keep telling Cassie he's made a mistake by declaring the Alpha pup untouchable. Still, my brother is a patient man but not a stupid one. He'll give the pup enough rope to hang himself with. If he does ultimately prove to be a snake in the grass, we'll handle him. In the meantime, let's go find out whether this woman was smoking crack or really did see an Omega at Thunder Bay."
Interlude: a bad moon rising.

Nostalgia was weird shit.

Dean didn’t really understand how he could miss something he’d never had. But he felt an aching pain whenever he thought about the father dead before Sam was even born. The father who had apparently been complicit in both his own attempted murder and the rape that had born Sam as its bitter fruit.

Perhaps that’s why, even if actual forgiveness wasn’t possible, Dean still at least attempted understanding. As much as his own life had sucked, as much as he missed his mother, as much as he loathed the knowledge of what John Winchester had done, Dean couldn’t truly find a way to completely condemn John’s wicked act because it had led to Sam and Sam was... Sam was the reason he got up every morning.

And Nostalgia wasn’t always a bad thing.

It had amused O’Toole, perhaps... Or maybe that was uncharitable and the Galla had meant it as a genuine kindness. Dean didn’t know. All he was certain of was that O’Toole had made a deliberate decision, when faced with the multitude of Pack cars in that huge barn-sized garage, to escape in the car that had apparently once been John Winchester’s personal pride and joy.

That may have been a factor in Dean’s decision to compel the Galla to leave the car with them in Franklin. Or it might have been simply the comfort of the barely known over the uncertainty of the completely unknown. Either way, Dean and Sam had been left in Franklin inside a shiny black behemoth of a car.

By the time Dean drove himself and Sam inside that car to find Frank Devereaux it was no longer shiny. It was battered and sand-scratched and it had multiple impact marks both front and rear, plus a really nasty scrape down its left side.

Not all of the damage was Dean’s fault. He wasn’t the only one who had ever misjudged the placement of his feet and hit the gas pedal instead of the brake. Most of the damage had been caused by his own carelessness though. The impala was far from the most suitable vehicle for a fourteen year old to teach himself to drive in.

Fourteen because the reason that not all of the damage had been caused by himself was that it had taken two years before he had judged he looked tall enough behind the wheel to risk starting to drive it at all.

One of the reasons, a dozen years later, that it proved so difficult for anyone to track their departure from Franklin was the assumption he and Sam had hitched a ride with a passing stranger from the very beginning. That all they had ever done in those first years was hitchhike back and forth like a pair of hobos.

Sam and Dean had never hitchhiked rides.

They had hitchhiked drivers.

Dean still felt guilty about how clumsily he had handled people in the beginning. Of course he’d been clumsy. He’d been twelve years old and he’d had the ability to ‘thrall’ people for less than a day when he’d first been forced to use it to save his and Sam’s lives. As with anything, practice had only served to make his thralls more effective. They never became easier though. The fact
they became almost effortless didn’t negate the fact he believed that each time he used his powers ‘for evil’ that he lost another tiny fraction of his soul.

Oh, it wasn’t a religious thing. It was simply he had not forgotten - would never forget - how it felt to be Galla. The idea of becoming the same type of monster as those who had terrorised him all his life, was horrific.

So more swiftly than would seem probable, even as he and Sam were first attempting to adjust to life on the run as two tiny packless boys, Dean had made a vow to himself to never cause a Creiche any avoidable harm and to erase all memory of anything that was unavoidable. He also endeavored to make sure he didn’t unnecessarily inconvenience people even as he ‘stole’ a few days of their lives at a time.

If he could actually benefit them, his conscience felt one hell of a lot better.

So within a couple of months of Wolfsbane, Dean had devised a fool-proof method of survival that was mutually beneficial to all parties. It utilized Sam’s skills with the computer - things that Dean had previously heard of but not seen (and, truth be told, never reached a point of total comfort with) - and something called face snap, or chat book, or whatever. Dean gave up even pretending to care enough to remember.

The important thing was they learned to answer... and, in time, post... requests and offers for lifts.

For almost two years, Sam and Dean criss-crossed the country in the back of their own car, being chauffeured by students and the like, who were desperate to find a cheap way to get from A to B. It was a perfect solution, creating a completely unpredictable randomness of their movements. They never chose where to go, they simply went wherever whichever Creiche who was driving them happened to need to go.

So the only true casualty of those first four years of their ‘emancipation’ was the car. Between the clumsiness of dozens of different young and inexperienced drivers, and the even younger and less experienced Dean, the impala arrived at Frank Devereaux’s looking considerably ill-used and battered almost out of recognition.

Both Frank and Sam had suggested dumping it (her) and getting something smaller and less memorable and far newer as soon as Frank had produced a legitimate looking level 2 license in his name (his fake name) that would allow him to drive during daylight hours even if he did still somehow keep getting pulled over by cops to check its legitimacy.

Which was where the nostalgia came into play.

Dean honestly didn’t know whether it was the fact the car had belonged to his father (and so was a kind of inheritance, albeit one he’d never been intended to claim) or that it had become the closest thing to home that he had ever known. but, either way, the thought of simply scrapping the car had felt like one loss too many in a life already filled with privation.

And that, combined with his need to avoid the idea of any career involving sitting still, was why - at sixteen years old, with Sam safely in school and Frank watching their backs (though he was still uncomfortable with why Frank was motivated to help them) Dean made the decision to learn to be a mechanic.

Well, okay, he didn’t really decide. He more fell into it by accident, but it was a happy accident and the first time in his life he felt actually in control of his own future so he embraced it.
It began with him locating a garage just south of Port Huron that had the facilities and expertise to restore the car, but telling the proprietor that he wanted to ‘watch’ the work being done. It had simply struck him that learning the basics of car maintenance would be a useful survival tactic when, inevitably, they ended up back on the road once more. Watching had inevitably evolved into helping, which had gradually transformed into helping with other vehicles too and, somewhere along the way, Dean had stopped being the weird, quiet, still too skinny, intense kid who hung around like a ghost and became the healthy, fit, personable kid who confidently charmed both the customers and staff with his enthusiasm for being a ‘grease monkey’.

Sam was admittedly less than impressed by Dean’s choice of a career. With just two years of school behind him, smart enough to run rings around both his peers and his teachers, Sam was already planning to do ‘great things’ with his life. As he pointed out to Dean, if they had to live with and pretend to be Creiche, they should at least endeavour to position themselves at the top of the food chain.

Dean didn’t like the way Sam always made ‘Creiche’ sound like a dirty word. He encouraged his brother to see his classmates as friends rather than rivals, as simply non-shifting people rather than ‘animals’, but he had to accept it would take time to fully eradicate the bad influence of Sam’s background. Sam wasn’t cruel. He wasn’t mean. He wasn’t a bully. He was, according to Frank who forced himself to spruce up and attend the occasional parent/teacher meeting, apparently a popular kid at school well known for having an easy smile and a helpful nature.

What bothered Dean was that Sam had an underlying arrogance, a learned belief he was better than humans, that underlaid much of his behavior. He wasn’t nice to his peers because he felt any genuine affection for them. He was nice because he was basically too kind hearted to indulge in ‘animal abuse’. Dean could only hope that time would eventually chip away at Sam’s perceptions until he came to the same conclusion as Dean had:

Humans were simply Wolfkin who couldn’t shift.

Well, okay, he knew that wasn’t biologically true, but in every way that mattered it was true. The humans weren’t ‘Creiche’, they were just people permanently trapped in the same misery as Dean had suffered for the first twelve years of his life. Not being able to shift was a terrible thing. An inability that deserved pity, not mockery, and the fact they managed to exist and even thrive as non-shifting people was something that should be applauded.

By the time Dean was eighteen, he had reached the conclusion that non-shifting people were, hands down, his favorite kind of people and he thought it was his duty, and that of all other Wolfkin, to nurture and protect them.

They weren’t ‘mud monkeys’ as the Faelchu had claimed. As even Sam, whenever he was being snappy or sulky, repeated. They weren’t animals.

And the fact he was spending more than a little... personal time... with a girl named Rhonda Hurley who had come into the garage in need of an oil change and had left with Dean’s phone number, was not bestiality. And not only because, so-far, they had barely fumbled past first base.

Dean’s hesitation in taking things any further had nothing to do with Rhonda’s species. It had far more to do with his own confusion over his own sexual identity.

Sam might not believe that Dean ever read anything more difficult than comic books (and, admittedly, Dean had compiled a hefty collection of graphic novels) but he had naturally spent a lot of time researching this strange new world they were living in and his own place in it. He obviously couldn’t learn anything about what it meant to be Wolfkin. He couldn’t learn what it
meant to be Omega because the humans had no secondary genders at all. However, he could learn what it meant to be intersex because that wasn’t unknown in non-shifting people either.

Sexuality came in a bewildering array of variations, he discovered, and the benefit of non-shifting people not having secondary genders was they gave great importance and thought to their primary genders.

So Dean learned it was perfectly valid to consider himself absolutely male, even if his genitalia was less binary. He was even more fortunate than many human males born intersex because he was fully developed as a male. Perhaps even a little too developed as a male, considering the difference between himself and most of the pictures he saw online. (Thank god Frank had set up Dean’s own laptop to erase his browser history, since Dean had no idea whatsoever as how to do that himself).

Dean was less sure of whether his ‘female’ genitalia was also fully developed. He definitely had a uterus, because he had menses, and he had a uterine opening. But since he had fully developed testes and definitely no breasts, it seemed highly unlikely he also had ovaries unless the internal organs of an Omega were totally different than those of a human. It wasn’t worth worrying about. For one thing, he was pretty damned sure that shifting and non-shifting people were not biologically compatible for producing offspring and, secondly, if he ever did manage to get past first base with Rhonda it wouldn’t be him risking pregnancy anyway.

And Dean had absolutely zero interest in real life human males.

The thought made him feel so literally nauseous that he had worried for a while that he might be a homophobe. Not a complete homophobe, definitely, because Jose and Brian at the garage were an out and proud married couple and the only thing Dean felt whenever he saw them stealing quick smooches in the corner was envy. So he had no problem with the idea of same primary sex relationships. He just felt a genuine urge to hurl his cookies at the idea of letting any male touch him in that kind of way.

It would be wrong.

It would be BAD.

Dean’s wolf was highly insistent about that. Even when the moon filled and his wolf thrummed with a need to run/run/run and mate/mate/mate, there was still a resounding scream of WRONG/WRONG/WRONG if he even so much as looked at a male movie star with any element of lust.

Which was something he still occasionally did anyway.

Dean learned he had a ‘type’.

And it wasn’t based on species or sex. He liked dark hair. Not necessarily black hair, but hair the colour of bitter dark chocolate. And he liked blue eyes. Not icy blue like Daniel Craig but the warmer, darker blue of Chris Pine.

Actually, he had a definite secret crush on all of Chris Pine.

But the idea of manifesting that crush in real life had literally sent him running to heave into a toilet bowl more than once.

Dean’s wolf was insistent that touching or being touched by anyone of the male variety would be a sin worse than death. The wolf didn’t have an objection to him messing around with Rhonda
though.

He wasn’t stupid. He knew wolves mated for life. He assumed the same was true for Wolfkin. His wolf, which at the time had been barely hours old really, had imprinted itself like a baby duckling and that was, as they said, the end of it.

Dean’s wolf now saw any other male as a ‘threat’ and females as merely a ‘fun’ way to pass the time.

Which was, truth be told, the primary reason his fumblings with Rhonda hadn’t gone any further. It wasn’t that she was human. Or the highly improbable chance of her becoming impregnated. It wasn’t even his vague worry she might notice he was intersex - which was highly unlikely unless she had a really good rummage around behind his scrotum - but the fact he didn’t think it was nice or fair to lead someone on.

He suspected Rhonda wanted more than just ‘fun’.

And Dean was already spoken for. Or at least his wolf was, which came down to the same thing. And since his wolf had been stupid enough to make a claim on someone who would probably order both he and Sam dead on sight just on principle (well, okay, most likely just Sam would be at risk, realistically) that was definitely going nowhere.

Dean refused to be all emo about it. Regrets and pining were only a short leap to resentment. He refused to even consider ever allowing himself to get into a position where he might begin resenting Sam.

Besides, he was happy.

He was eighteen years old. He had his freedom. He had a job. He had friends. He had Sam and Frank. He even had an almost-girlfriend.

He had nothing to be resentful about.

At least not until it all abruptly was ripped away from him.

And even then he told himself that the blame lay on his own head really. He’d become a little too complacent. Between Frank’s protection and the fact they were living just a short drive from the Canadian Border, making it pretty easy to take a three day break from work every month and slip into Ontario with his brother where they were almost certain to be able to shift in relative safety (the guys at the garage liked to mock him about that; about him obviously having a ‘time of the month’; which was a little close to the bone sometimes. But since they didn’t know he was intersex, let alone a ‘werewolf’, Dean accepted the ribbing for being as harmless as it was intended) Dean had allowed himself to forget that Sam at fourteen was considerably less mature than he had been at that age and was, honestly, somewhat of a hothead on occasion.

By the time Dean had managed to clear up the evidence... which had involved thralling eight kids and two teachers, Frank had already moved all of their belongings into a huge R.V. which, somehow, he had always had prepared ready for them to run if they needed to.

Sam’s thrall on Frank was still strong perhaps. Or maybe it was just that Frank had already lost two kids and wasn’t prepared to lose two more. Whatever their species.

The only mitigation, the only silver edge on the cloud, was that Sam hadn’t hurt anyone. That, really, was a major step-forward for his little brother. Sam had lost control of his wolf but he hadn’t bitten anyone.
So the mistake had been Dean’s not Sam’s, he decided. Sam was just a teenager. Of course he was going to lose his temper sooner or later. And maybe because he was only an Omega, without an Alpha’s inbuilt need to assert dominance, the fact he had always found it so easy to suppress his own wolf in any conflict situations shouldn’t have made him assume Sam would be capable of the same.

Clearly, Sam was going to have to be home-schooled for a while, until he had gained complete control of his wolf and Frank’s suggestion they all got on the road and remained mobile for a while ‘just in case’ made perfect sense.

So for the second time in his life, Dean abandoned everything he knew to protect his brother. And although this time what he was leaving was not a place he wanted to ‘escape’ but a place he had wanted to stay, at least they weren’t alone and helpless this time.

As he drove his now fully restored Impala and followed Frank’s RV through Wisconsin and Minnesota, as they wound their way slowly towards Thunder Bay, Dean was proud of the fact he never once complained to his brother about leaving the garage (and Rhonda) behind.

Even though Sam spent almost the entire journey grumbling about being pulled out of school over a mere ‘misunderstanding’.
Chapter Nineteen

Charlie was a damned good hacker.

She didn’t like to blow her own trumpet, but she was definitely the best hacker she’d ever come across.

Sadly, she was beginning to believe that Frank Devereaux was possibly better.

At least she knew the Pok’s name now. Or at least the name he was still using in 2014. After that, all bets were off. Because although she’d managed to backtrack Devereaux all the way from Thunder Bay back to Port Huron, she hadn’t been able to track his movements onwards from there.

He, the two young Wolfkin, and an RV the size of a planet had subsequently disappeared, after the retrieval of the missing child, as though they had simply been snatched out of the campsite by aliens.

The fact that their interviews of several dozen locals had led to the unearthing of their first solid lead wasn’t even due to an error on Frank’s part.

Frank hadn’t made a mistake per se. Despite stopping in a tourist campsite where holiday makers were liable to take snapshots of everything and anyone, Frank and ‘his’ boys had still somehow totally escaped any permanent record of their presence. Frank had also painstakingly removed himself from all the records of both himself and his vehicle being subject to automatic police investigation when a tiny girl went missing from the camper several lots down from his parking spot. Just as he’d erased all records of the incident itself.

But Frank had only been able to erase digital records, just as Sam had only been able to cast temporary thralls on people’s memories. And deep in the bowels of the local newspaper office there was still a physical file containing photographs taken that night by a reporter covering the manhunt for the missing kid,

Six years earlier the technology hadn’t existed to allow the simple act of running that series of still photographs taken around the time of the girl’s disappearance through modern facial recognition software to identify people so easily.

And the fact his face had appeared, startled, in only one of the dozens of photographs they had managed to track down suggested the guy avoided being filmed on principle.

It had only taken that one mistake, though.

They now knew his name, his age, and his history up until he disappeared from Port Huron and turned up a few days later in Thunder Bay.

And then nothing.

“But it is still a huge breakthrough,” Gabriel enthused brightly, sucking on a fat stick of rock candy that looked worryingly phallic to her.

“We know some more about both Sam and Gan too, at least,” Castiel agreed. He’d jumped on a
plane to meet them in Thunder Bay the moment they’d called to let him know that Gabriel’s hunch had turned out to have legs.

Charlie was wearing an unfamiliar look of doubt. Maybe it was the fact that this Frank guy was proving slippier than a greased pig but she was beginning to have an odd feeling that something wasn’t quite stacking up about any of this.

“It’s really weird how they swapped their ages as well as their identities, though,” she pointed out. “I can understand why Sam would have pushed for ID to support the age he looked. I imagine he felt the older the better as far as he was concerned. But why pretend Gan was so much younger than he really was? I get the need for camouflage but I’ve never met an eighteen year old who would be happy to pretend to be a little kid instead of fighting tooth and nail for the privileges gained by being an adult.”

“Veracity, maybe,” Gabriel suggested. “They could hardly pretend to be the same age, with Sam being physically so much more mature. It’s not like they could pass themselves off as twins. So it made far more sense to make Gan the younger brother on paper. Especially if Gan was only the height and size of a human fourteen year old.”

“And maybe Gan deliberately chose to take advantage of his young looks to gain an education,” Castiel agreed. “That makes sense. His ignorance of Dobycha history and customs would have put him at a distinct disadvantage in a college environment. He needed a basic school, so he needed to be perceived as younger to get away with attending one. Fortunately, he obviously was small enough to pull it off.”

Charlie still looked doubtful. “Is it usual for Omegas to be small for their age? He was eighteen. Shouldn’t he have reached almost his adult height by then? His wolf was pretty huge, which would suggest he was always going to mature into a tall man.”

“He wasn’t small for his age at twelve,” Castiel abruptly remembered, with a puzzled frown. “I know my memory of that day is hazy, but I’d surely remember that.”

“Arrested development,” Gabriel suggested with a shrug. “Gan would have only recently presented when you first met him. I figure most of his growth then went into the physical manifestation of his wolf for a while after that. I met Rowena, the Omega of the Scottish Wolfin. She is a tall woman, as was our Babushka. I think all Omegas are pretty statuesque as adults. But perhaps an Omega’s human form matures slowly during their teens because their wolves present so late. Maybe that means they don’t develop physically as quickly as other designations. It could even be a deliberate design, to re-enforce the obligation of other pack members to consider them a designation that needs to be protected. There are so few Omegas that there’s little written about the physical characteristics of their human-form development.”

“Oh, of course,” Charlie said, looking satisfied finally with that explanation. “I completely forgot they don’t even present until puberty. That would explain it then, I guess. So, Gan was growing so much slower than his younger brother that it would have caused questions if they’d done the fake identification any other way.”

“And everything about the way the park warden described Gan’s behavior suggests a quiet, bookish boy who rarely even poked his head outside the RV. So it clearly was his own decision to pursue a Dobycha education. Maybe he instinctively wanted to be a librarian like his great-grandmother,” Castiel suggested.

Gabriel paused, winced awkwardly, then said, “Talking about his grandmother, every witness account of Gan – or maybe we should be calling him Tom Devereaux now – describes him as a
slight, very good-looking, long-haired boy. What if ‘Tom’ was planning to transition into a female identity? Omegas are intersex after all. It’s perfectly possible that reaching puberty caused Tom to rethink ‘his’ identity and decide she preferred to identify as female? Gender can be fluid anyway, but for an Omega their primary gender is often simply a matter of self-identification.”

“Damn,” Charlie cursed. “You mean we’ve been looking for two males instead of a boy and a girl and that’s why we can’t locate them?”

“I think its highly probable,” Gabriel agreed.

“No, “ Castiel denied. “Bobby described them both several times as ‘boys’.”

“Before or after you’d asked him about two boys?” Charlie asked. “You told me he was being evasive and protective. Maybe, having realized how little you knew, he deliberately played along just to mislead you. Maybe I need to adjust my search parameters again.”

“Why pick the name ‘Tom’ then?” Castiel argued.

“By 2018, they were back to using the name Winchester again,” Gabriel pointed out.

“So for all we know they swapped and changed identities multiple times. I wonder if Frank Devereaux did the same. But, either way, maybe we should be looking for a ‘family’ unit of a man with two kids. A son and possibly a younger daughter?” Charlie queried.

“Men can have long hair,” Castiel argued.

Gabriel snorted. “Does the idea seriously bother you that much? Gan’s an omega. His or her primary gender is irrelevant. Don’t be sexist.”

Castiel spluttered. “Me? I’m not the one equating long hair with feminization.”

“He’s got a point,” Charlie agreed.

“You’re only taking his side because he’s an Alpha,” Gabriel griped.

“What? So I’m sexist too, now?” she demanded.

“Just rerun the searches based on both sets of datum,” Castiel suggested. “Just adding this Frank into the equation might make all the difference. Concentrate on the facts we now know.”

