Spin Cycle

by Awkward1

Summary

A messy hamburger leads to Castiel awkwardly doing his laundry in a deserted laundromat late at night in his boxers. Little does he know, cocky young Dean Winchester is about to walk into his life.

Notes

My washing machine broke. Spending a lot of time in the laundromat led to this. Sorry, not sorry. ;-)
The Ketchup Situation

Chapter Summary

He pushed through the double glass doors, not realizing there was another occupant in
the room until he heard muttered cursing. Stopping short, he turned, stunned at the
sight of a tall, lean, man in his late twenties to early thirties with a runner’s build,
messy dark hair and an angular face, trying to jimmy the laundry supplies dispenser
with an unfolded wire hanger, while clad only in his boxers. Dean couldn’t stop
himself before blurting out, “Dude, are you trying to McGuyver your way into some
laundry soap?”

The only reason he was in the Laundromat this late at night was because the moving
company hadn’t shown up at his apartment like they were scheduled too. So, Cas only had the
clothes on his back and an empty apartment to his name until the moving truck showed up.
Unfortunately, he also had to start at his new job in the morning. He had just planned on wearing
the khakis and button up he was currently wearing, but during the quick meal he had grabbed at
the diner near his apartment ketchup had dripped from his hamburger bun all the way down the
front of his shirt and onto his pants. Not really the best way to make an impression on the new
faculty he would be working with at the University.

He walked into the long, brightly lit room with walls lined with row and rows of silent
machines, except for a few in the corner spinning through a cycle for some missing clientele, and
fished the handful of quarters he’d found in the cupholder of his Prius, slamming them down into
the top of an unused machine. He opened the door to the front loading machine, removed his cell
phone from the front pocket and quickly unbuttoned his shirt and tossed it in, toed off his shoes
and pushed them under the hardbacked chair at the end of the row of machines and pulled off his
socks, throwing them in with the shirt. Cas looked down at the ketchup stain on his pants and
sighed, making quick work of his belt, tossing it with the shoes and pulling his wallet from his
back pocket, tossing it onto the top of the washer with the pile of quarters. Reluctantly, he
unbuttoned his pants and slid them off quickly, placing them in the washer with his socks and
shirt. He sighed, thinking there wasn’t really anything he could do with his shorts. He couldn’t
very well stand around the Laundromat naked, waiting for his clothes to finish. As it was, if it
wasn’t nearly 2 A.M., he wouldn’t dare stand around only in his underwear.

Clothes loaded into the machine, he turned to look for a detergent dispenser. There was a
large metal box mounted to the wall next to the change machine that dispensed detergent, fabric
softener and other laundry related items. He quickly counted the change he would need for the
washer and dryer and then realized he didn’t have enough quarters left over for detergent. He
walked back and grabbed his wallet, flipping through it and pulling out the lone single he had left.
Fan-fucking-tastic. He thought to himself. Thankfully, he still had his bank card and the detergent
was only a dollar. He slid the bill into the change machine and with a whir and four metallic
klinks, quarters rained down into the little metal bowl.

He slid the quarters in the slots, barely registering the beeping from the machines in the
corner that signaled they were through with their cycle. He pushed the little button next to the Tide
label and waited for the box to drop. There was a whirring sound, a thud and then nothing. With a
frustrated growl, he kneeled down and peered into the little slot at the bottom of the machine. He
could see the corner of the orange and blue box tilted at just the wrong angle near the back. Too far into the narrow space to reach with his hands. Cas scowled and slammed his hand into the front of the machine. The frustrations of a long day of traveling and mislaid plans washing over him.

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Dean returned to the Laundromat with a Big Gulp, a bag of M&Ms, a well-worn paperback, and a box of dryer sheets. He had left shortly after putting the laundry in the machines to pick up Sammy from his girlfriend’s house and drive him back to the apartment. He’d grabbed the dryer sheets while he was home at their tiny shoebox and after giving Sammy strict orders to lock up behind him and go to bed, he ran to the convenience store to grab some snacks to keep him occupied while the clothes dried. The nice thing about doing laundry this late at night, the only time he could find after classes at the university in the mornings, working at his Uncle Bobby’s in the afternoon and the occasional shift at The Roadhouse helping out his Aunt Ellen, was that no one else was ever around to mess with their stuff.

He walked into the Laundromat, ready for a chance to sit and zone out while watching their clothes tumble around in the dryer. He was tired. Working two jobs, attending classes and still trying to find time to spend with Sammy, making sure he was eating right, showering, doing his homework; all of the responsibility was taking its toll. He was only twenty for fucks sake. Carrying a load that was more akin to that of a single parent. And tomorrow, he would just start the whole thing over. Like his own personal Groundhog’s Day. The only change would be starting a new course at the University. Somehow his counselor had talked him into taking a course labeled Romantic Lit and Culture. While Dean was studying a major geared toward professional writing, he had been hoping to get into a course aimed more towards modern lit or fantasy. But those had already been filled by the time he could squeeze a meeting with his counselor into his busy schedule.

He pushed through the double glass doors, not realizing there was another occupant in the room until he heard muttered cursing. Stopping short, he turned, stunned at the sight of a tall, lean, man in his late twenties to early thirties with a runner’s build, messy dark hair and an angular face, trying to jimmy the laundry supplies dispenser with an unfolded wire hanger, while clad only in his boxers. Dean couldn’t stop himself before blurting out, “Dude, are you trying to McGuyver your way into some laundry soap?”

The man, startled, yelped and dropped the hanger, standing up quickly and clipping his shoulder on the edge of the coin machine. He bit his lower lip with a grimace and grabbed the shoulder - that probably hurt like a bitch, while he appeared to fight back a curse.

Dean stood there dumbly, clutching his candy and the Big Gulp, box of dryer sheets squeezed between his elbow and his ribs. After a moment, the other man unscrewed his eyes and looked over at Dean with what Dean would later swear were the biggest, bluest eyes he had ever seen. And at that moment, they were practically shooting angry sparks in his direction. The man took a steadying breath and closed his eyes once more. Dean was pretty sure he was mentally counting to ten and doing some sort of calming exercise. Dean tried not to smirk, but he couldn’t help it. So when the man opened his eyes once again, and looked over at him, he narrowed his blue eyes in irritation but spoke calmly in a gravelly, deep voice Dean was shocked to hear come out of the body in front of him.

“The box is wedged into the back and I can’t get it out. I would put more quarter into the machine, but I used my last dollar on that box and I believe it would just compound the problem.”
Dean, with the usual cocky arrogance he could shrug on like an old coat, set his things on top of one of the folding tables and strolled over to the machine to peek inside. He turned and grinned at the other man, “Yeah, this one does that all the time.”

With a quick, calculated punch to the top of the machine, the box dropped into the chute and the other man stared at it for a moment before slowly reaching out and grabbing it.

“I spent twenty minutes trying to get that out.”

Dean flashed another grin and winked at the dark haired man, “I’ve been coming here for a few years now. I know all the tricks.”

The other man’s eyes widened at the obvious suggestion in Dean’s voice and a flush crept up his neck. Dean’s grin grew wider and after a quick lift of one eyebrow he turned to retrieve his things and walk over to the machines containing his and Sammy’s clothes, fighting back a laugh at the obvious discomposure the other man was fighting.
I have no idea what I'm doing. Damn these adorable people.

Castiel sat awkwardly in the hard plastic chair next to the washing machine and tried to ignore the other presence in the room. Easier said than done, he thought, when you were sitting, practically naked, under bright fluorescent lighting and unsure of what to do with your limbs. For a man who was never surprised at his own levels of social awkwardness, this was an all-new low. He was afraid to look around, worried he might make eye contact with the brash young man he knew was sitting in the corner. He managed to last a few more minutes before he nonchalantly tried to look around the room. He was sitting in a chair in the corner, long, jean clad legs ending in worn boots spread out in front of the chair, leaning back casually scrolling through his phone. As if sensing Cas’s eyes on him, the young man looked up and slanted one eyebrow, lifting the corner of his mouth in that damnable smirk. Cas flushed and looked back down at his hands resting solidly on his knees.

His phone rang a moment later and he sprang up to grab it from the machine it was laying on. Looking at the screen, he sighed when he realized it was his sister Hannah. She was almost more socially awkward than he was. He really needed a call from his sister Anna. She could always give him good advice even in the oddest situations. And this was definitely the oddest one he had found himself in in quite a while.

He swiped his thumb across the screen and raised the phone to his ear, quietly answering with, “Hello, Hannah.”

“Hello, Castiel.”

Cas waited a moment for his sister to continue, waiting for her to fill the silence with her reason for calling. After thirty seconds, Cas prompted with, “Did you need something, Hannah?”

“Oh yes, Castiel, of course. Anna and I were wondering if you would be free tomorrow evening for dinner? We thought it would be nice to catch up after your first day.”