“Fine,” Charlie said. “So far we know that in 2014 Sam was calling himself ‘Dan Devereaux’, was claiming to be 18 and was working as a car mechanic in Port Huron.”


“Now who’s being sexist,” Charlie pointed out primly. “But yeah, I imagine his physical build was a considerable advantage in the role. The staff file photo of Dan Devereaux is black and white and a bit hazy but, boy, he was no ‘kid’. He was clearly built. All Alpha. Bit of a ‘ladies man’ from all accounts. Seriously good looking. And all the female customers were over him like a rash. I spoke to the proprietor of the garage, and he said Dan was all tanned muscles, teeth and freckles. Had a lethal combination of ‘bad boy’ looks and smooth southern charm. He clearly had no problem convincing anyone he was eighteen. Even more interesting than him being ‘Brad Pitt’ is the fact he drove a classic black car, a 1967 Chevy Impala, which he claimed to his work colleagues that he’d inherited from his father. Which, peculiarly enough, sounds very like the car that Henry Winchester was supposedly killed in.”
“What?” Castiel demanded, blinking in shock.

Charlie grinned triumphantly.

“The article I found about Henry Winchester’s fatal accident described the vehicle involved as being a black Chevy Impala. Could be a co-incidence… but I wouldn’t put money on it.”

Gabriel frowned. “It kinda makes sense, because where did John get the car from? He was 18 in 1994 when he visited Bobby Singer. The car was already twenty-seven years old by then. So it is possible the car belonged to Henry first. Did Bobby simply give it to John on that visit?”

“Henry was ‘purportedly’ killed in the car accident, remember. I imagine his car was totalled for veracity,” Castiel argued.

“In 1980. That meant Bobby had fourteen years to restore the car before John visited. Maybe he did that. Maybe he handed the keys over when John came calling.”

“What difference does it make if he did?”

“Apart from the fact the car has been owned by three generations of Winchesters? Four even, if it originally belonged to Deanna, which would actually make sense since it would have already been nine years old when Henry got his license. So that car isn’t just an inheritance. It’s a legacy. Which makes it highly unlikely that Sam, or Dan, or whatever the hell he currently calls himself, has abandoned it. But, more to the point, the title documents of the car would explain how the Winchesters found Bobby, wouldn’t it?”

“Would it? Title documents don’t list previous owner details.”

“No, but classic cars often have glove compartments stuffed full of old titles and repair documents. The paperwork history of the car adds to its value, so people tend to hold onto receipts for things even as minor as tyre changes. But even if the car doesn’t have a physical documented paper trail, those details are on file with the DMVs. With the VIN of the car, someone like Devereaux could have accessed the records of all previous title holders. The car is the most probable explanation of how they discovered Bobby, or at least the thing that led him to Sioux Falls in the first place. And then Frank could have found Bobby the same way I did… by investigating Henry’s death.”

Castiel looked at the grainy printout of Sam Winchester’s staff photo. He looked nothing like his pale, wraithlike brother… and yet… there was something in his eyes. Something so familiar it caused Castiel’s heart to wrench and his wolf to want to howl. In fact, for the first time in a dozen years, Castiel felt the weird, itching prickle on his skin of his wolf attempting to claw its way out of his body by itself. His wolf recognized this boy even if Castiel didn’t.

He didn’t know whether it was Sam’s connection to Gan that was luring his wolf, those same pretty, pretty eyes or a sense of ominous threat. Castiel did remember Sam’s wolf form. A beast that had been the largest black Wolf he had ever witnessed. It was no wonder Sam looked so tall at fourteen. By now, Castiel wouldn’t be surprised if the boy was well over six foot tall.

Castiel looked at this photo of the stunning fourteen year old Sam Winchester, at the face with a jaw line so strong despite the boy still having the gut-clenching androgynous beauty of youth, and realized this was both the boy he had promised faithfully to keep safe and the Alpha who might yet force Castiel into killing him.

And his wolf clawed at his flesh, snapping and howling and raging at even the thought of doing so. At betraying his promise to his Omega, perhaps.
That had to be the reason he felt so sick. So out of control. So unable to stop looking at the grainy photograph of this all too pretty Alpha boy with his intense eyes and his delicately freckled skin.

It could be the only possible reason why just looking at this picture was making his wolf go crazy.

Chapter End Notes

Two steps forward and one step back, as always.... ♂️

But we’re finally getting close to closing the gap between the timelines, so hang on in there 😊
At eighteen, Sam Winchester was breaking hearts and taking names.

He was already as tall as Dean, who was a perfectly respectable six foot one, and was still growing.

He was also a solid wall of fit Alpha muscle.

Fortunately for Dean’s ego, Sam’s musculature was of the lean and long persuasion. He looked like a runner or a swimmer. Fit as a butcher’s dog but lacking the solid presence of Dean’s own physical build. Perhaps he would bulk up as he grew, most likely he would, but Dean still doubted Sam would ever equal his own denser frame. Particularly since doing so would involve a lot less reading and a lot more ‘doing’.

Dean always joked that, coloration aside, Sam’s Wolf was more Red Setter than Rottweiler.

Frank, never exactly a submissive Galla, went one step further and was in the habit of calling Sam ‘scrappy do’.

Because ironically, considering his primary gender - and no matter how tall Sam grew - Dean was always going to look and behave more like an ‘Alpha’ than his brother.

Not helped by the fact that Sam had a whole hipster ‘man-bun’ thing going on. It was all part of Sam enthusiastically embracing his new planned ‘student’ persona, which was such an improvement on the emo sulky bitch of his earlier teens that Dean carefully refrained from commenting on how much he thought Sam looked ridiculous. He was doing his best to support anything that encouraged Sam to identify with any human culture.

Even when Sam gave him the lecture that the whole point of being a hipster wasn’t about following a trend but in deliberately not following a trend. Because trends ‘suck’.

“So, okay,“ Dean said. “You’re a bunch of people all joining together in a group to protest the way people join together in groups. Sure. That makes sense.”

Sam just sniffed and added that hipsters didn’t actually call themselves ‘Hipsters’ anyway. That was just a bogus title placed on them by people who didn’t understand that hipsters eschewed such titles.

“Ah,” Dean agreed wisely. “Like the first rule of Fight Club, huh?”

Which sent Sam off in a sulk.

So Dean manfully refrained from also mocking Sam’s dubious taste in music or his pretentious girly drinks or his weirdly bizarre ‘causes’. He’d suffered through endless lectures on environmental concerns and rights issues. He’d pretended to watch a myriad of documentaries on
matters close to ‘new and improved’ Sam’s heart and, although he and Frank had spent most of those TV programs rolling their eyes at each other behind Sam’s back, he’d never given in to the urge to snatch the remote back and switch channels.

Dean had only put his foot down on three issues.

The first was Sam’s aborted experimentation with vegetarianism. When totally reasonably pointing out they were ‘fucking werewolves’ hadn’t worked, Dean had somewhat brutally reminded him of his own - albeit involuntary - experiment of whether Wolfkin could exist on a largely vegetarian diet. That, like any other reminder of their distant past, had shamed Sam into giving in without further argument.

A point that segued nicely into the second issue. Dean’s name. Over the years since they had met Frank, they had both worn a number of false identities. Dean had been Dan Devereaux, Dave Plant, Dwayne Zappiter and Don Jagger.

But he had never been ‘Dean’ anything.

And when at eighteen Sam had put a good and valid argument forward to reclaiming the Winchester name before he attended University, he had kicked off into a sulky diatribe when Dean had, yet again, insisted on becoming Gan Winchester once more.

"Dean is your name," Sam had insisted with all the passion of his youth.

And he didn’t understand - couldn’t understand - that it wasn’t something Dean felt able simply to ‘claim’. As though it hadn’t been stolen from him, ripped from him, and that wound, that hurt, was still too raw for self-suturing.

One day he’d be ‘Dean’ again. He felt that in his gut, in his bones, but not yet. He wasn’t ready. His wolf wasn’t ready. He’d know when it was time. But now was definitely not it.

Again Sam’s own shame had allowed Dean to win the argument.

The third issue, however, Sam was simply not backing down on.

"Wolves are a protected species in California,” he pointed out. “One of the last places in America where that’s still fixed in law. It’s the safest damn place for me to be.”

"That’s a shit poor, self-defeating argument,” Dean scoffed. “If that’s the best you can come up with, counsellor, are you even sure Law is the right career for you? The reason Wolves are protected in California is there aren’t any damned Wolves there. A half dozen or so at best. That’s why they’re still considered an endangered species. If you accept the place at Stanford, you’ll risk discovery on your first full moon. You think anyone will see you, a black wolf the size of a panther, and not flood the inter webs with pictures? How about we cut out the middleman and just take out a full page ad that the Campbell Heir is alive and well and living in fucking California?"

"I can control my wolf,” Sam insisted. “Haven’t I proved that to you by now? I haven’t accidentally wolfed-out in two years and that wasn’t even really an accident.”

"Actually, that point weakens your argument more. You thought the appropriate response to a lone Volkrod accidentally sniffing my scent was to wolf-out and prove him right. If it wasn’t for Frank shooting him, you’d probably be dead and me... well, god knows what would have happened to me.”

Neither of them were sure what Volkrod attitudes to Omegas were. So, okay, the Faelchu had
considered him practically holy (for the couple of hours they had gotten their heads out of their asses and accepted the fact Omegas weren’t simply figments of the imagination and that Dean was one of them). For all they knew though, Volkrod might consider Omegas to be demonic manifestations or (and this was Dean’s greatest worry) sexual property. Dean hadn’t interacted enough with the other Faelchu to have discussed the matter and Sam was too young to have even known what to ask.

Dean personally suspected he would be seen as less desirable than an Alpha-line Beta, but possibly more desirable than a standard Beta. Hopefully. Because if it came to it, and the Volkrod caught them, he might need something to bargain for Sam’s life with.

And no, he told his wolf, as it woke suddenly and started scrabbling excitedly at the back of his head like a puppy locked out of a room, that did not mean he was going to find Castiel Krushnic to make good on the blood oath.

Or anything else.

As his wolf whimpered and sloped off to sulk, Sam said he thought Dean would be seen as considerably more desirable than any Beta. According to him, only Alphas could thrall. So if Omegas could also thrall, as Dean had so consistently proven, then maybe they were almost considered equal to Alphas.

Dean thought it was nice of Sam to say so (even if he didn’t miss the ‘almost’. His brother could still be a bit of an ass) but he wasn’t willing to find out for himself.

“Forget the fact they offered you a free ride,“ he said. “We can manage Yale. Me and Frank will just have to put some extra effort in to cover the cost. Connecticut is a better place for your wolf.”

”It’s too close to New York,“ Sam argued. “At least in California I’m less likely to bump into any passing Volkrod.”

“It’s not like they’ll identify you now even if you do,” Dean argued. “Between your aftershave and that stinky Girly shit you put on your hair, you smell more like a Hawaiian fruit salad than an Alpha.”

It was true. Ever since the incident two years ago, neither Dean and Sam ever left the RV without plastering themselves with scent blockers. Which, honestly, referred only to the fact that Dean spent a small fortune on Creed Aventus and Sam spent even more on Tom Ford’s Neroli Portofino Forte.

Despite being unable to smell either of them, Frank had proven to be a surprising expert on scent camouflage. He’d maintained that the best way to conceal their designations was to cover their scents, but to do so cleverly instead of just drowning themselves in Old Spice and hoping it masked their underlying natural scents. Since neither of them wanted to walk around smelling like they’d drowned in a bottle of cheap aftershave anyway, they had bought into Frank’s assertion that the best camouflage was to find a heavy, expensive aftershave that contained complementary elements of their own scents within its middle, heart and base notes, but had a completely different overall smell.

So Dean hid his magnolia top notes within the heart notes of Creed, overwhelming the floral scents with its base of ambergris and musk, and allowing its top notes of Blackcurrant, bergamot and Apple to easily compliment his natural crisp apple base notes.

Dean smelled FINE. He smelled edible. He smelled wealthy. He did not smell like an Omega.
And between Sam’s floral Neroli, and the mango and coconut shampoo and conditioner he used (something Dean mocked a lot) Sam most definitely didn’t smell like an Alpha.

Which was why Dean’s vote was for Yale.

Sam refused to listen. His heart was set on Stanford.

"Least he’ll blend in,” Frank pointed out. “Lots of hipsters in California.”

"I thought that was hippies,” Dean said.

Frank thought about that and shrugged. “Could be,” he agreed.

"I hate you both,” Sam announced.

It was a mark of how good things were between them these days that he could make a comment like that and it only cause Dean to snort, rather than flinch.

"So,” Frank said. “If you’re driving Sam to California, maybe it’s time you did the thing. You could visit Sioux Falls on the way.”

"We’re in Idaho. On what planet is South Dakota on the way to California?” Dean scoffed. “Now, if we were going to Connecticut…”

"I am not taking the place at Yale,” Sam growled.

And that was how, a few weeks later, Dean and Sam left Frank in Idaho - because Devereaux claimed he was just getting too damned old for road trips - and set off to discover whether the Deanna Winchester listed as the first ever owner of their car was truly their great-grandmother.

Bobby Singer turned out to be even more cantankerous than Frank... and Dean quickly decided he was just as loveable.

Not that he ever said so out loud. To either of them. Dean left all that ‘feelings’ crap for Sam. There wasn’t room in his life for two emotional princesses and Sam created more than enough drama just by breathing. Dean never felt he had anything useful to add to Sam’s various emo crises, so preferred to keep his own personal emotions to himself. As far as Dean was concerned, nothing was ever made better by bitching about it and love was always better demonstrated by actions than by mere words.

But both he and Sam genuinely ‘clicked’ with Bobby, if in totally different ways. Sam loved the educated Robert Singer, the man who had spent decades investigating the mystery he had stumbled over in befriending Henry Winchester. Bobby seemed to fully appreciate Sam’s intellectual curiosity and didn’t find it (a) bewildering or (b) pretentious or (c) boring, so he was miles ahead of Dean on the Sampathy meter.

Dean’s connection with Bobby was of a far more basic and physical nature. Bobby loved cars. Bobby was blown away to see them driving the car he called ‘baby’ and to learn that Dean had restored her himself. (Despite Sam’s snide comments it had been Dean’s bad driving that had caused her most of the damage in the first place).

"I was fourteen,” Dean pointed out, irritably, and then Bobby had witnessed his first bitch-fight between the brothers.

Fortunately he’d seemed amused.
They stayed with Bobby for far longer than they’d originally planned. So long, in fact, that Dean had barely managed to get Sam to Stanford on time.

And before they left he made Bobby a promise he’d keep ‘in touch’.

He kept the promise.

At least once every couple of months he’d make a call to check Bobby was alive, to confirm that he and Sam were still alive, and to double-check no-one had similarly followed John Winchester’s breadcrumbs and gone looking for them in Sioux Falls.

Sam had been in California for over two years before one of Dean’s regular calls to Bobby bore fruit.

Castiel Krushnic - *The* Castiel Krushnic - was looking for him.

Knew he and Sam were alive.

Dean felt sick.

His Wolf was doing an ecstatic dance.

”Shut the fuck up,” Dean told his wolf.

Castiel was promising Sam was safe from the Volkrod.

Well, he would of course. Even if it was a trap. *Especially* if it was a trap.

What to do?

What to do?

What to do?

If Castiel was being honest... if it wasn’t a trap....

But Dean didn’t feel he could trust himself to make the decision. From the moment Bobby had mentioned Castiel’s name, Dean’s wolf had been turning somersaults of joy inside him.

“I am not your bitch,” he told his wolf.

It whined pathetically.

“I’ll call you back,” he told Bobby, and phoned Frank.

”Word on the street is that Sam *has* been marked untouchable,” Frank confirmed a few hours later. “So either he’s serious or he just wants to get his hands on you without a fight.”

Maybe he should agree to meet the Alpha, he decided eventually. Better to do it whilst Sam was safely hidden a couple thousand miles away. He could check out the Alpha himself. See if he could be trusted before Sam got involved.

Yes. Yes. Yes. YES, his wolf said.

Because it was clearly a moron with no sense of self-preservation.

He needed neutral ground. Somewhere highly public. Somewhere he could meet the Alpha but
escape if it turned out to be a trap. Somewhere the Alpha couldn’t lay a finger on him without witnesses.

A big game, maybe. So there would be thousands of witnesses and he could escape the grounds within the departure of the human crowd if it went wrong.

“Tell him I’ll meet him,” he told Bobby.

Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. YES, his wolf howled.

He called Bobby back an hour later. “What did he say?”

Bobby was silent for a long time, then sighed as though it pained him. “Don’t take this the wrong way,” he said.

”Take what the wrong way?” Dean demanded.

Bobby was uncharacteristically silent for a while, then he huffed, muttered ‘idjits’ under his breath, and said, “He is asking to meet Sam.”

"He can go fuck himself. Sam ain’t coming with me.”

Bobby took an audible breath. “No. Not both of you. Sam. Castiel says it would be ‘inappropriate’ to meet with you, face to face, under such circumstances. He doesn’t wish to risk being disrespectful. So he wants to parlay with Sam first. Alpha to Alpha.”

”The fuck?” Dean snarled.

Well, he told his wolf. There you have it. The Volkrod attitude to Omegas.

”Tell him to bite me,” he spat at Bobby, and hung up.

Chapter End Notes

What’s that? You thought just snapping the timelines together would mean insta-meet?

Cas: I’m trying to do the right thing, honey pie.

Dean: Bite me

Bobby: ♂
Charlie looked at Castiel Krushnic, American Alpha of All, ruthless Pakhan, one of the most powerful Wolfkin in the entire world, and decided the only suitable adjective for him at that precise moment was...

... Twitter-patted.

"What happened?" Gabriel demanded, as Castiel dropped his phone from nerveless fingers and just sat there, in the conference room of the New York Pack House, his cheeks slightly flushed, his eyes sparking red fireworks deep inside the blue, like an underwater volcano erupting beneath tempestuous waves.

"He wants me to bite him," Castiel muttered dreamily. "He didn’t mark me by accident, after all. It wasn’t just a childish mistake. He wants us to mate."

"Um, that’s nice," Gabriel said, uncertainly. "So, is Sam Winchester coming to parlay then?"

Castiel shrugged absently, clearly totally disinterested in the subject of the Alpha at that moment. "I guess so. Bobby didn’t say. Perhaps he hasn’t managed to speak to Sam yet. All he said was that Gan had sent me a message. Gan said, and I quote, ‘bite me’."

He sighed happily and offered them both a wide, dreamy, gummy smile even as his wolf sparked in his eyes like it wanted to burst out and howl for joy.

In that moment, he looked less like the Alpha of All than one of the completely besotted idiots who belonged on a Harlequin bookcover.

Totally twitter-patted.

It would have been incredibly sweet if not for the handle of the SR1 Viktor sticking out of his shoulder holster, and the grimly suspicious looks being cast Charlie’s way by Castiel’s body guards as though, somehow, the Alpha’s odd behavior was somehow her fault.

"Let me get this straight," Gabriel said. "Bobby Singer called you back to say that Gan Winchester was offering to meet on neutral territory. You countered with an offer to meet Sam instead, and Gan replied ‘bite me’?"

"Exactly," Castiel beamed. "Isn’t it wonderful?"

"You poor sweet summer child," Charlie muttered under her breath, before exchanging a doubtful, wary look with Gabriel.

"English is his second language," Gabriel offered defensively. "And, human is his second species, for that matter."

"Okay, so I’m trying not to go all Princess Bride here," Charlie muttered quietly. "But I really don’t think those words meant what Castiel thinks they meant."

Gabriel frowned as he nodded his agreement. "I’m pretty sure you’re right," he mumbled, "but I’m
“Sure as hell not saying that out loud. Cas’s Wolf has been waiting twelve damned years for his mate to return. He’s a 30-year-old frustrated virgin with a fucking big gun. I sure as hell am not going to be the one to burst his bubble.”

“Not much point anyway. He’ll probably shoot you and then still not believe you,” Charlie said, wryly. “We’ve spent the last two weeks convincing him that Gan currently identifies as a girl, remember? Since we got that so wrong, he’s hardly going to listen to us now.”

“I’m calling Singer myself,” Gabriel said, retrieving his own cell from a pocket and dialling the Galla’s number. “Maybe we can resolve any misunderstandings before they get even worse.” He let the phone ring out an annoying amount of times before giving up. “No answer. Fuck. He’s not picking up and the damned thing isn’t even going to voice mail.”

"Will you authorize the expense of me flying to Sioux Falls?" Charlie asked. “I agree one of us ought to talk to Bobby Singer, but he might respond better to a fellow human.”

"Sure," Gabriel agreed. “Do whatever you need. Use your pack credit card and I’ll sign off on your expenses. See, at least, if Sam is coming and when. The timing is going to be critical, I think.”

Charlie frowned. “Why?” she asked. Her question was answered - though she didn’t realize it immediately - by the Alpha abruptly announcing, “I’ve got to go.”

“Where exactly are you going?” Gabriel asked, though his wincing expression suggested he already had a good idea of the answer.

"Poughkeepsie," Castiel replied, looking slightly panicked. “I need to prepare the гнездо for him. I never completed it. Why the fuck did I never complete it?”