Cas ran a hand up the back of his neck and ruffled the back of his hair as he considered meeting his sisters for dinner the next evening. As the youngest of their family, his sisters tended to be overprotective and almost suffocating at times. One of the reasons he had jumped at this job at the University was because it was almost an hour’s drive from his hometown. He would still have the chance to spend time with his large and overbearing family, but be far enough away that they wouldn’t be stopping by at all hours of the night and day.

“Um, Hannah, I’m not sure that would be the best idea. The movers didn’t show up tonight. I’ll have to unpack everything tomorrow after work, if they get here tomorrow. Maybe if we waiting until the weekend the timing would be better?”

Hannah didn’t answer for a moment. As Cas was just beginning to prompt her into speaking again, she answered.
The sounds like a more appropriate plan. Would you like me to contact the Better Business Bureau about your difficulties?”

Cas sighed and turned to lean his back against the bank of washing machines, tilting his head back to look absently at the ceiling before answering, momentarily forgetting to feel self-conscious of the other person in the room.

“No Hannah, I can handle it.”

“Alright, good-bye Castiel.”

Before Cas could respond with his own valediction, Hannah ended the call. Cas rolled his eyes and tossed the phone back on top of the washing machine, before scrubbing his hands through his hair. He was tired, anxious about starting his job, and standing in a room with a stranger wearing nothing but his boxers. This wasn’t the way he had envisioned the night before his first day as a professor. The washing machine chose that moment to emit its end of cycle bell. Cas turned and piled his wet clothes into his arms, having no choice but to walk in the direction of the bank of dryers on the far wall, near where the young man was sitting.

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Dean didn’t have any qualms about watching the dark haired man. He had been sitting so stiffly in the chair next to the washers, looking so uncomfortable, Dean couldn’t help but grin. He held himself perfectly straight, spine rigid, feet evenly spaced apart, hands on his knees. Dean would bet money the guy attended some sort of fancy prep school before whatever Ivy League college the guy had no doubt attended. He just had that vibe about him. He looked like he would be right at home behind a desk in an accounting firm. When he had looked over earlier and caught Dean’s eyes, Dean smugly noticed the blush rising up his neck. The guy was freaking hot as hell and for some reason the whole vulnerable nerd thing was really hitting a kink Dean didn’t even know he had.

Then the phone rang, and for the first time, Dean saw the man appear comfortable in his own skin. He talked to someone named Hannah, Dean was pretty sure it wasn’t a girlfriend. He had spent too many of his teen years watching people and calculating the odds of whether or not they would be an easy con. The body language coming from the other guy read more like ‘irritated and obligated’ than ‘significant other.’ He had tilted his head back at one point and stared up at the ceiling, creating a long smooth line out of his body and exposing a perfect length of throat Dean was dying to scrape his teeth against and suck a bruise on. Too bad the guy seemed so uptight, Dean might have explored the options a little further. But, with Sam home alone and this guy’s Absentminded Professor routine it probably wasn’t going to happen.

When his washing machine buzzed, Messy Hair stretched long, lean arms into the machine and retrieved the bundle of clothes. Dean tilted the front two legs of his chair off of the ground and leaned back, enjoying the play of muscles against the taut skin of his back. As the other guy walked across the room towards him, Dean bit his lower lip, and watched him. After he loaded a dryer and slammed the door shut he fed the machine quarters and turned to walk back across the room, before he could get too far, Dean returned all four legs of his chair to the floor and stretched a booted foot out, hooking a nearby chair and pulling it closer. He stretched his legs out and placed his feet in the chair, folding his arms and leaning his head back against the ugly green wall.

“Moving trouble, huh?” Dean asked as the man walked back across the room.

He turned, appearing surprise that Dean had called out to him. “Yes, all of my things are
currently in transport.” He answered, quietly, before shrugging and sitting back in the chair on the opposite side of the room.

“That sucks,” Dean replied, obviously.

“Yes, it is certainly inconvenient. Especially since I’m supposed to start my new job in about…” He paused to look at the clock hanging above the door. “Five hours.”

Dean grimaced, “Yeah, that ought to make your first day really interesting.” After a moment, the buzzer on the dryer went off. Dean stood and dumped the warm clothes onto a folding table. He quickly started to sort and fold his and Sammy’s clothes. He looked up and caught Blue Eyes watching him.

“Like what you see?” He asked cheekily before his brain could remind his fucking mouth to stop being such a dumbass.