He rose to his feet so abruptly that his chair tipped and clattered to the floor behind him. His expression was a combination of hope, excitement, determination and near-terror, as he turned and strode quickly from the room. After a brief moment of blinking uncertainly, Viktor and Benny shrugged at each other helplessly before following the Alpha out of the door.

Charlie’s thumbs sped over her smartphone in query. Her Russian was improving in leaps and bounds since her move to New York, but she still kept hitting unfamiliar words. Then, as her phone supplied an answer, she paused in confusion. “A what? A receptacle? Um... a socket? Like um... a holder? Like a prison? That can’t possibly be what he meant.”

"Google translate fail," Gabriel confirmed, with a snort. “Sure, it can mean that but translations are contextual. In this instance, Cassie is talking about a nest. A bower. A den, even. Basically, just a very special place for an Omega. Our father obviously never needed to even think about creating one for our mother as part of their courtship. He restored the mansion at Poughkeepsie for her, and built the courtyard garden in this brownstone, because she hated the city, but courting a beta-mate, no matter how beloved, involves far less ritual than the courtship of an Omega. That definitely requires a formal гнездо.”

"Courtship?" Charlie queried hesitantly. “I thought Castiel and Gan were already scent bonded. I thought it just needed to be sealed with a bite and,” she winced, “Castiel seems to think Gan has already agreed to that part.”

“Doesn’t matter if he has,” Gabriel said. Then looked horrified at his own words and hastily added, “I mean of course it matters. Because without Gan’s consent nothing would be possible at all.
What I mean, though, is that giving Castiel the green light to ‘bite’ him - even if that really is what he meant - is only giving Cassie permission to begin a ritual of courtship that will eventually conclude in that bite. And that’s highly ritualistic because the pride of the whole Krushnic pack is at stake if the courtship starts but ultimately fails to reach a satisfactory conclusion. So it’s always a case of the bigger and broussier the better.

“Castiel can’t court Gan without the traditional courting gifts, and a гнездо is a critical part of that. If Cassie was younger, if he hadn’t been waiting so long for his mate, I could possibly have convinced him just to have the top floor and roof terrace of this building quickly converted into a luxury penthouse. But now his wolf is in a panic. It’s had a dozen years to prepare its courtship properly. To prepare a proper гнездо. New drapes, carpet and a lick of paint slapped onto a couple of floors of this building as a substitute is unlikely to impress Gan at all, under the circumstances.”

Charlie frowned. “Castiel didn’t say he needed to start the гнездо. He said, ‘I never completed it’,” she pointed out.

Gabriel flinched slightly. “That’s a totally different kettle of fish. The гнездо Castiel started, but never finished is... well, it’s kind of tragic really. And probably almost past repurposing. It would be cheaper, and possibly faster, to tear it down and start again. But I don’t think Castiel will even consider that as an option. He’ll never be happy to offer Gan anything less than its perfection.”

“I don’t understand.”

“I don’t suppose you do,” Gabriel sighed softly. “Castiel started building Gan’s гнездо as soon as he returned from St Petersburg. So it’s pretty spectacular. Very Russian. All gold domes and hand hewn stone and glass. A kind of summerhouse in the gardens of the Poughkeepsie estate. It’s on the bluff overlooking the river. Stunning building. Like a tiny, perfect palace. Only... well, nobody believed Gan had ever existed at all, let alone had been an Omega, so Castiel had to fight our sire tooth and nail, every step of the way, until Dad managed to convince himself it wasn’t a totally pointless waste of money. Truth is, I don’t even think he cared about the cost in monetary terms but he worried it was definitely devouring Castiel’s soul.

“Our mother was more understanding. She thought the process of building the гнездо was a necessary mourning process, a way for Castiel to ‘lay a ghost’, as it were. So, our father left Castiel to it. As long as he took care of business, fulfilled his role in the pack, our sire didn’t interfere in his ‘hobby’. Karl never spent much time in Poughkeepsie anyway.

“But when Cassie was twenty-four, and the building was almost completed and our parents were getting ready to return to Russia, Dad visited Poughkeepsie for the first time in a couple of years and what he found there broke his heart. For a while I thought he was literally going to burn the whole thing down to the ground. Castiel hadn’t created a гнездо for his Omega. He’d created a mausoleum. In the Master bedroom, instead of a bed, Castiel was planning to install a gold-gilt-covered tomb.”

Charlie gasped in shock, her eyes glistening.

Gabriel looked equally upset “It was going to be an empty tomb, obviously, since we never even retrieved bones from the ruins of Wolfsbane but, basically, Castiel was building a magnificent memorial to his ‘dead’ mate. Making a point, in glass, stone and gold-leaf that he was never going to accept a replacement for the mate that everybody believed was nothing more than a figment of his imagination. That even Castiel, by that point, believed was nothing more than a fever dream.

“But it didn’t matter. No amount of counselling or reasoning was ever going to change the fact Castiel’s wolf had ‘mourned’ the death of his mate and we’re not like standard wolves, Charlie. We
don’t just mate ‘for life’. We mate forever. A widowed Alpha won’t ever mate a second time.

"So everyone, including Castiel, accepted the fact he was going to spend his entire life alone, but our father, Karl, refused to allow him to spend his life visiting that ‘mausoleum’ to continue his mourning. Our mother managed to talk Dad out of actually destroying it, but he forbade Castiel from completing it. So that building, that гнездо, was never fully completed and has been sitting abandoned and gathering dust for six years.”

"God, that’s so sad,” she breathed.

Gabriel nodded. “But it gives us a bit of time to sort this shit out,” he pointed out. “Castiel isn’t going to be pushing for the meeting with Sam to happen for a while. He’s panicking about the гнездо. Now he thinks Gan wants to be courted, his priority is going to be getting that building stripped of all its depressing tomb-crap and turned into a palace for a real living mate before Gan arrives. So if we’re right, and Castiel has inadvertently insulted Gan by refusing to meet with him, we can get the misunderstanding cleared up before Castiel even realizes there’s a problem.”

"I hope so,’ Charlie said. “Because if I was in Gan’s shoes, I would be spitting mad. Still, he’s Omega, isn’t he? I doubt his version of ‘spitting mad’ involves much more than an artfully quivering lip.”

"Fucking goddamn. You’re right. Actually, now I think about it, I can’t imagine the words ‘bite me’ coming out of of an Omega’s mouth in anger. Maybe it’s no wonder Castiel took it the wrong way. Those probably weren’t his words at all. Gan being offended would be more than enough justification for Sam Winchester to come storming here, guns blazing,” Gabriel pointed out worriedly. “Sam could probably call Castiel out in an old-fashioned duel over it and there isn’t a pack in the world who would condemn him for doing so.”

"Oh my god,” Charlie breathed. “Do you think the whole thing is a set up? Do you think Sam and Bobby Singer have just deliberately played Castiel?”

"Maybe we should both fly to Sioux Falls and find out,” Gabriel suggested, his usually affable expression twisting into a glower of grim fury. “If Singer and Winchester are playing a game here, neither of them are going to survive long enough to see it through. I watched my little brother mourn his Omega for twelve fucking years, Charlie. I’m not letting him lose him again. If Sam needs to be taken out to make it happen, then I need Castiel’s hands to be clean when he finally gets reunited with his mate.”

XXX

"My other line is ringing,” Bobby said. “I don’t think the Alpha-of-All appreciated being hung up on.”

"The Alpha of All can bite my ass,” Dean snarled furiously.

"I’m sure he’d like to,” Bobby muttered.

"What?” Dean snapped.

"How about you just cool your jets, huh? I think this is probably just a misunderstanding,” Bobby suggested. “Wolfkin are all about tradition and although I don’t know much about the Volkrod, it makes sense they’re far more likely to follow old fashioned values than the Faelchu were. It’s probably completely out of order for an Alpha to approach any member of a different pack without politely requesting permission from a rival Alpha. This isn’t necessarily Castiel being sexist about
the fact you’re an Omega. He specifically stated he was trying to be respectful.”

"To Sam. Respectful to Sam. Because he’s an Alpha," Dean pointed out bitterly.

"Isn’t that what you wanted?” Bobby pointed out mildly. “For Castiel to treat Sam with respect, rather than simply trying to blow his brains out? Offering to meet with Sam, like an equal, is a win, son. If you can get that shit sorted out first, then maybe you and Castiel can get your own shit sorted too.”

Dean heard what Bobby was saying. He didn’t even necessarily disagree with it. But...but... he’d reached out to the Alpha.

Our Alpha, his wolf yipped excitedly, chasing its tail in happy circles.

THE Alpha, he insisted. he had reached out to the Alpha and had been dismissed as nothing more than... than Sam’s property.

Fuck.

Was that part of Wolfkin ‘traditional values’? Were Omegas bargaining chips? Was he seen as nothing more than something to be bartered? Maybe it wasn’t even specifically the fact he was Omega. Maybe Sam’s inbuilt arrogance stemmed from the reality that if you weren’t ‘Alpha’, you weren’t anything as far as Wolfkin were concerned. Castiel wanted to talk to Sam, ‘Alpha to Alpha’. Which suggested that only an Alpha’s opinion mattered.

Dean had spent twelve years as a Galla. He had spent twelve years as a free man. There was no question in his mind which one he preferred. And there was no way in hell he was going back to being ‘Galla’ again.

How had he forgotten?

Now he thought about it, he remembered his conviction that the entire pack had been as much Samuel’s bitches as the Galla were. The way that Samuel’s bite when the Wolfkin reached the ‘age of reason’ enslaved the wolves just as thoroughly as his thrall enslaved the Galla.

Castiel was just another Samuel.

Dean’s wolf whimpered with distress, whining as Dean’s sudden distaste for their ‘mate’ slid through their connection like bitter poison.

And if, Dean decided, Castiel was just like Samuel, then there was no way he had been serious about simply wanting a civilized conversation with Sam.

This was all smoke and mirrors.

Castiel didn’t want to meet Sam to show respect.

Castiel wanted to remove the rival Alpha out of his way, so he could claim Sam’s ‘property’ for himself.

The fucker was trying to kill Sam after all.

The blood oath meant nothing because it was the promise of an Alpha to a mere Omega, a mere Galla. Castiel had never intended to keep his word.

“I’ll call you back,” he told Bobby, and hung up without even saying goodbye. Castiel
knew Bobby. Dean needed to keep Bobby out of it now, for Bobby’s safety and his own.

He dialled Frank’s number, and was careful to wind thrall into his voice before he even started speaking. He wasn’t in the mood for an argument.

"I need blueprints for the Volkrod headquarters in New York,” he said, without bothering with any further introduction.

"Hmmm....” Frank replied. “No you don’t. Because, quite apart from anything else, Castiel’s private helicopter just filed a flight plan to Poughkeepsie.”

"Where the fuck is Poughkeepsie?"

"It’s the location of the real Pack House of the New York Volkrod. A gated estate about ninety miles north of the City. A compound, really. I guess you could say it’s Castiel’s equivalent of Wolfsbane."

And there was something poetic in that, Dean decided.

This had begun in a compound under siege.

Perhaps it was always inevitable that it would end the same way.

"That works for me,” he said. “Get me any available blueprints. Wolfkin or not, the law will still have demanded shit like building permits. I’m in Colorado. It’s going to take me three or four days to drive there. Find me somewhere along the way I can obtain weaponry.”

"Rocket launchers?” Frank asked dryly.

"Would be nice,” Dean agreed. “But I’ll settle for a couple of AK-47’s and a silencer.”

"The former makes the latter a bit redundant,” Frank pointed out.

"I’ll be using them to get away,” Dean said, “not to get the job done. This isn’t war. It’s personal.”

"He’s your Alpha, son. Your mate. Do you really think you can get that close, look him in the eye and pull the trigger?”

Dean ignored the thundering of his heart and the howling anguish of his panicking wolf, “Yes,” he said. “I’ve spent twelve years trying to figure out what it means to be Omega, and now I know. It means I’m not any form of Galla. I’m not even enslaved by my own wolf. I can do what needs to be done. I can protect what’s mine. And, according to Bobby, I’m the virgin fucking Mary and I don’t even need a mate. Sammy might be a little shit, but he’s my little shit. So, yeah, for Sam, I can do this. It’s time to close the circle, Frank. Time for the last scene of Wolfsbane to get played out.”

Chapter End Notes

See, I told you the reunion was almost upon us.... whistles innocently...
“Keep your hands where I can see them,” the man barked from the porch.

Since he’d already discharged his shotgun into the dirt several feet in front of them as soon as their Uber had sped off, Charlie was definitely happy to wildly wave her hands above her head like she was guiding a plane in to land. “We’re not armed. I swear,” she yelled, hoping she didn’t sound as terrified as she felt.

“You turned up on my doorstep with a fucking werewolf,” he pointed out dryly. “That’s hardly unarmed. Even if he’s only a pocket monster.”

“I’m 5’8”,’’ Gabriel snarled defensively. “I’m not that short. I’d be considered practically a giant in Bolivia.”

“’This ain’t Bolivia, Fido. Make one move to wolf-out on me, you overgrown puppy, and I’ll salt you like a bag of chips.”

Gabriel sneered at him. ’’Salt won’t hurt me.”

”Nope, but like I told your brother, you’ll still be pissing Margaritas for a week.”

The Beta’s expression changed from annoyed to cautiously optimistic. ”So you know who I am?”

“Gabriel Krushnic. First Beta. And you’re Krushnic Alpha-line so you probably think I should be impressed by your little furry ass,” the man said. ‘’I’m not,” he added, for clarification.

”Can we all just start again?” Charlie asked. “I’m Charlie Bradbury. I’m Castiel Krushnic’s Prislugoy and I’m here because I think there’s possibly been a bit of an unfortunate misunderstanding.”

The man snorted. ”’Ya think? You can run off and tell your master I haven’t heard from Gan since yesterday morning. Not since he pissed him off so bad the kid probably ain’t speaking to anyone right now. And no, I can’t call him. I ain’t lying’ bout not knowing his phone number. He only ever uses burners and chucks them every couple of weeks. So Gan always calls me. Doubt he’ll be callin’ back soon, though.”

Charlie winced. “Um. About that. The Alpha may... well, may have ‘misinterpreted’ the message Gan sent. We’re here to clarify the situation. Castiel took the words ‘bite me’ for an invitation to initiate courtship,” she explained delicately.

Bobby Singer’s lips twitched and he snorted again. “Did he now?” he drawled.

She frowned suspiciously. “You don’t sound surprised,” she pointed out.

Bobby shrugged. “Gan told me exactly what to say. So I said it. Fact I didn’t mention to him that I thought Cas might misunderstand his meaning? Well someone needs to get one of those boys to get their heads outta their asses.”

At her side, Gabriel snickered and relaxed slightly.
"Though it fucking stuns me the goddamned Alpha of All could have been so fucking insensitive. After all the shit that went down with the Campbells, didn’t it occur to him that Gan might have an issue with being treated like a piece of shit by an Alpha? Mate or not, if Castiel Krushnic imagines the fact he’s an Alpha is anything other than a big fat black mark in Gan’s book, he’s got another think coming. You’d better tell that fucker to reconsider his approach entirely. Gan is entirely less than impressed by all this Alphanspreading bullshit.”

“Castiel barely remembers meeting Gan at Wolfsbane,” Gabriel answered defensively. “He was injured and drugged at the time, so perhaps he’s missing some significant memory because he’s definitely never said a word about Gan expressing a problem with Castiel’s designation. But why would Gan have scent marked an Alpha if he’s Alphaphobic, anyway? Was it just an accident?”

"Is being Alphaphobic even a thing?” Charlie asked.

"It theoretically could be;“ Gabriel said. “Just because Omegas are expected to mate Alphas doesn’t mean they have to. Omegas do as they will. If Gan decides he prefers Betas, that’s unfortunate - and a bit odd - but it’s his choice to make and we’d respect it entirely.”

"Are you on drugs, boy?” Bobby demanded, rolling his eyes impatiently. “I’m not talking about Gan’s damned sexuality. Or whatever the fuck you call secondary gender attractions. I’m talking about the insult of Gan having the balls to offer to meet with Castiel only to be told, effectively, to shut the fuck up and stay out of it until the two big bad Alphas resolve the problem.”

Gabriel looked genuinely shocked and horrified.

"You misunderstand the situation entirely. The Alpha is understandably concerned about the existence of the Campbell heir. Whilst learning that neither pup perished at Wolfsbane was somewhat of a relief, because the death of children is never acceptable to him, it obviously has created a potential problem for the Volkrod. A conversation to establish Sam Winchester’s intentions is necessary. Under the circumstances, it’s not unreasonable to expect that conversation might be... volatile. Castiel merely wished not to distress Gan. He didn’t want him to listen to any potential unpleasantness. Such a conversation is totally inappropriate within an Omega’s hearing,” Gabriel explained.

"You see? Castiel was being protective. The absolute last thing he intended was to cause offence,” Charlie added earnestly.

"Gan isn’t a damned 1950’s housewife, ya morons. He don’t need ‘protecting’. He sure as hell don’t take kindly to being told to just shut up and look pretty. So, if Castiel didn’t want to ‘offend’ Gan, he’s shit out of luck. Offence has most definitely been caused.”

Charlie gasped and clasped her hands to her mouth in horror. Gabriel literally went pale and swayed on his feet.

"The Omega is offended? Truly offended?” Gabriel choked.

Bobby blinked slowly. “Not as much as he would be if he heard you call him ‘The Omega’ like he’s a goddamned thing,” he snarled. “You’ll show my kid some goddamned respect on my property or I’ll turn you both into a couple of Salt shakers.”

Without hesitation, Gabriel, First Beta of America, sank to his knees in the dirt of Bobby’s yard and bared his throat to the older human.

"If Gan Ainm Winchester, the Omega of America, has accorded you a position of such importance
in his affections, then I offer my willing obeisance to you as his representative,” Gabriel announced formally. “The Krushnic Pack would never willingly or knowingly offend an Omega or his claimed family.”

“Well, Balls,” Bobby said, succinctly. “Looks like there’s a fuck load more misunderstandings going on here than I’d even realized.”

It took the best part of a bottle of whiskey (the quantity consumed primarily because of Gabriel’s Wolfkin immunity to the effects of alcohol) before Gabriel and Charlie managed to convince Bobby that an Omega was considered barely one level below an actual deity to the Wolfkin of the world.

“Poor Deanna,” Bobby sighed. “She had no idea. And Henry... oh my God. This means if Henry had run to the Volkrød, to your Daddy, in 1980, then both he and John would have been protected.”

“As Omega-kin, Henry and John would both have been accorded protection,” Gabriel agreed. “But as the immaculately conceived son of an Omega? Regardless of his designation, Henry Winchester would have been welcomed by the Volkrød with not just open arms but much celebration,” he confirmed sadly. “Henry would have been regarded as святое дитя, a holy child, by my sire.”

Charlie was completely confused. None of this added up. “So why did Samuel Campbell believe it was okay to kill Henry? Had the Faelchu lost so much knowledge of Wolfkin history that they had forgotten that Omega-kin were due almost as much honor as Omegas themselves?”

“They must have,” Gabriel said, looking horrified and slightly sick.

Bobby looked at the pair of them, his face a study of confused irritation, and then he said, “Good God. You people have no damned idea, do you?”

An hour later, Gabriel was swaying in his chair, looking so ill that Bobby half expected him to fall out of it. He’d already bolted to the bathroom and vomited twice. Saying that Bobby’s words had made Gabriel feel sick was the literal truth.

“I just can’t comprehend this,” Gabriel admitted, his voice small and his expression bewildered. “I always... well, I always felt a bit bad about Wolfsbane. Not Samuel’s death... but that of the entire pack. I always thought my father had gone too far. Now? Now I wish I could dig them all back up and revive them just so I could kill them all again. Slower.”

“If it was possible, you’d be standing in line,” Bobby growled. “Don’t make the mistake of thinking Gan’s lack of a pack equates to lack of support. That boy has friends. Not because he’s some damned ‘mystical Omega’ but because he deserves them.”

“Of course he deserves them,” Charlie said passionately. “No wonder Sam had to grow up so fast. Why he had to take charge. Poor Gan must have been totally defenceless after that upbringing. And that explains why he spent all that time pretending to be just a little kid, and going to school. He never had a chance to be a child at all before then, did he?” Charlie said, wiping her eyes and sniffing.

“Huh?” Bobby asked, frowning at the pair of them like they were a pair of fascinating bugs. “Tell me, what the hell is it you think you know?”

Charlie grinned proudly and began to tell Bobby everything they’d already cleverly figured out for themselves.

Forty minutes later, Bobby sat back in his chair, regarding them both in complete stupefaction as
he digested all they had ‘learned’ about the paragon of Alpha magnificence who had kept ‘poor fragile Gan’ safe all these years.

She wasn’t surprised he looked stunned. The Winchesters and Devereaux had been meticulous in covering their tracks, but she had picked up all the puzzle pieces, all the tiny snippets of data ‘bleed’ and had formed a solid and workable hypothesis regardless.

When Bobby finally spoke, she wasn’t expecting a ‘wow’ - he didn’t seem the type - but she fully expected a grudging look of respect and/or affirmation.

Bobby took a deep breath.