The other man jolted and stammered, “I’m sorry, excuse me,” before looking away towards his spinning washing machine.

Dean laughed quietly, “Dude, its fine. I’m just being a smartass.” After he folded two pairs of Sammy’s jeans and Holy shit, the kid was going to outgrow these soon if he didn’t slow down, Dean looked up at the other man. “I’m hoping your apartment came furnished, it would really blow if you didn’t even have a bed to sleep in tonight.”

Something flickered across the man’s face and Dean could have kicked himself. “Aw, man. Seriously? You don’t even have a bed?”

He shrugged and motioned towards the door. “I will sleep in my car tonight. The floors of my apartment are hardwood and I believe it would be the lesser of the two evils.”

Dean began stuffing the folded piles of clothes into the laundry bag before tying it closed. “He walked towards the door and looked out at the parking lot. “That blue thing? How are you going to sleep in that? It looks like a roller skate.”

Dean slung the heavy laundry bag over his shoulder and looked from the man to the tiny electric car out in the lot.

“Okay, listen, there is a hotel down the block. It’s called the Twilight Inn, looks seedy but really it’s not too bad. My friend Ash works behind the counter. Tell him Dean sent you and he’ll give you a break on the rate.” Dean slapped four quarters on the washing machine with a wink and backed out the door towards the parking lot saying, “Try the Magic Fingers. You’ll love it.”
In the end, Castiel took the young man’s advice. Once his clothes were dry, he pulled them on quickly, hissing as the overheated jeans zipper pressed a little too closely. He drove a short distance down the road until the blinking neon of a roadside hotel sign beckoned to him. The hotel appeared to be nearly deserted. Only two other cars were occupying the twenty-four parking spots laid out in a row in front of twelve hotel room. The long, low building was brick faces and appeared well kept even if terribly outdated.

He walked into the dark paneled office, looking up as a bell jangled announcing his entrance. Behind the counter, a young man in a sleeveless t-shirt, a nametag that read ‘Ash’, and an unfortunate hairstyle choice was tapping away at a laptop that looked more like a science project, while two television monitors behind him on the wall played on mute. The young man help up one finger, never taking his eyes off of the screen. After a few long minutes of rapid keyboard tapping, he looked up at Castiel.

“What can I do you for?”

Castiel took a step back, feeling bewildered and blurted. “Uhhm, I uh, a man named Dean sent me to get a room for the night.”

Ash squinted his eyes and appeared to study Castiel for a moment. Then he pulled a form out and filled out a few lines before sliding it and a pen across the counter.

“Just sign that and I need a credit card and a photo ID and you are good to go.”

Castiel took the pen and quickly signed his name. After he slid his license and credit card across the counter with the papers, Ash swiped the credit card. While he was copying the license information onto the paper, Ash asked, without looking up, “You need two keys?”

Cas cocked his head at Ash and stared for a moment, “I’m sorry?” He responded.

Ash looked up and met his eyes, “Two keys. One for you and y’know… one for Dean?”

Cas felt his brow furrow in confusion. Then, as he replayed his first comment to Ash, his mouth formed a silent O and he quickly shook his head. “Oh no! No, no, no. It’s just me. I’m the only one.”

Ash cocked an eyebrow disbelievingly but he slid a key across the counter without saying anything.

“Your room is on the end. Number 12. Checkout is at eleven.”

Cas quickly pocketed the key and walked out, welcoming the cool night air on his
flushed cheeks.

He opened the hotel room door with low expectations. *At least it was clean*, he thought to himself. He quickly undressed, and rinsed his boxers the best he could in the hotel sink with the stingy bar of complimentary soap, wrung them out as thoroughly as he could and hung then over the shower curtain rod to dry during the night. Then he walked over to the bed and pulled the stiff cheap sheets and thin blanket back and slid into the bed. He turned onto his side to turn out the light and realized there was a metal coin box mounted on the wall by the bed. Magic Fingers. *Well, that explained one thing.*

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Dean overslept. Somehow, godfuckingdammit, he overslept for a class that didn’t even start until 10:30. Sammy had popped his head into Dean’s room before leaving for school at eight and said goodbye. Dean remembered mumbling something and then thinking to himself, just a few more minutes wouldn’t hurt. Next thing he knew, he was blinking awake and realizing he had thirty minutes to shower, dress, and drive across town and find a non-existent parking space on the campus with the least amount of parking spaces in the freaking world. Thank god the coffee maker was on a timer. If he had to face the morning without his daily infusion of caffeine, things could have gotten messy.