"Idjits," he pronounced.

Charlie’s responding expression, honestly and quite ironically, could only be described as an ‘artfully quivering lip’.

"I’m feeling kinda disillusioned,” he eventually said. “Know why I kept the secret of the Wolfkin all these years? It wasn’t thrall. And after Deanna and Henry died, it wasn’t even love. Emotions didn’t come back into it at all until I met Henry’s grandkids. But in between, all those long years in between when I had no real reason to keep the secret? I kept quiet about the Wolfkin because all of my research, all of my studying, convinced me that Wolfkin are better than humans. Smarter, more honest in their dealings, less selfish, even less warlike. Ruthless and criminal, sure, but not warlike.

“But I listen to you now and all I can conclude is... you’re all fucking morons.”

He glowered at the pair of them, as though they were total and utter disappointments who barely deserved to continue breathing the same air as him.

"What?” Charlie asked.

“Hey,” Gabriel protested.

But they both exchanged nervous, uncertain glances because it was glaringly obvious that they had somehow screwed the pooch.

Charlie hadn’t felt this awkward and wrong footed since she had been in college, trying to defend some dubious coursework to a grumpy, taciturn Professor.

Instead of expanding on his criticism, Bobby checked the time, then sighed expansively. “It’s late. You Volkrod got private planes and shit?” he asked Gabriel.

The Beta looked startled and confused, but nodded and said, ”Of course."

"Good,” Bobby said. “Get one waiting for us at Sioux Falls tomorrow morning. Flying commercial is too much of a ball’s ache with my chair. “

"No problem,” Gabriel agreed. “But, um, where are we going?”

"I’m going to take you to find out the truth for yourselves, directly from the horses’s mouth,” Bobby snorted.

He turned to Charlie. “There’s a room at the very top of the stairs, you’ll find some stuff to change into and a bed. It’s dusty but clean.”
“What about me?” Gabriel whined.

”There are no other spare rooms.”

”In a house this size?”

“Unless you want to explain to either Sam or Gan Winchester why you were shedding hairs in their beds then, as I said, there’s no spare rooms. There’s a couch. You’re small. You’ll fit, or go find a hotel. I don’t care. I’m tired and going to bed now.”

xxx

Even with the advantage of flying direct, courtesy of a Krushnic private jet, they didn’t land in the San Jose Mineta airport until well after lunchtime and by the time they arrived on campus at Stanford it was almost 3pm.

’I told you,” Charlie crowed, as they followed Bobby who was wheeling himself confidently towards a student accommodation block. “He’s bringing us to meet Gan.”

They had spent the entire flight arguing whether the frustratingly tight-lipped Bobby was bringing them to meet Sam, Gan or both. But once it was clear the destination was the University itself, Charlie was confident it was Gan they would be meeting.

Her first thought, when Gan opened the door was ‘Holy shit, he’s tall.’ Her second was ‘damn, he’s good looking’; her third, looking around the strewn papers and stacked books of Gan’s room was how mundane the surroundings were, and her fourth was how irritated the Omega looked at having unexpected visitors.

Well, not Bobby. He seemed startled but genuinely thrilled to see Bobby. But Gan was casting uncertain, wary looks. And he’d taken one sniff of Gabriel and had bristled like a big, angry dog.

Gabriel had taken one obvious sniff and was looking startled, unsettled and totally confused.

Surprisingly, Charlie could smell Gan too. Maybe it was an Omega thing, because she’d never picked up the scent of a Wolfkin before. Gan smelled... divine. Though not quite how she’d imagined. She’d heard Castiel describe Gan as smelling like magnolias floating in a sea of champagne. But Sam’s scent, whilst definitely floral, reminded her more of a Hawaiian Luau. Maybe because she was human.

And his eyes, whilst a pretty shade of hazel, were nothing like the intense green of his brother.

In fact, whilst Charlie thought both Winchesters were total eye-candy who could make a small fortune as cover-models - she was gay, not blind - she was vaguely disappointed to personally think Sam was the ‘prettier’ of the two, for all his Alpha muscle.

“Why would you bring a Volkrod here?” Gan demanded of Bobby, looking more irritated than alarmed.

Then again, he was big enough to fold Gabriel like a pretzel.

“He’s just a pint-sized puppy,” Bobby pointed out, as though he could read Charlie’s mind, “But the gig is up anyway. Time to man up and go see Castiel Krushnic. Your brother needs you to finally get off your ass and pull your weight, boy. Time for the whole Campbell/Krushnic shit to get resolved. Everything’s going to go to hell in a handcart if we don’t get some misunderstandings
cleared up. So pack your bags. We’re all going to go to New York.”

Gabriel looked too stunned to react for a moment, looking between the huge Omega and his Galla for a moment in total disbelief that anyone, human or not, would dare to speak so disrespectfully to an Omega.

"I’ve got mid-terms in two weeks,” Gan whined, his face folding into a dramatic pout. “I can’t just drop everything and leave.”

Charlie winced slightly, certain even thinking an Omega was a ‘spoiled little bitch’ was probably blasphemy.

Bobby rolled his eyes impatiently. “I keep tellin’ myself ‘this is the year you’re gonna grow up and take responsibility’, and then, yet again, you open your damn fool mouth and prove me wrong.”

The comment was too much for Gabriel. He growled deep in his throat and his skin visibly rippled.

Gan turned to look at him and his eyes blazed in warning.

Blazed red.

Alpha red.

Gabriel froze.

But not in fear.

"Well, fuck me,” he muttered. “You’re Sam Winchester?”

Sam glowered at him petulantly. “Of course, I’m Sam Winchester. Who the hell else would I be?”

Who the hell else, indeed, Charlie thought, as her entire mental construct of ‘the Winchesters’ came crumbling down like a collapsing house of cards.

Chapter End Notes

yeah... probably not the chapter you wanted... but the chapter you ‘needed’, before we get to the good stuff 😊
Chapter Twenty Three

It was only mid afternoon of day three since Dean had made his decision to confront Castiel and settle this shit once and for all and, even after Dean had diverted and dipped down to Harrisburg to collect his weapons, he was only four hours' drive from his destination.

He’d made far better time than he’d expected, but twelve hours a day of steady driving would do that for you.

His ass, his shoulders and his right calf ached like a bitch though.

He vaguely contemplated the idea of parking up when he got a little closer to Poughkeepsie, and taking a break. Resting up a little. But he wanted to hit the compound in twilight, just at the point where the light was hazy and the shadows long, when human eyesight was at its weakest but before full dark snapped Wolfkin vision into maximum efficiency.

And he couldn’t wait a whole extra day to do so. His nerves wouldn’t take standing still for that long. He already felt as though he was being eaten alive by termites and he was still on the move. If he stopped to think, to breathe, he thought his skin would stop merely shivering and would simply rip off him completely.

He was a werewolf. He was pretty sure that kind of thing could literally happen.

So despite knowing a brief rest would be in his best interest, he put his aches aside because he was determined to get the job done that night. By this time tomorrow, Sam was going to be safe or Dean was going to be dead. Or maybe both. Most probably both. He had little true hope of getting out of the Poughkeepsie compound alive.

But that didn’t seem to be a huge consideration. He wasn’t sure he wanted to survive. Castiel was his mate. He knew it. His damned wolf knew it.

Dean had accepted that Sam’s life was going to cost Castiel’s death.

Three days of driving, with nothing else to do except think, had equally convinced him that his own life was barely going to be worth living once Castiel was dead anyway. He was damned well going to try to survive the encounter but, bottom line, if he didn’t make it? Well, it sucked but it was maybe gonna be for the best.

Oh, sure, he’d tried to tell himself otherwise. He’d done the whole ten-step pep talk that he was an ‘individual’, that he wasn’t defined by his mate, by his Alpha, that the two were mutually exclusive. That he hadn’t really even met the guy and he was an Alpha so therefore inevitably an asshole because (a) Samuel and (b) Sammy - hey, he loved his brother but sheesh...

He was sick and tired of kidding himself.

He was about to kill his mate for the sake of a brother who was so happy living packless in California as a would-be vegetarian hipster lawyer with a goddamn man-bun that Dean doubted he’d even notice if his brother disappeared off the face of the earth entirely.

Which was all kinds of fucked up.

But was also not open to negotiation.
He chose Sammy.

He would always choose Sammy.

Because love, real love, was unconditional.

This was about how Dean felt, not about whether or not Sam deserved him to feel that way.

And Castiel, his mate, wanted Sammy dead so... well, it was a no-brainer which way he was going to jump.

Because whatever else Sammy had done or hadn’t done, the only reason Dean was alive... the only reason Castiel was alive, was the way Sam had protected Dean from Samuel on the day Dean presented twelve long years ago. Without that, neither Dean nor Castiel would have survived Wolfsbane anyway. Which meant they both owed their lives to Sam.

So, maybe, it was some form of karma reasserting itself that both he and Castiel might now have to give those stolen lives up to save Sam in return.

He took the I81 towards Poughkeepsie, his hands steady on the wheel despite his wolf howling and wailing like a banshee the entire way.

The ceaseless noise was another reason why his drive had been so fast. His wolf wasn’t letting him rest, and driving the car was better than tossing and turning pointlessly in a motel bed. The wolf was ceaselessly circling inside his skin, sniffing and scratching, seeking a way to break out of its cage. Dean feared if he closed his eyes this close to Castiel Krushnic, he would wake to find himself clothed in fur and already eagerly running on four paws towards the Alpha like a bitch in heat.

His Wolf was a goddamned shameless hoe.

Mate/mate/mate/mate his wolf sang, a dirge of want and need, despite it knowing Dean’s purpose had fuck-all to do with claiming the Alpha. The wolf was being as stubborn as a mule and twice as ornery. All it seemed concerned with was the fact that, with every mile of asphalt eaten by the Impala’s tyres, Dean was getting closer to the Alpha who smelled of petrichor, of geosmin; of home.

It would have worried Dean more, this bi-polar motivation, this crazed wolf agenda - this proof that his wolf-form and his human-form were poles apart in their emotions towards the Alpha - except that Dean knew the wolf’s adrenaline response would kick in the minute he was in genuine danger. Once Dean committed himself to this action, once he crossed the rubicon by entering the Volkrod packlands armed for battle, it would be too late to turn back.

Because the minute the Alpha saw him toting a goddamned grenade launcher into the compound, Castiel fucking Krushnic would sure as shit lose interest in Dean’s furry ass as mate material.

So even if Dean lost control of his wolf at that point, it would be motivated then purely by self-preservation. When push came to shove, the wolf wouldn’t let him down.

His skin was itching like crazy, prickling sensations running up and down his nerves. His body hair felt as though it was standing on end. He thought it was the silver causing his nausea. He was pretty sure it was the silver. Just knowing it was in the trunk of the car was enough for all of his senses to be going apeshit.

Frank had come up trumps, as always.
Dean was toting enough firepower to be a one-man army.

He'd been joking about the rocket launchers. Frank clearly hadn't shared his sense of humor because Dean was now the proud owner of an XM25 semi-automatic grenade launcher. He wasn't sure it would prove more help than hindrance, given that it - combined with its 36 rounds of ammunition - weighed a hefty 50lbs. But he was a wolfkin, not a human, so was strong enough that the weight alone wasn't sufficient reason to turn it down.

And it was definitely cool shit.

Frank's dealer had also provided an M16 assault rifle, with half a dozen spare magazines. Not as reliable as an AK47, but the amount of available ammunition for the M16 had sold it to him as his best option. He had two Glock semi-automatic pistols, with 9mm parabellum cartridges, six cloud-maker smoke grenades, and two incendiary grenades.

He didn't bother with knives. If he got close enough to anyone for knife fighting, he'd be better off depending on his teeth and claws anyway.

But the one addition to his arsenal, the one totally unexpected addition, was something Frank had Fed-Ex'd to wait for him at Harrisburg. An old fashioned standard manual pistol. A colt. For which there were only two bullets.

Silver bullets.

*Two* bullets.

There was something almost poetic about that.

Two bullets. One each. Because maybe that was inevitably the way this was going to have to go down. One to take Castiel out. The other to save himself from being literally ripped apart by the Krushnic pack in retaliation if he failed to successfully shoot his way out of there afterwards.

The silver was currently causing Dean to wish to climb out of his own skin.

But he was loaded for bear and fully prepared to take on the whole damned Krushnic pack single handed.

Except, of course, nothing was quite that straightforward.

He was just past Allentown, still 112 miles from Poughkeepsie, when an automatic vehicle recognition system first picked up his car. He was on the I84 just past Newburgh, with maybe 15 miles left to go, when he pinged the Volkrad's second early warning system. He hit Wappingers Falls before the third, a drone camera, managed to get a clear picture of him through the windscreen.

xxx

In 2008, before the assault on Wolfsbane - but during the actual planning of that event - Karl Krushnic had devised a protocol that, in the wake of the rout of Wolfsbane, became standard practice for all Pack Houses.

It became known as the ‘Bane Protocol’.

Because those that don’t learn from the past are destined to repeat it and Karl, as the author of the assault that had proven the vulnerability of compounds, had no intention of anyone using his own
methods against him in the future.

The Bane Protocol was the reason all the pups, Pok and non combatant betas had already left the Poughkeepsie estate a good half hour before the second warning confirmed Sam Winchester’s vehicle was still en route to the Pack House.

Wolfkin had a pack mentality and that, in emergency situations, led to smooth and seamless evacuations because pack did as they were told without grumbling or second guessing their Alpha’s orders. And the Bane Protocol clearly stated that by the time you knew for sure there was a risk, it was possibly going to be too late.

So by the time the second alert sounded, the entire population of the entire 200 acre estate consisted of only three Wolfkin and a single Pok.

Such a complete evacuation, however, was not in accordance with the Bane protocol. And two of those Wolfkin being told to leave also was definitely no part of any protocol.

"Do you really think I can’t handle a twenty year old, inexperienced Alpha by myself?” Castiel growled. “Besides, I invited him to meet with me. He may simply be too ignorant of Wolfkin practices to realize he should have made a formal appointment rather than simply driving up to our front gate.”

"If you believed that, Alpha, you would hardly have sent everyone away,” Viktor pointed out grumpily.

"It’s prudent to take precautions,” Castiel snapped. “That’s all.”

It was both true and an unashamed lie.

True because he couldn’t understand why Sam would have approached in such a blatantly recognizable vehicle if he hadn’t simply been showing a lack of good manners.

A lie because Castiel was pretty certain this was less an attempt to parlay than a hot-heated, immature, over-reaction to Sam finding out that Gan had reached out to another Alpha.

Castiel was pretty sure Sam was going to arrive guns blazing.

Surprisingly, his primary reason for enacting the Bane Protocol hadn’t been for protection of his pack.

It had been for protection of Sam.

Because Castiel had a sinking feeling he was going to have to handle this conflict the old fashioned way.

And if his wolf was concerned about the safety of Pack, it wouldn’t allow Castiel to simply shoot the young Alpha in the legs. It would be determined to remove the threat entirely.

Sam Winchester was Omega-Kin. More than that, he was the great-grand pup of an Omega. From a line of homogeneous Omegas. Which was enough to completely blow Castiel’s mind. Both Sam and Gan were the result of a three hundred year old Omega miracle. The idea of killing either of them felt like sacrilege.

But, even more importantly, Sam was Gan’s brother. Flesh of his flesh, blood of his blood, and the
last thing Castiel wanted to do - if it was at all possible to avoid - was to kill Sam Winchester, the brother of his mate.

Unless he had no other choice.

By removing the vulnerable pack members, Castiel was simply reducing the probability of having to kill the younger Alpha.

Conversely, the necessity to do so had put him in a completely foul mood because he had also been forced to evacuate the Pok working on the completion of Gan’s гнездо. And that, far more than the young Alpha’s arrival itself, had completely pissed him off.

So he wasn’t in the mood for arguing with his bodyguards.

His usual empathy for their situation, the knowledge that his death would inevitably cause their own, was completely absent as he demanded they climbed into a car and left him alone.

Well, save for the single Pok.

He wasn’t sure if it was fear of their own fates, or genuine concern, that allowed Viktor and Benny to fight his thrall long enough to still be with him when the photograph from the drone flashed up on the screen.

"Fuck,” Benny said. “Try not to shoot him in the face, boss.”

Despite the seriousness of the situation, Castiel snorted with genuine humor. Sam Winchester was an absolutely stunning looking man.

Castiel’s wolf seemed to agree, given the way it started yipping with excitement.

More embarrassingly, Castiel could feel his own cock twitching in response to the gorgeous face pictured behind the wheel of the sexy black car. He was obviously responding to some similarity between Sam and his brother, though Castiel could see little resemblance between the hale and hearty Alpha and his own memories of the wraithlike Omega.

But since, as a scent marked Alpha, Castiel had always felt nauseous if he even so much as expressed appreciation for the physical appearance of any other wolf, it had to be Sam’s connection to Gan that was allowing, or causing, Castiel to physically respond to the photo on the monitor.

Castiel was Gan sexual.

He had been for twelve years.

So he couldn’t possibly be feeling any amount of attraction towards Gan’s brother.

He was just being confused by the insane howling of his wolf and the adrenaline surge of knowing he was probably going to be fighting for his life.

Castiel wasn’t arrogant enough to believe he was guaranteed to win a fight between himself and Sam.

So his last words to Benny were, “If I don’t make it, tell my father I want to be buried where I die. I want to be lain to rest in Gan’s гнездо. At least in death I can be with my mate.”

Despite his own fear, despite his fury at being dismissed from Castiel’s side, forced to obey by
unbreakable thrall, Benny’s final words as he climbed in the car were wry. “For god’s sake, Boss, just let us take him out for you. We could just drive right at him, a tragic scenario of our fleeing asses ‘accidentally’ hitting his car head-on. Then you and your Omega can mourn the tragedy together. It would be romantic. Very Russian.”

Castiel smiled and shook his head sadly. “Trust me, my friend,” he told his faithful bodyguard, “If there’s any possible way to avoid anyone mourning today, I will take it.”

He waited until Benny and Victor had driven off, deliberately leaving the gates to the compound unlocked and wide open as instructed, and then turned to the Pok.

"Time to get ready,” he said.

O’Toole rolled his eyes. “I actually thought you letting me out of that damned Oubliette was my life looking up,” he complained. “Should have known better.”

"Sam knows you. He’s thralled you twice before. He didn’t kill you then, he probably won’t kill you now. Most importantly, he knows you’re easily bound in obeisance to him. He’ll know you aren’t lying when you tell him where I am. I’d rather he didn’t burn my mother’s house down to the ground looking for me.”

xxx

Dean braked so suddenly that the car slipped and skidded as it came to a shuddering halt.

The gates of the Poughkeepsie estate were wide open in seeming invitation.

The guard house looked deserted.

Slowly, cautiously, he steered the car to the side of the road, parking it right next to the tree line. Then he slid across the front seat and used the passenger door for cover as he slipped out of the vehicle and dropped low, knees to the ground and sniffed the air cautiously.

His knees impacted the soft fallen leaves that lay on the ground, sending the scent of loam into the air, and his wolf threw back its head and gave a long, piercing howl. Silently, Dean clamped down on the wolf, keeping its mournful cry trapped deep inside his own chest.

He could smell wildlife moving within the trees. A muntjac grazing half a mile away, a warren teeming with rabbits, a dove cooing in the branches several hundred feet to his left. He could smell the forest, could hear the far off rumble of the Hudson’s tumbling waters.

He could neither smell nor hear a single Wolfkin.

It was a trap.

It had to be a trap.

He had clearly lost any element of surprise. Castiel knew he was coming. Castiel was waiting for him. Castiel had, somehow, cleared the place of innocents so they wouldn’t get caught in the cross-fire.

Innocents.

Because this was the Volkrod’s main compound, the place where the families lived and...

Oh shit... why had he not even stopped to think about the fact this was where the Volkrod pups
lived?

He’d been thinking of this as a battle, as the epic showdown between the ‘last’ of the Campbells and the Krushnic Pack. he’d been thinking of all the Russian wolves as being enemy, of being ‘fair game’, of being combatants.

But there were pups here.

Or pups missing from here.

He stilled, calming his thudding heart, thinking it through.

Gate open, check. Pups missing, check. Trap, check.

The remaining Volkrod wanted him to drive right through those gates. He wasn’t sure how they were hiding their spoor. But the fact he couldn’t smell or hear them meant wherever they had concealed themselves, they weren’t going to be able to easily surprise him if he was on foot.

He couldn’t smell the tell-tale scent of buried explosives but he was pretty sure if he drove through the gates, either a buried IUD or an airborne missile would take him out long before he reached the main house.

So, fine. He wouldn’t drive.

Instinct told him to slip into his wolf form, slide through the gates low and swift, lope thought the vast acres surrounding the house on surefooted paws.

He told instinct to take a hike.

He needed weapons he couldn’t carry as a wolf.

Besides, unless the heavens were going to helpfully open and dump a blanket of thick snow, his wolf was hardly going to be inconspicuous. Why the fuck were Omegas the color of Arctic wolves? Might be useful in somewhere like goddammed Siberia. Was fuck all use mid-spring in New York State.

But he needed speed, so he popped the trunk, looked sadly at the XM25 and decided it was too damned heavy after all. He settled for the M16, the pistols and the colt. Plus a couple of the smoke grenades, just in case.

He strapped and stashed the kit, shuddering as the faint scent of silver hit the back of his throat and caused him to gag, slipped the magazines and cartridges into an x-shaped ammo belt that made him look like some ridiculous extra from The Magnificent Seven, then trotted towards the gate in a low, zig-zagging motion, hyper aware he could be in the sights of any number of concealed snipers.

It wasn’t until he was through the gates, past the guardhouse, off the driveway and concealed within the trees inside the estate that he managed to breathe again.

xxx

Even unfinished, Gan’s гнездо was breathtaking.

The sun was dipping low in the sky over the Hudson, its dying rays a warm rose-gold glow that bathed the gray stone columns in the palest blush of pink and caused the gilt domes to sparkle. Inside the гнездо, the rooms were shadowy and unlit, so the exterior glass looked like dark, almost
black, mirrors.

Over the last three days, Castiel’s Pok had stripped the interior of all its faded dusty drapes and rugs and had scrubbed its marble floors until they were glossed like polished gems. The only ‘furniture’ ever installed, the only item not yet removed in anticipation of all the hand-built furniture Castiel had commissioned two days earlier, was the golden sarcophagus he had always intended be placed in the master bedroom.

The sarcophagus was where Castiel intended to wait for Sam’s arrival. It would bear silent witness to either their reaching of an accord, or the spilling of their blood.

It sat where it had been abandoned six years earlier, so heavy with its sold leaf and jewel encrusted decorations that it had taken a team of eight Wolfkin Betas to carry it just as far as the main hall of the гнездо. They had left it there, waiting for the marble floor of the bedroom to be completed before installing it in its final resting place and because of Karl’s horror at discovering the mausoleum, the work had never been completed.

The lid of the sarcophagus was the true reason the гнездо had taken so long to prepare that Karl had arrived in time to prevent its completion.

The jewels and polished glasses that made it so heavy were a mosaic, a scene so delicately formed of tiny colored insets that it appeared almost to have been painted rather than constructed.

Two wolves.

One black as midnight, with eyes formed of lapis lazuli. One whose body was formed entirely of diamonds, so it was the silvery blue-white of fractured ice, with eyes formed of peridots.

The wolves were leaping towards each other.

Their mouths open in howls. Their bodies destined to crash together.

Every time Castiel had looked at the mosaic, his heart had shattered anew at the knowledge those wolves would never meet, never blend, never entwine together as mates.

Ironically, to a human eye, the wolves looked as though they were about to meet in battle.

xxx

Dean wound his way through the woods, avoiding the trails, his body hugging the trees, using their trunks for cover as he darted from one to the next, always listening, always sniffing the air, his senses on high alert.

The sun was still sinking into twilight but inside the forest the shadows had already fallen to near darkness and overhead it had begun to rain, a light drizzle, but enough to release the scent of petrichor from the fallen leaves that lined the ground. A smell that was driving Dean’s wolf to a near insane clawing inside his head.

Being surrounded by that scent, the scent of his mate, was maddening.

For more than one reason.

How the hell would he track Castiel down if the whole fucking estate stank of the same base notes as the Alpha’s scent?
Dean coughed a bark of laughter as he hoped, suddenly, that the Krushnic Alpha was as vain as his brother. A bit of mango and coconut conditioner would be damned well useful under the circumstances.

At least the fact his own body was near drenched with half a bottle of Creed would prevent the Alpha from pinpointing his scent either.

So they were both at a disadvantage now.

Dean could work with that.

As he approached the house, he could hear only one heartbeat.

A single heartbeat pulsing on the wrap-around veranda surrounding the front door.

A single person waiting.

Waiting for him.

And for a moment, though it was impossible to believe this wasn’t trap/trap/trap, he wanted to believe that Castiel was simply waiting for him on that porch, willing to see this through Alpha to Omega, according him the same respect, after all, as he had offered Sam.

But no.

He couldn’t afford to believe it.

Couldn’t afford even the slightest of hopes that this could still be resolved in words rather than blood.

It was too late.

It had already been too late twelve years ago when Karl Krushnic had pronounced Sam’s life forfeit.

There had never been any opportunity for resolution.

This was just the last final death throes of a conflict begun a dozen years earlier.

And as he crept closer to the house and his nose separated the plumes of scents, he realized the single heartbeat was that of a human. A Pok. Not the Alpha at all.

His Wolf whined, bereft.

"I know, buddy, I know," he muttered to it, even as he sniffed the air. No gun oil, no metallic spoor of polished metal, no silver.

So an unarmed Pok.

Left like a sacrificial goat.

TRAP/TRAP/TRAP his instincts screamed.

He unslung his M16, checked the magazine, and brandishing it in his right arm, finger ready at the trigger, he broke from the cover of the trees.
Chapter Twenty Four

“He’s waiting for you in the гнездо. He’s completely alone. It isn’t a trap. Well, other than the fact he’s probably the most deadly bastard you’re ever going to have the pleasure to meet. And he’ll most probably be the last,” O’Toole snickered.

“What the fuck is a.. a gnezdo?” Dean demanded, feeling the word out cautiously. O’Toole’s words made him feel nervous but he was refusing to let himself feel intimidated. Castiel Krushnic was goddamned Bratva. Of course he was a ‘deadly bastard’.

"In this case? It’s a tomb. A pretty, multi-million dollar mausoleum built especially for a pretty Omega named Gan Winchester. So tragic, huh? Castiel Krushnic spent years building that thing to stand in perfect memorial to his dead mate. Maybe he wants you to see it with your own eyes before he kills you.” O’Toole’s eyes glinted with genuine, if dark, humor.

Dean’s blood ran cold at the implication.

Castiel had always intended to kill him?

His wolf howled in anguish, clawing desperately to emerge, begging to be allowed out of its mental cage. Mate/mate/mate, it insisted.

Dean impatiently shoved it back down. He didn’t have time for its histrionics today.

Maybe Castiel hadn’t just discovered he and Sam were alive after all. Maybe Bobby was wrong. Maybe the whole thing, the visit to Sioux Falls, the conversation with Bobby, had just been smoke and mirrors too. If Castiel had time to build a ‘multi-million dollar mausoleum’ then he must have become aware of their survival at least a couple of years ago.

Oh my fucking god.

Castiel wasn’t just an asshole.

He was evil.

An evil asshole.

Did the Krushnics hate the Campbells so much that Castiel, in discovering his ‘mate’ had survived Wolfsbane after all, had felt no option except to ensure he died?

Dean didn’t know enough about Omegas; more specifically he didn’t know enough about how Volkrod perceived Omegas. What if his earlier worry about Volkrod thinking Omegas were demonic rather than holy had been the truth? Dean didn’t even know how mating and claiming really worked between Alphas and Omegas. All he’d been able to learn from Bobby’s limited research into the history of the Wolfkin was that if his own wolf was so sure Castiel was his mate, then Castiel’s wolf inevitably felt the same.

But maybe Castiel thought that was a bad thing.

Maybe just because their wolves had bonded, it didn’t necessarily follow that the Wolfkin felt the same way. Where did the wolf end and the man begin? It all felt a bit schizophrenic to Dean, but he’d always thought of his wolf as having its own unique personality. So whether they were two different sides of the same person, or two different ‘people’ sharing the same body, the end result
was maybe the same.

Perhaps Castiel’s *wolf* wanted him, but Castiel the *man* didn’t.

Maybe Castiel’s wolf wouldn’t allow him to mate a wolfkin of his choice unless, or until, Dean was dead.

He had no knowledge of whether or not Wolfkin were like wolves in that respect, but it made sense they would be similar. Wolves mated ‘for life’. If Wolfkin were the same, it made sense that Castiel needed him to be dead in order to be able to move on.

Building him a fucking goddamned tomb in anticipation of the ‘happy event’, though, was seriously sick shit.

He turned in the direction of the bluff over the Hudson where O’Toole had told him he’d find the gnezdo thing. He seriously regretted not bringing the grenade launcher now. He would have enjoyed just bringing the whole fucking building down on Castiel’s head.

Still, maybe better if he could look the fucker in the eyes when he put a silver bullet in his black heart.

He left the Pok unharmed and headed towards the гнездо, so distracted by his shock and fury that he didn’t even hear the human muttering about the odds of having survived meeting *Sam* Winchester three times.

xxx

Castiel smelled him approaching before he heard him.

It was possibly due to adrenaline that the inexperienced Alpha was stinking like an Italian brothel. The stench was almost overwhelming. Not exactly *unpleasant* but definitely far too ‘loud’. The strong unmistakable musk of an Alpha tangled with top notes of fresh fruit and even, deep inside the scent plume, a tiny whiff of magnolia. As though that teasing smell was meant as a cruel reminder of the Omega he had mourned for so long. The Omega he might lose again because of the stupidity of this arrogant, hot-headed Alpha pup.

Because he could smell gun oil and gun powder and explosives.

And something else, some *other* smell lurking beneath the rest. Sharp, nauseating, terrifying.

Silver.

So much for a parlay then.

He remembered Gabriel suggesting that Sam might want to breed his own brother. *Was that* what this was? Sam having learned Gan had invited him to initiate courtship? Sam wanting to destroy his brother’s chosen mate in the hope that might make Gan more receptive to his own claim?

No matter that wolves couldn’t *mate* twice. Their biology still allowed for reproduction outside of a mate-bond. Sam Winchester could still use his brother to sire an heir, if Gan permitted him to. And how better to confuse the emotions of a delicate, sheltered Omega than to offer to ‘comfort’ them through the heartbreak of a broken mate-bond.

That was, after all, how Crowley had taken over the Scottish Packs, by *comforting* his own mother, Rowena.
Why would a damned Campbell have any more honor?

Intense dislike pooled in Castiel’s gut.

Perhaps Sam’s survival of this encounter was not going to be his priority after all.

His wolf immediately howled and fought him, rising like a dark rabid force, and this time the internal battle was so fierce that black hair started to sprout on his forearms before he wrestled it back into submission. ‘Stop panicking’, he snapped at it. ‘Gan is our mate. He’ll forgive us. Sam is the one in the wrong here. It’s not me who arrived at another Alpha’s door armed with silver.’

The wolf continued to mither and whine and gripe.

Castiel ignored it.

He cautiously slipped into the deeper shadows behind the sarcophagus, his hand reaching for the handle of his SR1 Viktor and he withdrew it smoothly from his shoulder holster.

Just as a window shattered on the front of the гнездо, and a smoke grenade crashed down onto the marble floor amongst a pile of broken glass.

Sam Winchester was moving fast because, even as the black shadows of the hall filled with the swirling plumes of billowing gray smoke, another window on the other side of the building broke with the impact of a second canister.

Choking and spluttering, blinded by the gas, Castiel’s eyes blazed scarlet.

Rage filled him, but not at the assault on himself. At the assault on Gan’s гнездо. The glass was handmade. Venetian. Imported at vast cost. For Sam to despoil his brother’s nest was his greatest insult yet.

“Ты будешь молиться о смерти, прежде чем я закончу с тобой,” he snarled, promising not death but worse. That the young Alpha would pray for death before Castiel was finished with him.

His Wolf roared and snarled, fighting him as though it was desperate to break the chains of his control to rend and tear, but Castiel could smell the guns, smell the silver. This was not the time for a wolf but a time for reason and cool control, so he pushed it down impatiently, trapped it within the bands of his iron will, refused to listen to its desperate howls of protest.

There was a clatter to his right, the sound of a door opening, or perhaps a stone thrown as deliberate distraction.

He was blinded by the smoke, slightly deafened by the two grenades, his nose - his most useful sense - too distracted by the sour bite of silver and the overwhelming stench of too much musk and too little magnolia, but he was Castiel Fucking Krushnic, Alpha of All, and he had fought more battles than Sam Winchester had eaten hot dinners.

He dropped, rolled in the opposite direction from the noise and came up firing.

There was a pained yelp and the clatter of a falling firearm.

Arm or hand shot then, a wound that would heal quickly in such a charged atmosphere. He shot again, slightly to the left, assuming the Alpha would have had the sense to move already and so he dropped and rolled himself at the same time, knowing the discharge of his gun would have given away his position.
Sure enough a burst of semi automatic fire crackled through the air and he barely managed to move fast enough to avoid the spray of bullets that flew in his direction.

He bit back a cry of pain as he was hit not by the bullets themselves but by shards of marble spitting up from the floor as it was pitted and cratered by machine gun fire. The splinters of stone cut his pant legs, slicing gouges in his shins and lower thighs.

But they were minor wounds, ones that were closing even as he made a bounding leap upward until he was standing on the sarcophagus itself. In that position, his head was slightly above the worst of the smoke and, in the far edges of the room, near the alcove that concealed a doorway to the upper floor, he saw the shadows shift into the form of a tall man.

“Попался,” he murmured. Got you. He calmly raised his gun, took aim and fired.

Perhaps the Alpha heard the bullet being fired, or smelled the spark of gunpowder or simply was planning to move anyway. The bullet aimed at his heart - because, in that moment, Castiel had forgotten completely his intention to avoid a kill shot - went far wide and hit the Alpha’s left shoulder instead, hitting with such punching force that it spun him around.

Spun him so he was facing Castiel, so that he saw him stood on the sarcophagus, and then the M16 in his right hand burst into life and sent a flurry of deadly missiles in Castiel’s direction.

Castiel dropped flat and rolled sideways off the sarcophagus, dropping behind it more heavily than he’d intended, courtesy of the bullet that grazed his forehead as he fell.

Head wounds always bled like a bitch.

He had seriously underestimated the young Alpha. He’d expected at least an attempt to negotiate rather than a silent full frontal assault. He’d assumed the overgrown pup would arrive with fair weaponry. A civilized gun or two. A knife maybe. Not a fucking machine gun and smoke grenades.

He was seriously outgunned.

But he knew this building like the back of his hand. He knew every alcove and crevice, every doorway, and he knew exactly where, overhead, the chains held the huge ornate chandelier that hung above them. So huge its vast construction stretched almost the full width of the room.

Nearly half a ton of iron and glass, held by chains attached to three huge bolts drilled into the rafters.

He put a fresh clip in his gun, raised himself over the edge of the sarcophagus and let rip a half dozen shots in the vague direction of Sam Winchester, letting his last bullet go wide and high as he dropped back behind the protection of the huge stone box.

A second later, beneath the sound of the M16’s return volley, he heard a metal bolt fall from the ceiling and clatter onto the floor.

He scooted around the edge of the sarcophagus, running doubled over, fast and low, and heard Sam running in the other direction, moving to keep the gold-gilt box between them.

Again he rose and shot a half dozen times. Again Sam returned his attack with a burst of machine gun fire. And again, Castiel heard the reward of a dropping bolt. Far above their heads, the Chandelier croaked and groaned ominously. The rafters shifted as though the entire ceiling was now contemplating the idea of crashing down under the swaying weight of its heavy burden.
But in the darkness, in the still billowing smoke, the danger was just a dark shadow above their heads. Even Castiel, knowing what was above them, couldn’t actually see the chandelier.

The last part was going to hurt.

He could fake a cry of pain, but the wounds on his legs and head had healed already. He needed the stench of hot fresh blood to draw the young Alpha out.

He inched his way around the sarcophagus, letting off the odd random shot, just enough to keep Sam twisting and firing in his direction, just to keep the young Alpha unaware he was moving into a deliberate position, was moving Sam into a deliberate position.

And just as he reached the place where the floor dropped slightly, where the wall recessed into a small open fireplace, empty because it was still awaiting installation of its stove, he rose to fire, let the spark of light from his pistol announce his position and then dropped too slowly to avoid the machine gun’s bite.

He nearly miscalculated.

One of the three bullets that actually hit him missed his heart by perhaps half an inch. One pierced his left lung. One shattered his right femur.

All hurt like fucking hell.

He allowed himself to cry out in pain and shock, though the pain was irrelevant and the shock was negligible considering he’d allowed himself to be hit on purpose, and the room filled with the stench of his blood.

The wounds hurt, but they were minor. Every bullet had hit a place that would be healed by a simple shift.

But he didn’t shift.

He deliberately didn’t shift.

He lay there, in the fireplace, letting his blood run freely, letting his collapsed lung cause his breathing to sound ragged and desperate - because at that point it truly was - because Sam Winchester was 20 years old. Sam Winchester had never been in a gun battle for his life before. Sam Winchester would, inevitably do.... what Sam Winchester did do.

He moved in to finish the job.

Oh, he was was no young fool. Sam was wary, cautious, obviously anticipating Castiel might be ‘playing dead’ and clearly expecting a shot to be fired in his direction if he broke cover.

So he edged around the room, keeping deliberately out of the line of fire, making it impossible for Castiel to get a bead on him.

But that was okay, because when Castiel did finally raise his gun and shoot, it wasn’t Sam he was aiming for.

There was a moment, after Castiel had shot the third bolt, when nothing happened.

He thought perhaps he had missed. He prepared to shift, knowing now his only chance would be to attack on four legs and spring from below, hopefully getting his jaws around the young Alpha’s
throat before he dropped the M16 and reached for the gun with the silver bullets.

Desperately, he began to unravel the bonds that held his wolf, began to strip the firm control that had pinned the beast within him, and it was snarling and howling, fighting so hard to escape that his mental fingers were fumbling and making it harder, not easier, to release the creature he had taken thirty years to learn to completely suppress.

And then the sky fell in.

Or at least that was how it felt, as the vast heavy chandelier ripped free of the ceiling in a wrenching scream of twisted bolts and raw metal. As it crashed down, its glass crystals falling like stalactites, like a show of deadly ice knives, like a shower of arrows followed by a wrought iron carcass formed of welded metal. The entire structure dropped like a falling meteorite.

The half-ton of metal hit the top of the sarcophagus with such force that the stone cracked in half and the beautiful, heart-rending mosaic on its lid splintered into a dozen fractured pieces like a broken puzzle.

And Castiel howled, in grief, in fury, and it was that finally allowed his wolf to smash through and take over.

With the shift the three bullets were expelled, the wound on his forehead sealed shut, and the odd pieces of flying crystal were ejected from his skin as black fur rippled into place over frail human flesh.

Unharmed now, the wolf rose from the fireplace, a gigantic mass of black fur and snapping fangs; its blue eyes crazy-paved with red.

And it leaped, its body rising in graceful flight like the wolf in the broken picture. It flew effortlessly over the debris of shattered crystal and smashed stone, towards the terribly wounded man who was kneeling on a crystal strewn floor, his body pierced by a thousand pieces of flying glass, one blood drenched shoulder impaled on a section of wrought iron, his other arm shakily holding a Colt pistol loaded with silver bullets.

xxx

The sky had fallen in.

And Dean couldn’t move. He was pinned in place by a virtual girder of iron through his left shoulder. The shoulder that already had taken a bullet. Escape without shifting was impossible. Besides, he could barely see; could barely hear.

His eyes had been pierced by shards of crystal, as had his entire body. Blood was running in rivulets down his face, his arms and his chest.

He had thrown himself down as the iron chandelier had fallen, had failed to avoid it entirely but had at least escaped being crushed by its falling weight by dropping below the height of the sarcophagus that had halted its deadly fall.

But in doing so, he had thrown himself face down onto a floor strewn with shattered crystal and now fat sharp shards were buried in his flesh, his hands were ripped and torn, crystal embedded in his fingers, the worst of the fat splinters resisting his body’s urge to expel them and close his wounds.

None of his injuries were life-threatening by themselves. Not even the thick, nearly complete,
crystal that had dropped like a spearhead onto his back as he lay stunned on the ground. Its thick fat length was buried several inches inside his flesh, narrowly missing his right kidney.

It hurt like fuck.

But worst of all, far worse than the cuts and the scrapes and the stabbing of the crystal shards, was the ringing in his ears.

He’d thought the sound of the grenades going off had been disorientating. That the shots fired in the small, stone-walled room had been deafening. But nothing had prepared him for the noise of a half-ton of falling chandelier.

He had bitten his tongue he thought, because all he could taste was blood. Unless one of the myriad of shards buried inside his flesh had also pierced some vital organ. Perhaps the blood was welling from inside him, the mark of an injury even his wolf couldn’t heal.

So his senses were shot. His sight, his taste, his hearing, all were failing him.

And his nose, the most important sense of all for a Wolfkin, was filled with the overwhelming scent of petrichor and blood, and silver.

Always the silver.

He needed to shift, because this body was broken and shattered. He was bleeding out inside his own goddamned Tomb, which was all kinds of ironic, and only shifting would heal him.

But the Alpha, his Alpha, was still alive, was growling, was shifting, and if he shifted too he would drop the gun, the Colt, and the Alpha would complete the job the collapsing roof had started.

He shuffled his knees, wincing as yet more crystal pierced his skin, and raised a trembling, blood drenched arm; the Colt held firmly in his bloodied fingers.

And the wolf, night black, leapt towards him with death in its crazed eyes.

And Dean squeezed the trigger.

Or at least he tried to.

But as his index finger attempted to close on the trigger, a fat shard of glass embedded in his palm shifted and bit into his flesh, slicing nerves, stealing his ability to open and close any of the fingers on his hand and so, even as he winced in pain, his nerveless finger simply slipped in the blood pouring from the tiny but critical wound.

And his lack of experience made him hesitate about what to do.

His other arm was useless, trapped in place by the edge of the chandelier.

He needed to shift.

He didn’t dare shift.

Shifting meant losing the gun.

But he couldn’t use the gun.

Having the will to fight was not the same as having expertise. He had learned about weapons
online. He had learned to shoot at a firing range. He had grown balls by living twelve years of his life as a Faelchu Galla with his entire existence at the whim of Wolfkin who hated and despised him.

But until today he had never fired a weapon at a person.

And this was his Alpha.

Shit. This was his Alpha.

He had scent marked him.

As he had somehow scent marked his Grandfather.

And he had stopped Samuel with his voice.

His voice.

Not a gun.

He dropped the Colt from his useless fingers and opened his mouth to yell “Sit” and “Stay” and whatever the fuck else he had yelled at Samuel although his mind was blank and he was bleeding to death and he barely had a second before Castiel would rip his throat out and then he’d have no voice to speak with anyway.

But before a sound even emerged from his mouth, the leaping wolf landed on the floor before him.

And simply sat down.

Dean just gaped in stupefaction.

The wolf, so huge its face was level with the kneeling Omega, its immense sharp teeth mere inches from his face, tilted its head to the side and simply stared at him, its expression - despite its furry face - somehow appearing confused.

"Um, hey,” Dean said, cautiously.

The wolf’s tail thudded on the floor, just once, and its ears twitched as though it was listening.

Dean blinked slowly. Wasn’t this the guy who was just trying to blow his head off?

"Um, maybe we should have started with introductions?” Dean offered cautiously.

The wolf offered him a huge doggy grin and chuffed.

It looked like it was laughing at him.

"Are you laughing at me?” Dean demanded.

The wolf yipped once. And continued to grin.

And suddenly Dean had the oddest realization. This wasn’t Castiel. This was Castiel’s wolf. And Castiel’s wolf knew who he was. Castiel’s wolf hadn’t tried to kill him. Maybe, just maybe, Castiel’s wolf didn’t want to kill him.

"What do you want?” Dean asked.
Uncaring of the glass biting into its pads, the wolf yipped and dropped, its face nearly on its front legs, its rear haunches raised, its tail waving like a frantic flag.

"Yip," the wolf said again. It rose, turned in a circle, then dropped again, muzzle to front legs, haunches wriggling, tail waving. "Yip."

Dean just blinked, swaying woozily, not even sure if this was a dream.

He was so tired, the blood seeping from his knees, from his hands, from the crystal buried like a knife in his back, from the Metal pole lodged in his shoulder, and Sam... Sam felt far away, and this was the Alpha, his Alpha, or at least his Alpha’s wolf and Dean was unarmed now and trapped and wounded and on his knees, but the Wolf wasn’t attacking him, wasn’t biting him, wasn’t trying to kill him... it wanted... wanted...

...to play?

The huge black wolf, all teeth and claws, was wriggling on its belly in a room filled with knife-like shards of glass, and it was yipping and bowing and wriggling its hips and its tail was waving like a flag and all its posture was saying was come with me, run with me, play with me; like a huge, overgrown puppy dog.

Was it that easy?

Could he just forget the last twenty four years? Hell, could he forget the last twenty four minutes?

Yes, yes, yes, yes, YES, Dean’s wolf said.

Could all the hurt and misunderstandings and the bad blood between the Campbells and the Krushnics be forgotten?

Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, YES, his wolf insisted.

Yes, Dean thought.

Because this battle between their human forms was bullshit.

They weren’t human.

They were wolves playing human.

And maybe they played badly sometimes. Maybe they let human emotions and priorities and prejudices take over. And they forgot who they were. What they were.

They were wolves.

And this wasn’t the end of it. Dean knew that. It couldn’t be this simple. Human things still needed to be resolved. Conversations would need to take place. Arguments would happen. Sam’s safety would need to be established. Dean’s position needed to be established.

He needed to find out why the fuck his Alpha had built him a goddamned fucking tomb.

But now?

Right here and now?

It was a start.
It was a hope.

And what Dean needed to do was to stop himself from bleeding to death by shifting into his wolf form.

Yes, yes, yes, yes, YES, his wolf agreed.

And maybe he was just suddenly feeling too damned tired to argue anymore, To fight anymore, but it seemed to Dean that if his wolf thought it was so damned fucking smart, he’d let the goddamned wolves sort the problem out between themselves.

"Yip," Castiel’s wolf said, wriggling its hips, tongue lolling, eyes bright with excitement. With hope.

"Oh, what the fuck,” Dean said, ungraciously, and let his wolf take over.
Chapter Twenty Five

Chapter Notes

just a short and sweet one today 😊

The night was so bright it was blinding.

They moved low, fast, their paws eating up effortless miles through the perfect grays of a monochrome forest at midnight.

They wound in and out of the trees, two wolves, both shimmeringly iridescent, one pelt a rainbow of diamond speckled silver, the other a titanium ocean. In the night, under the moon, the wolves did not see each other as black and white. Their wolf eyes saw galaxies in each other’s fur.

And as they gambolled through the woods, taking turns to chase and be chased, both wolves ignored the lure of deer spoor and rabbit trail, the temptations of beaver and long-tailed weasel, because their noses were filled with petrichor and magnolia, scents rich enough to drown in.

With yips, and playful nips, they swerved and leapt over each other like balletic gymnasts. Lush tails waving like victory flags, they raced and chased, tongues lolling, eyes shining, through the leaf strewn pathways carved by the feet of a thousand lesser paws. Those of the red foxes and Canadian lynx that scattered fearfully from their path, from the Elk and Muntjac that quivered and trembled in their wake, brown liquid eyes stark with shocked relief that neither great beast chose hunt over play.

Up, up, up, through the the tree line, until they crested the bluff, and then down, down, down, as they tumbled and rolled, paws slip-sliding on the loose stones scattered over trails eroded by the winds of time, until they finally reached the shores of the river below.

They danced and splashed through the shallow water of rock pools, the wolf of pale molten silver pausing to tease at a family of otters, until the wolf of liquid titanium turned somersaults and pranced like a stallion and howled proudly at the moon, look at me/look at me/ I am Alpha/ Alpha / Alpha, but the silver wolf just snorted HA, and, unimpressed, it turned and ran up the shoreline of the river, looking back over its shoulder to check the proud Alpha was scrambling desperately now to follow. Chase me/ Chase me / Chase me the silver wolf demanded, as it raced joyfully into the distance.

And so the Alpha did.

xxx

“Oh my fucking god,” Gabriel wailed, sinking to his knees and clutching at the torn, blood drenched clothing scattered on the floor of the fireplace. Ripped, pitted with holes, and even as he picked up the garments, spent bullets clattered to the floor.

“Это зона боевых действий“, Benny groaned.

It was, Gabriel agreed grimly. This was a war zone.
From the outside, the гнездо had barely seemed damaged. Nothing more than a couple of broken windows had marred its perfection.

Inside... it was a scene of bloody destruction.

They had diverted from their originally intended La Guardia and landed in Newburgh just after five am. Benny and Viktor had met them there in two cars, as instructed, and had driven them up to Poughkeepsie.

As First Beta, Gabriel was the only wolf with enough authority to allow the bodyguards to break the thrall that had prevented them from returning to the compound themselves. But it had taken until 3am before Benny had learned the reason Gabriel was not answering his cell phone was that he was on a plane, and then there had been a further delay before he’d gotten a message to him via the pilot.

Doing so had maybe saved an hour or two, since the plane had landed fifty miles closer to the compound and its passengers had been informed of what had gone down... or at least what they all had thought was going down.

But now everyone was feeling guilty and stupid and too goddamned panicked to even think straight.

The four of them with wolves were struggling to keep human form at all.

”An omega did this? Did THIS?” Viktor was repeating with helpless incredulity, as they stepped gingerly over an acre of shattered blood-splashed crystal and spent gun casings. As they saw the fallen carcass of the chandelier, its back broken over the ruins of the sarcophagus with its cracked lid and fractured mosaic.

The picture of the two wolves leaping for each other no longer looked ‘romantic’ even to Wolfkin eyes.

Out of the six of them only Bobby seemed calm, as he sat in his wheelchair at the entrance of the гнездо, unable to enter over the destruction the battle had wrought.

“Reckon he didn’t like the decor,” he muttered, with a snort. “Don’t blame him. It’s like a fucking tomb in here.”

xxx

The dawn had broken. The silver wolf was white now, though its fur was blushed rose in the light of the rising sun. It was sprawled, napping, in the sandy mud, its eyes now green as jewels, its scent of champagne and magnolia edged now with notes of river mud and fish.

Lots of fish.

The white wolf was an asshole.

For three hours the titanium wolf, now the deep black of a drowned river rat, had exhausted itself bouncing in and out of the river. It had fought currents until its limbs were trembling with exhaustion. It had plunged and leapt in the shallows. It had swum and dove in the deep until its pelt was so sodden it could barely drag itself back to shore, let alone bring its offerings to shore.

The white wolf wanted fish.
But not just any fish.

There was a growing pile of corpses piling up in front of the white wolf’s snout.


And this, finally, the black wolf’s finest offering. A four-foot long striped bass. A fish so huge that the black wolf had feared it would drown before it managed to haul the bass’s thrashing body out of the water by its tail. The fish was still flopping and gasping as, step by painful step, the wolf staggered up the embankment, towing the fish behind him, dragging it by its tail fin, until eventually depositing it front of its mate and collapsing onto its belly, its flanks heaving as it gasped for breath.

Alpha/ Alpha / Alpha, it crowed, proud despite its exhaustion.

The white wolf huffed, then took a delicate nibble of the carp instead. The first fish the black wolf had offered. The fish that, up until that point, the white wolf had expressed no interest in whatsoever.

The white wolf was an asshole.

The black wolf watched it, adoration in its exhausted eyes, and simply sighed happily that it had finally pleased its contrary would-be mate.

xxx

“We need to go find them,” Sam insisted, his eyes blazing Alpha red, his voice deliberately resonant with Alpha compulsion.

Except nobody seemed impressed. Not even the humans.

Gabriel’s eyes twinkled with genuine humor for a moment as he regarded the Alpha pup’s efforts to take charge.

"Puppy thrall might work on Dobycha and ferals. Won’t work on pack or Pok. It’s not enough to be born Alpha. That’s like being born with the ability to become a Master Artist. Won’t do you a shit load of good if you never pick up a paintbrush."

"He’s right," Bobby agreed, gruffly but not unsympathetically. “You’ve spent the last twelve years coasting along on your brother’s coattails, letting him do the heavy lifting, letting him be the ‘Alpha’. The only times you’ve ever flexed your Alpha ‘muscles’ are to win arguments with human beings, most of whom were mere kids. Reaching for your paintbrush today is gonna do you fuck all good. You need to practice.”

"That’s bullshit," Sam snapped. “De... Gan used his thrall on Samuel the day he presented. Just opened his mouth and a sixty year old Alpha of All collapsed like a puppet who’d had his strings cut. He sure as fuck didn’t need to ‘practice’.”

The three Beta wolves all visibly shivered, their eyes glazing over.

"Omega,” Viktor sighed reverently.

Sam growled, his eyes flashing with satisfaction. “Exactly. My brother, the OMEGA is out there with your fucking psychotic Alpha chasing after him.”
”Hey,” Charlie snapped, “it wasn’t *Castiel* who took silver bullets and a Machine Gun to a fang fight.”

Benny snapped his teeth at her warningly, “An Omega is beyond reproach,” he reminded her.

”Jesus H. Christ,” Bobby sighed. “All of you cool your jets. Ain’t nobody going after no-one. They left their clothes. They’re wearing their wolves. So, misunderstanding is over. Castiel’s wolf is sure as shit not mistaking Gan’s white ass for an Alpha anymore. So if either of them is suffering at the moment, it sure as hell ain’t *my* kid. Shit ain’t gonna get real until they come back here, put some damned clothes on and start being awkward damned-fool humans again. So I suggest you put the word out it’s safe for folks to come back to the compound. Ain’t gonna be anything more dangerous going on from here on in than a load of moaning and griping and gnashing of teeth.”

”That makes a surprising amount of sense,” Gabriel agreed. He looked at the destruction around them and sighed. “At least I can get some Pok back to start clearing all of this mess up.”
Chapter Twenty Six

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Даже не говори со мной”

It was all Castiel said, his voice a hoarse growl, as he walked into the main house two hours after their discovery of the battle zone. He was naked as a jay bird, leaves and twigs tangled in his wildly tousled hair, sandy mud squelching between his toes, and his entire body smelling pungently like a wet dog in a fish market.

Although he had materialized almost like a ghost, somehow missing all of the perimeter alerts and simply walking in the front door as though having been transported to the veranda by some arcane magic, he appeared mortal, pale and almost frail as he entered the hallway.

He looked bone-tired, shattered past exhaustion, the doleful expression on his face completely at odds with the flickering Alpha excitement that ignited his eyes, a passionate fire that laced the blue with red sparks that burst like tiny fireworks. And, despite his labored pace, the set of his shoulders was proud and happy rather than stooped with defeat.

Whatever had happened during the seemingly endless night hadn’t been terrible then, Gabriel concluded. But his brother, his Alpha, was still a study of contradictions from which more meaningful conclusions couldn’t be drawn.

Gabriel struggled for silence, for calm. Neither possible when his wolf was howling Omega/omega/omega - had been yelling it for hours now - in some crazed looping pattern of both yearning hope and terrible dread. He needed to know what had happened between the two wolves that had begun the night in a battle to the death only to slope off together into the dark like a pair of thieves... or perhaps even lovers...

Where is your mate? Where is your Omega? Where is THE Omega?

The not-knowing was like a literal ache behind his breastbone. A pressure building into a crescendo as though it was a living, starving creature that, unfed, might burst out of him if his curiosity was not assuaged.

It stunned him that before he had even met Gan Winchester in the flesh, he could greet the presence of his brother, his Alpha, his Pakhan, and feel less relief to see him alive than disappointment not to see with his own eyes that the Omega was alive. Though, realistically, the presence of Castiel was guarantee of the latter. Had Castiel’s mate not survived this tragic misunderstanding, Gabriel expected his brother would have thrown himself off the bluff in guilt and mourning.

So where was he?

Where is your mate? Where is your Omega? Where is THE Omega?

But Castiel had told him ‘don’t even talk to me’, so Gabriel decided it was probably better - and safer - to wait until the Alpha had slept before pressing for answers. And had showered. Yup, definitely better to wait until the fish stench was washed off.

Still, as soon as Castiel began mounting the staircase towards his bedroom, each step obviously
costing considerable effort, Gabriel turned and raced towards the Pack House’s data room where everyone else was gathered, watching the perimeter cameras, waiting impatiently for the eventual return of pack and Pok and any evidence of Alpha or Omega.

Omega / Omega / Omega

Only to crash into Charlie who had burst out of the room running in his direction.

“Gan’s okay,” she announced breathlessly. “The front guardhouse cameras just caught him arriving at his car, still in wolf form. And by god, he’s glorious. When people said he was white, I thought he was white. But he’s...he’s WHITE,” she said, nonsensically. “I mean a shiny iridescent white that’s all sparkly. Like a vampire. Well, no, cos there’s no such thing as vampires, let alone sparkly ones, but I mean.... you know, let’s just move on to the point, huh? He shifted, and, huh, good thing I’m gay, but, anyway, he threw some clothes on, then climbed in his car and drove off in the direction he came from. I sent a drone to trail him, at a distance, just to see where he’s going.”

Which probably explained Castiel’s odd attitude.

Clearly the two wolves had spent the night together and, given the evidence of his nose, fish had definitely been involved. But the wolves had split up this morning, The Omega presumably having snapped and snarled at any attempt by the Alpha to follow him. Hence why Castiel was looking both happy and bitchslapped at the same time.

So everything was still up in the air.

But not hopeless, unless Gan just kept driving out of state.

What if he kept driving?

What if he wasn’t planning on returning.

What if...

What if...

He followed Charlie back into the room in a daze. The other wolves were glowing and fretting. Only Bobby was sitting there like a calm island in an ocean of chaos, as they all watched the black car speeding away from the house, away from the estate, away from the Pack and it was all Gabriel could do not to throw back his head and let loose a howl of despair.

“He’s stopped at Fishkill. Hang on. Let me see if he.... ah yeah, he’s in the parking lot of the Magnuson,” Charlie finally announced, quickly googling the motel’s website before, on another screen, quickly hacking into the motel’s antiquated booking system. “Yup. There he is. A ‘Frank Urquhart’ has just booked into a room there. He’s paid for a week in cash. A week. Not just a night. A whole week. That’s good right? Means it couldn’t have gone that bad, huh?”

”Frank Urquhart?” Viktor queried. “You sure that’s definitely him?”

Charlie snorted. “I think he’s letting us know he noticed the drone.”

It was Sam who got it first and chuckled, which was a considerable improvement on his previous glowers. “It’s the initials,” he said.

"The Magnuson’s a complete dive,” Benny complained, looking totally offended. “He can’t
possibly stay there.”

"I’m just relieved he’s staying anywhere," Gabriel said, with an audible sigh of relief. "And, yeah, a week’s good. A week’s great. That suggests there’s at least some willingness to resolve all this. Maybe, if Cassie doesn’t fuck up the courtship completely, we can still turn this around."

Bobby looked at the webpage Charlie had pulled up and snorted. “Place looks pretty upmarket for Gan, to be honest. The prospect of free breakfast probably sealed the deal. That boy moves on his stomach and he doesn’t have money to burn.”

"Price isn’t a consideration," Viktor interrupted. "There’s a Homewood Suites by Hilton far closer to the estate. If he’s refusing to stay here, fine, that’s understandable under the circumstances. He probably is still unaware you are here now to act as his chaperones."

"As his what?" Sam spluttered.

"The honor of an Omega is always carefully guarded. Please advise him that there is not a member of this pack who would fail to stand with him even against our own Alpha in the highly unlikely event it would be necessary, although it’s totally understandable that he might chose alternative accommodations regardless. But the Krushnic Pack will not stand for an Omega staying in a 2 star motel. We are more than happy to cover his stay at a proper hotel. One more worthy of his presence,” Viktor announced stiffly.

"You’ll ‘stand’ for whatever the fuck my boy chooses to do,” Bobby spat. “I’ll pass your kind ‘offer’ on to him, but don’t be surprised if he don’t take it.”

The Volkrod all exchanged confused, worried looks.

Bobby didn’t give a shit. He refused to pander to all this holy Omega religious bollocks.

"I need a car," he said. “I’m gonna go talk to my boy. See whether you lot have totally screwed the pooch or whether he’s willing to give you idjits a chance to redeem yourselves.”

“I’m coming with you,” Sam announced firmly.

The human snorted and said, “well, I wasn’t planning on driving myself.” But he still looked pleased, and slightly surprised, that Sam was still wanting to play ‘Alpha’ instead of immediately sloping back home to California now the imminent ‘danger’ had passed.

They were in the borrowed car, a white jaguar limo so spacious that Bobby had no problem fitting himself and his folded chair in the backseat, before Sam spoke again.

"I know you don’t get why I think my college is so important. But there’s a reason the Wolfkin need to earn their money as criminals," he said, as they drove down towards Fishkill. “They have to stay outside the system because they can’t afford to try and integrate with humans. They definitely don’t dare put their pups in the normal Education system. Look how bad I screwed up in Port Huron and I had more reason than any Wolfkin to keep myself under the radar. Pups are stupid. Kids are stupid. Dean’s the only person I’ve ever met who’s never fucked up like that, even as a pup.”

"Don’t call him that. He doesn’t like it," Bobby snapped.

"It’s just us here,” Sam pointed out, rolling his eyes.

"You think I didn’t hear you nearly slip up earlier? Always calling him Gan, even in your own
head, is the only way to avoid making a mistake.”

"All the Volkrod will soon know the truth about the Faelchu. They’ll understand why Dean calls himself Gan Ainm. You saw the look on Gabe’s face when the penny dropped. The rest of the Volkrod are going to be just as horrified that an Omega had his name taken from him. There’s no reason at all why Dean has to keep his real name hidden anymore."

Bobby scoffed loudly. "If you think this is about Gan hiding his name you’re a fool. And for all the idiot things you sometimes do, you ain’t no fool. And you can’t be the arbiter of Gan’s hurts. It’s not your call as to how long it takes him to heal any of his wounds, least of all one in which you were complicit."

"It hurts me,“ Sam admitted. “Knowing why he won’t use his own name, and knowing I’m a big part of the reason. I don’t think he realizes that every time I have to call him ‘Gan’, it feels like a gut punch.”

"Good,” Bobby said. “Cos that guilt will keep you honest.” Then he sighed deeply. “I ain’t actually blaming you, kid. You were both tiny pups, you both had a raw deal, and fighting that bastard’s bite, that poison in your veins, can’t be easy. Plus Gan being the way he is? Well, it’s hard for you to step up to the plate when he’s always there, handling shit, letting you off the hook and, well, I guess you’ve always been wary of waking the part of you that everyone wants you to keep sleeping.

“But I’ll tell you somethin’, from a lifetime of bitter experience. Burying shit don’t ever get it dealt with. That crap just ends up coming back out of the ground twice as stinky as it went in. The sooner you face and overcome your own demons, the sooner you’ll become the kind of man both me and your brother know you can be.”

"I know," Sam agreed. “But I swear that going to college, getting my law degree, all of that is not part of my attempt to run from the past. It’s about making lemonade. Everything that went down put me in a unique position. I’m the first Wolfkin since Deanna with a chance of really making it as a human.”

"And that’s honestly what you want?” Bobby asked sceptically.

"It was what I wanted. I’ve always known that me being the ‘Campbell Heir’ was the thing most likely to bring trouble to Gan’s door. I knew I was his weak spot. His point of vulnerability. That’s the only reason I never asked him to move to California with me. I thought he was safer out there without me. I know I can be a selfish asshole sometimes, but only about the little stuff. Never about that. Never about Gan’s safety. And there was never going to be a place within the Wolfkin for a Campbell Alpha, at least not without conflict, so I figured my making it alone as a human was the only logical way to go.”

"Sounds like you’re rethinking that decision now,” Bobby suggested.

Sam nodded. "Gabe spoke to me when we were on the plane. He said there could be a role for me here. He’s suggesting I transfer to Yale to finish school. Then, if I’m willing to take Castiel’s bite and become one of his sub-Alphas, the Volkrod would welcome the idea of having a Wolfkin Lawyer in their pack.”

“I’ll just bet their little furry criminal asses would jump at the chance,” Bobby agreed. “Gabe, huh?”

Sam flushed.
Bobby smirked, but all he said was, “Well, that sounds like a plan, as long as we can sort out this Omega crap with your brother.”

Sam frowned. “I know there’s been a shitload of misunderstandings before now, but from what I gather taking to Gabe, Gan just won the lottery here. If he walked in that compound and told the Volkrod he farts diamonds, they’d be running around handing him plates of beans. He can’t do any wrong as far as they’re concerned. He turned up at the estate uninvited, blew shit up, let off 500 rounds at the Alpha of All, took actual silver bullets onto pack lands, and all anyone wants to do in response is pat him on the head and coo over how ‘cute’ and ‘pretty’ he is.”

Bobby snorted rudely. “And that, Sam, is exactly the problem right now. If it were up to the Volkrod, we’d be driving to some luxury suite at the Hilton, where Gan would already have been ferried by limo, and the entire pack would be running around fighting for the privilege of washing his darned shorts for him.”

Sam huffed and shrugged. “And that’s a problem, why? He deserves good things.”

“So of course he does. But he also deserves the right to decide for himself what good things he wants. Those wolves try treating him like Little Lord Fauntleroy, they’re gonna have more than a couple of smoke grenades to worry about. Speaking of which, call your uncle Frank and let him know your brother’s alive. I doubt Gan’s in the right mind to remember to ring him but the poor guy must be worried sick.”

Xx

“Castiel Krushnic can fuck off and die,” Dean pronounced coldly, his eyes flinty and hard, as he let them into his basic, but clean, motel room.

He looked considerably less exhausted than Castiel, although neither Bobby nor Sam had seen the Alpha to make a comparison.

"But...but... I thought you had both... um... made peace with each other?” Sam said, delicately, not sure exactly what the two wolves had been up to all night but certainly not imagining they’d gone ‘fishing’.

"Castiel’s wolf is okay, maybe,” Dean admitted reluctantly. “But the guy himself?Fuck that shit. The asshole tried to kill me,” he snarled. “In a fucking mausoleum he had built ready for my corpse. Sick fucking bastard.”

Bobby sighed, then patiently explained the purpose and point of the гнездо. “He didn’t build it because he thought you were alive,” he finished. “He built it because he believed you were dead. Because he was heartbroken you were dead. It’s all kinds of sad and tragic, really. He genuinely mourned you for all those years.”

"Huh,” Dean said, his expression softening slightly. But then he stiffened again. “That’s balls. He still tried to kill me. Or did he think I was a fucking vengeful zombie back from the dead?”

"A gun toting zombie,” Sam snickered.

“Shut up, Sam. You’re not helping,” Bobby sighed. “He did not try to kill you, at all, Gan. He would never have raised a finger against you. He mistakenly, and understandably, thought you were Sam,” he explained patiently.

Which, possibly, was not the best thing to say.
“He tried to kill SAM? The same Sam you’ve brought here into the fucking lion’s den against my express orders?” Dean demanded. “I’m so mad with you, Bobby, I could fucking spit.”

"Sam is perfectly safe with the Volkrod. They regard him as nothing more than a harmless overgrown puppy. A transgender puppy, probably, considering he apparently acts and smells like an Omega,” Bobby snorted.

"Hey," Sam protested.

"It’s okay, Sam. They seem very sexually liberal from what I can see,” Bobby snorted. “They don’t seem to have a problem with your gender confusion. Anyway, Gan, the point is, turns out the Volkrod belief in the divinity of Omegas is far more passionate than that of the Faelchu. Kinda embarrassingly so. As the descendant of homogeneous Omegas, Sam is almost as holy to the Volkrod as you are as an actual Omega. He’s just not considered inviolable like you.”

"Invio...what?” Dean demanded, frowning in genuine confusion.

"He means the Volkrod don’t want to hurt either of us but, unlike you, I can’t get away with stuff like trying to murder the Alpha of All,” Sam snorted. “You, though, apparently are able to do anything you like,” he added, sounding somewhere between awed and jealous.

"Get outta here,” Dean scoffed.

Bobby rolled his eyes, "Sam’s right. The only reason Castiel fought back is he believed you were Sam. You look like an Alpha. You behave like an Alpha. You even smell like an Alpha with that damned aftershave.”

"So Sam isn’t safe here at all, is he?” Dean spat triumphantly.

"Well, not if he attempts to blow Castiel’s head off,” Bobby growled. “But now they know he’s a Sasquatch-sized, toothless puppy, Sam is definitely off the hit list unless or until he does. And you going in all guns blazing like that, hell, kid, what did you expect Castiel to do? Just sit there and take it? Though, from what I hear, the guy’s so head over heels for you he would have probably let you do it if he’d known who you were, the poor sap.”

"Poor Sap? He dropped a fucking chandelier on my head,” Dean whined.

"I’m not a toothless puppy,” Sam griped.

"Sam, Gan, I love you like my own. I do. but sometimes... sometimes you two are the whiniest, most self-absorbed sons of bitches I ever met.”

They both had the grace to look slightly abashed for a moment.

But then Dean rallied. "What exactly did you mean, I look like an Alpha?” he queried, looking between them suspiciously.

Bobby winced slightly. “All yours,” Sam snickered and gestured for Bobby to fend the question. So he fully deserved it when Bobby replied, “Because the reason they mistook you for an Alpha, is that Sam fits an Omega profile far better than you do.”

“He does?”

"I do?”
"As far as I can gather, Traditional Omegas are spoiled little shits with an overblown sense of their own importance," Bobby snorted.

"Owch," Sam said.

Bobby chuckled. “Seriously, they describe them as having the ‘wisdom of holy innocence’ and crap like that, but as far as I can see it all boils down to them being thought of as delicate, temperamental little flowers. An Omega is expected to behave like some kind of helpless, unworldly vestal virgin, swooning into the arms of their big bad protective Alpha like a Disney Princess.”

"The fuck?" Dean asked.

"Exactly,” Bobby snorted. “So, no, it’s fair to say you definitely weren’t what Castiel Krushnic expected.”

For a split second, Dean looked hurt. Then his face twisted into a sneer, “Then he’s probably as pissed at his wolf right now as I am with mine.”

"I never said he was disappointed,” Bobby pointed out, and, just for a moment he could have sworn he saw relief flash in Dean’s eyes.

So that was how it was. Damned idjits, the pair of them.

“Look,” he said. “This is a lot to take in. On both sides. The Volkrod have just had one hell of a surprise in you. You are probably just as surprised about them. They’re even talking about Sam moving to Yale and becoming Volkrod. None of which is dependent on your decision about Krushnic. Whatever you decide to do about your mate, don’t blow a chance for you and Sam to be part of a pack again.”

It was a low blow, Bobby knew, pulling the Sam card on the kid. But if anything would stop this spiral of misunderstandings in its tracks it would be Dean’s hope for Sam’s safety and happiness.

“What true, Sammy?” Dean demanded.

"I really think so,” Sam agreed. “Gabriel is First Beta. If he doesn’t have a problem with me, stands to reason the rest of the Volkrod will follow suit. It’s kinda embarrassing but, yeah, I think they built up this idea I was some super scary bad-ass Alpha, only now they’ve met me... well, turns out the big bad scary bad-ass Alpha was always you.”

"Huh,” Dean said, looking stunned.

"And, most importantly, since the bad-ass Alpha is an Omega, you’re Teflon,” Bobby stated bluntly. “So, anyhow, you don’t need to decide anything right now. The Volkrod have a saying: ‘An Omega is beyond reproach’. It means you can take as long as you like to think shit through. Oh, and the Volkrod are offering to put you up in a goddamned Hilton while you make your mind up. I told ‘em you’d probably tell ‘em to kiss your ass, but s’up to you. Who knows, maybe you missed your calling as a ‘spoiled little shit’. You might even like it.”

"It’s got a pool and a gym,” Sam pointed out enthusiastically.

"See why they thought he was the Omega?” Bobby drawled, rolling his eyes.
So all we need now is someone to knock sense into Castiel too and, just maybe, this will all work out after all
“What the hell are you doing?” Gabriel demanded, as he burst into his Alpha’s room and, instead of finding him still in bed as he’d expected, saw he was sitting at his desk typing into his computer with a fierce expression and one angrily stabbing finger. He still looked tired, but now he had the haunted look of someone who had slept badly rather than the exhausted look of someone who hadn’t slept at all.

"Sending a message to our Sire. He should know what has happened before I report myself formally to the Верховный Суд,” Castiel said, his blue eyes stark with misery as he gazed at the screen in front of him. His confession was already several pages long.

Gabriel choked. “Are you insane?”

"I attempted to kill an Omega. I harmed an Omega. One of only four in the entire world. I cannot even begin to count the magnitude of such a crime. I will report myself to the court of the Alpha Council and accept the consequences of my actions. I imagine forced abdication is the best outcome I can hope for. It’s possible my life itself will be forfeit. But I will accept the judgment of my peers.”

Gabriel’s jaw dropped open and he mouthed wordlessly for a moment before shaking himself and rolling his eyes incredulously.

"First off, you didn’t know, you doofus. Guy turns up like a one-man army shooting the shit out of you? Anyone would assume Alpha and shoot back. Secondly, and far more importantly, he isn’t harmed at all,” Gabriel scoffed. “He pranced out of the woods like a fluffy, white, my-little-pony shooting rainbows out of his ass, then climbed in his car and only drove as far as Fishkill, where he calmly booked himself into the Magnuson for a week. He’s not only unharmed, he isn’t leaving. Which means he’s still open to your courtship, you self-sacrificing moron.”

"Fishkill?” Castiel demanded, blinking at the irony. He had shifted and slept and he still ached from all that damned swimming. Then he stiffened. “He’s in a motel?”

Gabriel shrugged helplessly. “I know, but what can you do? Robert Singer told me to, and I quote, ‘suck it up, buttercup’. He’s very disrespectful for a Pok. Highly improper. Even ruder than Charlie Bradbury, and that’s saying something. But he belongs to Gan, so what can any of us do, huh? He also told me - not asked but told me - to come up here, kick your ass into gear, and tell you to go downstairs and talk to him. And I figure an Omega’s Prislugoy probably trumps even an Alpha-of-All, status-wise, so get off your self pitying ass and do as you’re told. He wishes to speak to you formally as Gan’s official Сваха.”

Castiel startled so badly he literally fell out of his chair.

Gabriel reached over his brother’s sprawled body, deleted Castiel’s email unsent and turned his computer off.

"Up and at ‘em, Alpha mine,” he snorted, then walked out of the room whistling, leaving Castiel to scramble to his feet and chase after him.

xxx

"I don’t get paid enough for this crap,” Bobby muttered. “Come to think of it, I don’t get paid at all.”
"Gabriel’s telling Castiel you’re Gan’s Сваха,” Charlie chuckled. “So the Alpha will probably pay you. Handsomely. Personally, I’d hold out at least for a private island, if I were you.”

"What the hell’s a Svaha?” he demanded suspiciously.

"A matchmaker. Fine old Russian tradition,” she added, with a wink. “So even if Castiel wants to go all smitey-Alpha on your ass, he won’t dare. You’re going to be protected under formal mating rites. In other words, you can say anything to him without fear of repercussions and then bill him for the privilege.”

Bobby thought about that, then grinned. His smile was only slightly evil.

xxx

“I guess the really ironic thing is... I don’t really know what he looks like either,” Dean confessed to his brother. “He was all beaten to shit at Wolfsbane. And yeah, sure I remember thinking he was good-looking despite that, but I was kinda distracted by the Alpha thing.”

"The Alpha thing. Uh huh,” Sam snickered.

Dean blushed. “Look, I was just a kid, so what did I know then, anyway? And, hell, he was little more than a kid himself. Then last night was all a bit too dark, smokey and...um... intense.”

"Yeah, well night-time gun battles tend to be like that, I guess,” Sam said, rolling his eyes rudely.

"How would you know?” Dean scoffed.

"I’ve seen Die Hard. I know stuff.”

They were sitting together in a wonderfully named restaurant in Fishkill called ‘Feeling Kinda Kozy’, as Dean devoured his second serving of Chicken Pot Pie. Maybe his wolf shouldn’t have been such an asshole about the Bass, because he was starving.

"He was still asleep when I dropped Bobby back at the house. I haven’t actually met him yet,” Sam confessed, as he speared a piece of cucumber out of his prawn salad and nibbled on it delicately before dabbing his mouth with a napkin.

Shit. Dean loved his brother, but he was a goddamned embarrassment.

He deliberately shovelled a fat handful of fries into his mouth before saying, “But have you seen a picture of how he looks now? As a grown man, I mean.”

Sam winced slightly at his bad table manners but nodded. “He’s ‘bout your height. Dark hair, tan skin, really intense blue eyes, muscular but lean. Kinda good-looking I guess...”

"Huh,” Dean said, swallowing the fries and diving back into the pie. “S’good,” he moaned, before adding, “Thought he’d be taller. Like you. I definitely remember him being tall.”

"You were twelve. He was eighteen. Of course he looked tall.”

"I’m beginning to feel like a zoo attraction. Do they have no idea how fucking obvious they are?” Dean grumbled, distracted by the bell ringing yet again as someone slipped out of the restaurant door only to immediately be replaced by another person queuing for a takeout from the front counter. It was perfectly obvious their interest was not truly on whatever bagged item they finally left with though, since none of them ever took their eyes off him from the moment they entered to
The moment they left.

"Folks arriving back at the compound this morning heard the ‘glad tidings’ and are obviously sneaking down here to see you with their own eyes. You’re like the second coming to them apparently,” Sam grunted, still looking as though he was uncertain whether to be awed or jealous. “At least they’re doing it one at a time, making sure they don’t make you feel threatened.”

There was no chance of that anyway. Dean could smell the Betas. Every single one of them stunk of excitement, anticipation, happiness and a slight amount of fear. Not one of them smelled of aggression.

It actually, unbelievably, seemed as though Bobby and Sam were right about the Volkrod. He was welcome amongst them. Revered even. Which was weird but cool. Definitely suggestive of Sam being safe. Because if the Volkrod had some weird-ass beliefs about Omegas, it was probably safe to assume they’d be unlikely to attack omega-kin. And that, odd as it seemed, was obviously a good thing.

It was still aggravating. "I feel like a goddamned goldfish in a bowl. Guess the restaurant’s pleased for the extra business though."

As though summoned by his words, their waitress returned to the table with a third - unordered, but not unwelcome - portion of fries. “On the house,” she announced cheerfully, at Dean’s raised querying eyebrow. “You famous or something? You look like you should be famous. Bet you’re an actor, huh? I rarely get the chance to watch films these days. What kind of movies are you in?”

"Kinda like Die Hard,” Sam said, with a smirk.

Dean kicked him under the table.

xxx

On the surface of it, Castiel was a cooler customer than his older brother.

He didn’t vomit even once as Bobby repeated the tale he had told Gabriel in Sioux Falls.

But Castiel’s iron control over his expression and his body didn’t extend to masking his scent.

By the time Bobby ceased talking, the scent of Castiel’s fury was like another presence in the room. So intense even a human could smell it.

"If they were not already dead...” Castiel growled.

"Yeah, yada, yada, yada,” Bobby said. “Heard it all before. Stand in line. The important point is this... every single damned thing you attributed to Sam? It was Gan. He was the one who thralled O’Toole. Both times. He was the one who kept them both hidden. He was the one who worked as a mechanic while Sam got to play human kid at school. Just like he was the one who almost took you out last night. So whatever you think you know about him, whatever you think you know about Omegas... throw it away and start again.”

"But it is not how an Omega should be,” Castiel protested.

“Tough, because if you can’t handle that, can’t deal with the idea of an Omega who can out-Alpha you, then say so now. So he, and Sam, and I, can all get the hell out of this place and get on with our lives,” Bobby said bluntly.
"Does he truly wish me dead?" Castiel asked, his voice low, his expression still fixed in an expressionless mask, but his eyes sad, wounded and confused.

"Give me strength," Bobby muttered, and began to explain the misunderstanding for the second time in one day, despite the sense of complete deja vu.

xxx

"So you really sure you don’t want to check into the Hilton?" Sam wheedled, “because pool. And I bet their breakfast buffet is far better,” he added cunningly, honing in unerringly on Dean’s sole vulnerability.

Dean snorted with laughter. “I’m perfectly comfortable here. But go check yourself in, if you want to,” he offered indulgently. “Use the credit card Frank gave you for emergencies. It’s got a 10k limit.”

"I would have," Sam admitted ruefully, “but Gabriel gave me a lecture about not shitting where we eat. The Volkrod don’t allow any ‘dubious’ behavior in a 30 mile radius of their compounds. So fake credit cards are a no, no.”

"Then go stay at the Pack House. You can’t tell me they don’t have a pool and shit there. It’s a fucking millionaire’s mansion.”

"You don’t mind? Because I’d like to, but not if it bothers you,” Sam said sincerely.

"I think you're safe with the Volkrod,” Dean admitted reluctantly. “And Bobby’s staying at the house for a bit, isn’t he? So, yeah, go for it if you want to.”

"You’re safe there too. Come back with me. Viktor and Benny are Castiel's personal bodyguards and they both said, in a fight, they'd take your side rather than his. I really believe they meant it.”

“Shit poor ’bodyguards’ then,” Dean sniffed, looking genuinely offended on Castiel’s behalf.

"I give up,” Sam sighed.

“Just go,” Dean said, not unkindly. “I need some time to think. Need some peace and quiet. Here,” he threw his latest burner in Sam’s direction. “Take the number, so you can call me if anything’s hinky.”

xxx

Gabriel found Castiel standing inside the ruined interior of the гнездо.

He winced apologetically. “I wanted to get the worst of it cleared up before you saw it,” he said quietly. “But despite almost all of the pack and Pok being back, I can’t locate hardly any of them. Most of them have all completely disappeared again.”

"It doesn’t matter,” Castiel said, turning to fix his brother with sad eyes. “No point cleaning it. I’m going to be tearing it down anyway.”

"WHAT? You can’t do that. It’s Gan’s гнездо.”

Castiel hesitated a moment, then shook his head.

"No it’s not. It’s the гнездо of a ghost. Of an illusion. Of an Omega that never existed anywhere except my own imagination. You were right all along, брат. The boy I thought I met at
Wolfsbane was nothing more than a fever dream.”

Gabriel’s heart thuddied with panic.

"What happened? What did Bobby say? What did you say? Gan wouldn’t have sent Bobby as Cbaxa if this couldn’t be worked out. Tell me what went wrong and I will fix it for you, brother. Don’t give up on Gan now."

Castiel blinked at him slowly.

"Have you been stealing my vodka again?"

“What?”

"Why else would you possibly think I would give up on my Любимый?"

Gabriel took a deep breath.

Then another.

"Okay, help me out. One minute he’s an illusion. Next he’s your ‘beloved’. You’ll need to forgive me being a bit confused."

Castiel sighed. “All this,” and he gestured impatiently at the small palace, “is a гнездо for an ‘Omega’. A gentle, unworldly, fragile and precious Omega. A work of art for a living breathing work of art. It is not the гнездо of a Воин.”

"Well, no,” Gabriel admitted, his frantic heartbeat slowing as he understood. “I admit I can’t honestly see Gan Winchester wafting around in here in a long gown, flowers in his hair. So what are you thinking?"

"I don’t know,” Castiel admitted. “And Bobby didn’t help. All he said was I was ‘driving in the wrong direction’ and although he’d happily put me on the right road, he wasn’t going to ‘drive the damned car’ for me. He said I needed to figure it out for myself.”

Gabriel huffed and pursed his lips. “I get his point. If he just tells you exactly what to do, what gifts to offer, then he’s telling you how to ‘trick’ Gan into believing you understand him. To really understand him, you’ll need to figure it out for yourself as you go along. I dunno, Cassie. Seems to me, all things considered, you need to think about what you would like in his position."

"What do you mean?"

"You said it yourself. He’s a Воин, a warrior. Maybe you should just treat him as an equal?"

"That would be disrespectful,” Castiel snapped.

"Really? Seems to me what’s really disrespectful is not listening to what he wants. An Omega is beyond reproach, Cassie. If he wants to be treated like a mere Alpha, well, who are you to criticise his choice?"

"I don’t know how to even start.”

"So start here, with the гнездо. If it were you, if it was to be your special, private place, what would you want?"

Castiel didn’t even need to think about it. “A hunting lodge,” he said. “That’s what I’d like. A
wooden cabin, deep in the trees. A private place of my own inside the forest where my wolf could always run free. That’s what I’d like as a гнездо, if I were Gan.”

Gabriel thought about that and nodded. “Well, there you go then. It’s definitely a hell of a lot better than a mini Disney castle.”
Castiel Krushnic was the American Alpha Of All. He was one of the most influential and important Wolfkin in the world. He was well versed in intimidation and practiced in persuasion. Perhaps he lacked Gabriel’s ability to sweet talk and flatter and cajole but his cool assurance and commanding presence compensated for his lack of natural charm. He was still, to coin a phrase, a smooth criminal.

Primarily because he was smart enough to understand his own limitations and surround himself with those who ably compensated for his own weaknesses. He was an Alpha. The natural ability to thrall and dominate was threaded through his veins. An Alpha had no need to learn ‘people skills’. For the rare situations in which they proved necessary, he had his First Beta. Why have a dog and bark yourself, anyway?

But, in retrospect, perhaps convincing Gabriel to charm Gan’s cellphone number off Sam - only so his brother could be ‘formally’ assured of his welcome by the Volkrod, of course - had not been his smoothest move.

Because having seamed, walked calmly to the privacy of his own room, the number clutched tightly in his fingers, and having dialled the number with trembling determined fingers, Castiel couldn’t think of a single word to say.

He opened his mouth... and nothing came out except a faint whoosh of expelled breath.

And the moment his lungs were empty they suddenly seemed to forget entirely how to refill again and then he was gasping, like the striped bass, like a fish out of water, a creature finding itself so thoroughly outside of its own environment that even breathing became an impossible challenge.

Gan’s initial “Hey” swiftly moved to threats against his person if he was just a ‘heavy breathing creeper’. And then inevitability to near panic as it suddenly occurred to the Omega that only his brother knew his current number.

Halfway through Gan grimly promising to jump in his car, come to the compound and ‘kick some ass’ if Sam was in trouble, Castiel finally managed to catch sufficient breath to say, “Hello, Gan.”

The resultant silence was deafening.

Castiel manfully fought the urge to simply hang up and flee.

The silence continued, pregnant with anticipation...

And Castiel had nothing.

Everything he had planned to say, every word he had laboriously practiced in his head before picking up the handset, had fled him completely and he was dying on stage, floundering, drowning in the all too dry air of his own goddamned bedroom.
And still Gan said nothing.

"I...um... I ... I hope you are... are... well,” Castiel finally stuttered.

He was rewarded with a small snort, that he thought was an expression of humor. Hoped was humor. Considering this time the night before they had both been shooting at each other, his comment was perhaps a little incongruous. But at least Gan hadn’t blurted out anything bitter like “no thanks to you,” or “fuck off, assbutt”.

Encouraged, he tried again, "I... um... am reliably informed the Magnuson is clean, if... um... somewhat basic..."

His voice trailed off and he fought the urge to simply punch himself in the face. What the fuck was he talking about? This was his Omega, his mate, and he was discussing a motel room?

Gan just snorted again.

The silence returned, broken only by breathing on both sides of the line.

And, oddly, for a short while it was enough. Just that nebulous connection of two men breathing in sync.

But then the silence became heavy with expectation and neither man seemed able to overcome it, to move the tentative ‘peace’ into anything more meaningful.

"Um... um... I hope you sleep well, Gan,” Castiel said, eventually, awkwardly.

And then he hung up the phone.

And face-planted on his desk with a groan of embarrassed despair.

xxx

Twelve miles away, Dean Winchester listened to the dial tone of a disconnected phone and looked somewhat like a beached fish himself.

What the fuck?

THAT was the American Alpha of All?

The guy in charge of the scary, terrifying, demonic Volkrod he had lived twelve years in terror of?

The Alpha who had haunted his dreams like a dangerous addiction, deadly and terrifying but always inescapable.

The man who, outgunned in a firefight, had simply responded by dropping a fucking ceiling down on both their heads because a guy like that, deadly and cool, would rather die himself than lose a battle.

And yet....

He was a complete and utter dork.

xxx

The black wolf waited, ever patient.
Castiel was sleeping heavily, the events of the last day and a half having finally caught up with him.

He was asleep long before the crescent moon rose in the sky like a scythe.

And still the wolf waited, until his human entered REM sleep, the landscape of dreams, and then he slipped into place and took over.

Castiel woke clothed in fur, rose from his bed on four paws and trotted towards the open window, following his nose unerringly towards the distant spoor of his mate.

He leapt, diving in a graceful arc, landing fifteen feet below and twice as far away from the window ledge and then loping towards the driveway at a pace faster than a running horse. He passed uncaring through the perimeter alarms, aware that his presence would be captured in the data room, that pack would be milling and moving in frantic response, that a call to the gatehouse would ensure, even before he reached the boundaries of the estate, the gate would be opened for his exit.

So he ran, and he ran, smooth asphalt under his paws allowing him to speed faster than the winding trails through the trees, and carelessly, shamelessly he thundered down the main highway towards Fishkill, knowing even if his presence was witnessed by Dobycha eyes, he would not be seen. The thrall of the Volkrod was woven into this land. Though few of their neighbors were Pok, all of their neighbors were thralled.

For forty years the Volkrod had carefully fostered a sense of peace and acceptance in Poughkeepsie. Most of the local Dobycha, if asked by a stranger, would deny wolves lived there at all. And they wouldn’t be lying. They simply had learned not to see.

The black wolf was not a wolf. His stamina was that of a Wolfkin. He didn’t lope the miles like a marathon runner, he ate the miles as though he was closing in on prey.

It took slightly less than thirty minutes for him to arrive, breathless and triumphant in the dark lot of a sleepy motel.

And then, uncaring of witnesses, he simply sat down in the midst of the parked cars, tipped his head back to the moon above, and he let rip a haunting howl of longing.

Inside dozens of motel rooms and surrounding houses, humans shivered in their sleep, tossed and turned in their beds, their dreams invaded by primeval memories of their millennia as prey. The dogs living in nearby properties whimpered in their sleep, torn between fear and distant memories of times when their ancestors would have followed that cry, not huddled from it in terror. Their fur rippled and their flanks heaved as the black wolf’s cry said pack /pack /pack and mate /mate/ mate and called to run / run / run under the moonlight under a night blanket of stars.

And in one room, a white wolf woke and howled back.


xxx

They chased down the almost deserted highways together, two wolves, one the color of the sky, one the color of the moon.

Fur sparkling with the iridescent mother of pearl hue of a shell, the pale wolf took the lead, its paws powering silver-white haunches to speeds the dark wolf could barely keep up with. The wind ripped at their fur as they sped, faster and faster, until the white wolf swerved off the road and up a steep embankment before crouching low and reaching up in an impossible leap to clear a high wall
with balletic grace.

The black wolf, heavier, clumsier, lacked its mate’s finesse. It failed to clear the wall smoothly, was forced to scrabble and claw to scramble over the last few inches, its back feet biting into stone as it pushed its heavy frame over to land in an awkward belly flop on the other side.

It rose, slightly stunned, shaking itself, its shaggy head sniffing desperately for the scent of its mate. But a teasing yip in the distance offered direction even before the waft of magnolias drew it inexorably to follow.

And as it saw its surroundings, recognised them, if the black wolf was in human form it would have groaned.

They were in Splash Down Beach.

A water park.

And his mate, his glorious, exhausting mate, was already sat on top of a huge water slide, its fur haloed by moonlight, its eyes bright with mischief and fun. It howled once, *come / come / come* and *play/ play/ play* and then with a puppy-like yip it threw its body prone and hurled down the water chute like a speeding arrow before crashing into the water below like a canonball.

At least there were no fish, the black wolf thought, as hours later, sodden - again - and eyes stinging from chlorine, it flopped on the slick tiles next to the monster wave pool that - thankfully - was switched off, the water still and calm beside them.

But the pale wolf was looking at it expectantly, its green eyes a sparkling platinum in the darkness, and so, with a tired huff, the black wolf dragged itself to its feet and, with a groan, trotted from locked concession to locked concession until his nose picked up the faint but unmistakable scent of meat.

It crashed against the wooden door of the food hut, splintering it into pieces, and entered a nirvana of hotdogs and meat patties and chicken wings.

As it trotted back and forth, hauling the booty to its waiting mate, the discomfort of its wet fur and stinging eyes was forgotten in the burning hot pride of providing, of proving itself worthy.

And so the black wolf just lay there, eyes shining, as the white wolf perused the offerings and eventually seemed to find them acceptable - at least given the way it snarled threateningly when the black wolf had the unforgivable temerity to attempt to take one of the seemingly less-acceptable offerings, one it had *thought* unwanted, for itself - and so despite its tiredness and the ache of its own hunger, the black wolf watched its mate eating and shivered with bliss.

xxx

When Castiel woke the next morning, his entire bedroom stank of chlorine and there was a note on his bed, written in Gabriel’s looping script:

"Have gone to smooth things over at Splash Down Beach. Do you have any idea what damage fur can do to filtration systems?"
"What the fuck?” Castiel growled.

And then memories flooded him.

And, despite the feeling Gabriel was probably currently writing a huge compensation check, he grinned.
By the end of that first week, Castiel had woken in his bed two more times with the evidence of night time journeying on his body, unexplained aches in too many places, and nothing more than hazy, dreamlike memories of his wolf’s illicit adventures.

There was a cunning deliberation to the way the wolf grabbed the reins only when he was fully asleep and lost in dreams. Not only because he was totally susceptible to its whims at that point but because, done carefully enough - as was clearly the case - Castiel was just carried along as a ‘passenger’, believing he was dreaming right up to the point he woke up with leaf tangled hair, muddy feet and feeling as exhausted as though he had run a marathon.

Having slipped its leash after thirty years of rigid control, it appeared his wolf had no intention of returning to its former subservience.

Castiel suspected the only reason the Wolf wasn’t taking control every night was the physical impossibility of their shared body staying awake 24/7. His body couldn’t handle both his human and wolf personalities living full-on, independent lives. He had to have uninterrupted sleep at least every other night.

It was just as well, because he wasn’t sure the pack could afford for him to have adventures every day.

So far, Gabriel had written several substantial checks.

Castiel couldn’t even remember exactly how the huge wooden pirate ship at the DC Sports mini golf center in Wappingers Falls had been destroyed. Although whenever he tried to access the memory more clearly, his wolf’s snort of supreme satisfaction suggested the incident had been ‘fun’.

So far, what he had learned about his Omega’s wolf - was that it enjoyed anything that involved water - usually Castiel in said water - and anything that involved food - lots of food. That the white wolf clearly thought an element of danger was preferable for any adventure, and that destruction of property was less of a regrettable side-effect than an added bonus.

It appeared to be an extremely bad influence on his own wolf.

“This is almost feral behavior,” he scolded it constantly. “You’re the Alpha of All. You’re supposed to be responsible, respectable, and CIVILIZED. You’re supposed to set an example. Not become the pack Hellion. An Omega may be beyond reproach. YOU most certainly are not!”

His wolf just snickered unrepentantly and ignored him completely.

It was very... vexing.

Sadly, all he had learned about his actual Omega during the same period was that he liked simple comfort food and ‘ran dark’. Ever since that one abortive phonecall, Gan had stopped answering calls from unknown numbers and had threatened to change his own number entirely if Sam ever let Castiel borrow his own phone to call. Castiel may possibly have known that because he had asked to do exactly that.

According to a somewhat sheepish Sam, Gan was apparently still ‘thinking’ and would contact the Pack in his own sweet time and not before.
According to that Pack filled with shameless spies - who were all still neglecting their own duties completely to slope off constantly to Fishkill to coo and awe over Gan at a discrete distance - Gan was eating his way through every restaurant in that town in his effort to replace the calorie-toll of their joint adventures.

Castiel had opened a running Pack tab for him in every eatery within their area of influence. He - and his wolf - gained huge satisfaction from the fact that (after some initial proud and vocal protest - as reported by several of those unofficial pack spies) Gan had given in to at least that much and were his tastes those of a ‘normal’ Omega, Gabriel would be wincing at those bills as much as the cost of their night adventures.

According to Charlie, Gan had just paid for another week at his motel. So that felt promising at least. She had talked him out of paying that bill too, with the argument that Gan’s willingness to cover that cost was a good barometer of his mood. Castiel had subsided, though it hurt him to know he was failing to provide even basic shelter for his Любимый

Charlie told him to ‘suck it up’.

She was highly disrespectful for a Prislugoy.

Charlie also told him he should ‘get off his ass and go visit Fishkill himself’.

He ignored that part of her ‘wisdom’, because she was only human and she clearly failed to appreciate the necessity to accord respect to an Omega’s expressed wishes.

Gan had stated clearly that he wished to be left alone to ‘think’.

Castiel told himself he was perfectly happy to wait for Gan to make up his mind.

According to Cas’s wolf, Cas was an idiot.

According to Bobby, they were both a pair of ‘idjits’ and they ‘deserved each other’.

Perhaps Bobby was right. The real problem though was, aside from the potential bankruptcy of the pack if their wolves continued to indefinitely cause havoc to all the neighboring Dobycha tourist attractions, time was not on Castiel’s side.

Which had nothing to do with Gan - who was fully within his rights to take however long he liked to ‘think’ - and not even that much to do with Castiel - who had waited for so long without even hope that he would rather live forever with the current status quo than face Gan’s final decision going against him - because the time pressure was coming from an external source.

And that external threat might soon be approaching like an inexorable force.

Because, somehow, Karl Krushnic had been informed of Gan’s survival.

Castiel didn’t know who had called St Petersburg with the news - though when he found out they were going to wish they had never been born. It was certainly not Gabriel, considering his brother had turned almost white with fear when the delegation from their sire arrived out of the blue, a week to the day after Castiel and Dean had destroyed the гнездо.

Both brothers had assumed, on being advised of the Russian Pack-members’ arrival, that someone had reported the previous week’s ‘incident’ to the Верховный Суд after all.

Discovering the real reason for the visit was almost worse than that.
Their mother, Neomin, had sent the delegation with the entire personal contents of his Babushka’s гнездо as a dowry gift for Gan. (Embarrassingly enough, she had included a note to Castiel stating that - considering his personality - she thought he probably needed all the help he could get if he wanted to impress an actual Omega. It was particularly hurtful because Castiel was becoming increasingly convinced she was right.)

Crate after crate had been unloaded from a private aircraft, and driven up from Newbugh to Poughkeepsie in two large trucks. The value of the contents could probably have purchased a small country. Castiel had a sinking feeling Gan would be horrified to receive even a single one of the priceless heirlooms.

Bobby’s blunt agreement with his sentiments didn’t leave much room for doubt.

"He’s got a XM25 semi-automatic grenade launcher in the trunk of his car. Send any of that shit in his direction and I reckon you’ll get up close and personal with it."

"Maybe he’ll like the jewellery, at least,” Charlie suggested diplomatically. “It’s very valuable and all very... um... shiny.”

"I’m pretty sure the only things that Gan ever finds ‘shiny’ are edible things,” Castiel snarled.

Sam snorted. “You already know him so well.” Then he frowned, “Um... your mom does know Gan’s male, right?”

Gabriel shrugged helplessly. “It doesn’t usually make a difference with Omegas. Whether they identify as male or female, they love anything beautiful and so usually prefer to wear gowns and jewels and shit. It’s an Omega thing. Choosing to wear a dress wouldn’t make people consider a male Omega to be declaring himself feminine. No more than people think wearing a foustanella makes a Greek soldier look ‘female’.”

"Maybe I’m just too old to buy all the politically correct bollocks but seeing those guys wearing those frou frou skirts definitely looks weird as shit to me,” Bobby admitted. “But each to their own. I ain’t for judging what makes other folks happy. Important point is what Gan thinks, and speaking as his Svaha I’m tellin’ you now, you do not want to be giving him a bunch of lady-dresses as a courting gift. Not if you want to keep your own boy-parts intact.”

"We’ll put everything except the jewellery in storage,” Castiel decided. “They are heirlooms that a future pup might appreciate. The jewels must be given to him, lest we insult the St Petersburg pack entirely. But perhaps if we put them in a safety deposit and merely gift him the key, it will be perceived as less... insulting."

"Not a bad idea,” Bobby agreed, with reluctant approval. “cos knowing him he’ll never bother going to collect, so he might at least imagine it’s more masculine shit like watches and signet rings. In fact give the key to me for safe-keeping and I’ll just drop it casually into conversation like it’s no biggie.”

“It’s not all dresses,” Sam said, rooting through the boxes. “There are pants and doublets and blouses too. Some of this stuff is really nice. Just look at the quality of this embroidery. Wow.”

Bobby rolled his eyes. “Always knew the wrong pup got born Omega,” he snorted dryly.

Gabriel snickered and gazed fondly at the huge Alpha pup who was running reverent fingers over the garments, shamelessly appreciating the work of skilled Russian seamstresses, before returning his attention to his own younger brother.
“The main problem, Cassie,” he said, “is if the word has gotten out about Gan, then you aren’t the only Alpha who’s going to be interested in throwing their hat in the ring. Just because he scent marked you doesn’t mean he won’t find another Alpha equally or even more attractive. You might be stuck with him, but he’s still got a whole playing field to choose from. Basically, you need to put a ring on it, brother, or someone else might beat you to the finish line.”

Castiel’s eyes flared scarlet and he growled deeply.

“So how does that work?” Bobby asked, totally ignoring Castiel’s obvious distressed fury at the idea. “I mean, as Gan’s Svaha, I probably ought to know what other options are on the table for him.”

Gabriel looked almost gleeful as he explained, “well, I doubt any American Alphas would attempt it. They’re all sworn sub-Alphas of Cassie here, so it would be a bit suicidal to try to steal their Alpha’s main squeeze. But any Alpha from another country could request permission to visit to pay their respects, and if Castiel refuses to permit them access, they could raise a complaint with the Верховный Суд. In all honesty, I can’t see the Alpha Council interfering in the case of common or garden Alphas, but if an unmated Alpha of All, like Kali for instance, wanted to try her luck it would be considered extremely bad manners for Castiel to refuse. He would probably be ordered to comply, to provide Gan with a suitable range of choices.”

With a low growl of fury, Castiel turned to Charlie, snapped, “You, come with me,” and stormed out of the room. She shrugged expansively at them all, then chased after him.

“Oops. Was it something I said?” Gabriel asked innocently.

Sam frowned at him suspiciously. “I thought you told me Kali decided she was Alpha-sexual, and that’s the reason you and she broke up.”

”My bad. I must have forgotten for a moment,” Gabriel said unrepentantly.

“And, anyway, it would be insane for the Russian Krushnics to spread the word to other packs before Castiel manages to ‘seal the deal’. So there’s no way there’s any other Alphas poised to charge over here and fight duels for Gan.”

”Well, I admit its highly unlikely,” Gabriel drawled. “But just the possibility should kick Cassie’s ass into gear.”

”Hmmph,” Bobby said, but he looked highly approving. “Boy needed a rocket up his ass before Gan got tempted to do the job properly.”

xxx

“So it’s about an hour or so up the I87, in a town called Hunter,” Charlie announced triumphantly. “Exactly what you asked me to find. A suitable location for a first date.”

”Zombie Hunter Paintball?” Castiel asked incredulously.

”You wanted something fun,” she shrugged.

“I was imagining something like a musical,” Castiel protested. Which, seriously, was already far out of his personal comfort zone. If Gan were a traditional Omega, Castiel definitely would have suggested a chaperoned meal in a fine-dining restaurant followed by a performance of La bohème.
“Trust me, you do not want to be taking Gan to musical theatre. And there’s lots of other cool shit at Hunter Mountain. Like off-road 4x4 experiences. He was a mechanic and, hell, I’ve seen his car, so it makes sense he’d like something like that. And there’s skiing and sky rides. That’s all first date stuff for someone like Gan.”

It went against every bone in his body. Even after the ‘incident’ in the гнездо, he was still struggling to think of an Omega, his Omega, in that way. Every fibre of his being wanted to wrap Gan in silk. To protect him, to guard him so carefully that even a rose would never enter his presence without every thorn having been removed.

He wanted to take Gan to the finest restaurants. Dress him in designer clothes. Introduce him to Opera and Ballet.

His wolf snorted rudely, and Castiel remembered the white wolf howling like a crazed banshee and launching itself like a rocket down the Arctic Mammoth slide at SplashDown Beach.

He thought about the gowns his mother had sent.

He thought about the palace he had built for an Omega that had never existed.

”Book it,” he said. “All of it. And find somewhere I can take him to eat. A steakhouse perhaps. But somewhere good, not somewhere nice.”

”Got it, boss,” she grinned.

”Now all I have to do is work out how to ask him on the ‘date’,” Castiel sighed.

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