As it was, he slid into the lecture hall with about thirty seconds to spare. The Angel of Parking Spaces must have been watching out for him this morning. He’d managed to find a spot for Baby right in front of the building. Most of the other students were seated in the seating surrounding the lectern already. There wasn’t any professor type person to be seen at the front of the class, so Dean knew he hadn’t missed anything important. Walking to one of the empty seats near the front of the class, Dean placed his travel mug of coffee on the desk, before slinging his messenger bag off his shoulder and and sliding into the seat. He pulled out his laptop and opened a blank document to take notes on. Sipping his coffee slowly, he looked around the classroom, taking note of a perky blonde three seats over. She returned the smile he shot her and then turned to whisper something to the girl next to her.

“Dean, nice of you to make it,” someone said as they dropped into the seat next to his. Charlie, his best friend since middle school, quickly pulled out her Ipad and pulled up the class syllabus.

“Where were you? I didn’t see you as I came in?” Dean asked, leaning back in his seat.

“I was in the back row. You were two busy checking out the talent to notice.” Charlie turned to him and quirked her lips, a knowing look in her eyes.

“Whatever. You could have waved or something.”

Charlie just shook her head, a mischievous look on her face. “No way, these seats are better. Wait till you see what I’m talking about.”

Dean shot Charlie a confused look before he took another sip of coffee. “Where is the professor anyway?” He looked at the clock. “Shouldn’t class have started like five minutes ago?”

Charlie nodded to the door at the front of the room, “He had to run back to his office. Said he forgot something. I think it’s his first day.”

Just then, three things happened simultaneously. Dean took another mouthful of coffee. Charlie said, “Just wait till you see this guy, he’s dreamy.” And, Messy Haired, Blue Eyed Guy
Who Does His Laundry In Boxer Shorts walks into the lecture hall carrying a short stack of papers. Dean proceeded to choke, and Blue Eyes looked up squinting.

Time stood still. Dean, managed to swallow the mouthful of coffee trying to kill him, quickly recovered and shot his best shit eating grin towards the professor, who subsequently squinted his eyes and cocked his head to the side for a full fifteen seconds before he blinked, and turned to the podium at the front of the room.

Charlie nudged Dean’s knee. “See what I mean? I think he’s dreamy and I don’t even play for that team.”

Dean, glanced over at the top of the syllabus visible on Charlie’s Ipad, noting the name at the top. Professor Castiel Milton.
Castiel had been feeling harried as he walked back into the lecture hall, carrying the stack of syllabi he had forgotten on his first trip down. He was slightly overwhelmed when he realized just how full his section was. The hall was almost full, with only a few empty seats open at the very back. He looked around the full room and paused for a moment at the flicker of recognition on a familiar face.

He wanted to bury his face in his hands and groan. Of course, Castiel thought, the green eyed man from the Laundromat is one of the students in his first class on his first day. Of course, the random stranger who saw him embarrassed and half naked is someone he is going to have to speak in front of twice a week, ninety minutes each session. As quickly as he processed these thoughts, he stood there blankly, before catching himself and turning back to the podium.

He shook himself mentally as he tapped the papers on the desktop until they were in a more orderly stack. Taking a deep breath, strengthening breath, he turned to the class and began.

“Welcome to Romantic Lit and Culture. My name is Professor Milton.”

He walked to the first row of seats and handed the stack of syllabi to the first student. “Please pass these along.”

As the papers were dispersed throughout the room, Castiel climbed the three steps to the raised dais. “The purpose of this course is not only to teach you to appreciate the works of the Romantic Period, but also to encourage discussion of the themes we find in these works; such as the American and French Revolutions, the birth of Industry, and the changing role of women in society.”

He paused for a moment to look around the classroom. “We will study the works of Keats, Shelley, Wordsworth, Byron, and Austen as well as the Lake Poets, The Cockney School and the members of the Godwin-Shelley Circle.” Castiel raised his eyebrows and looked pointedly at a few faces that looked especially clueless. “If none of these names are ringing a bell, I would suggest putting in some library time this evening. Or, at the very least, a quick Wikipedia search so you don’t appear continually lost during out next meeting.”

With a sardonic glance at the class, he continued, “Your goal, during this class, is to not only learn to “appreciate” these works, but to be able to discuss them intelligently, and discuss their
themes. Notice I said appreciate - not like. I can’t teach you a love for literature but I can expect a modicum of intelligence when debating it.”

Castiel waited a beat before continuing, “You will also be writing…A lot.” There were a few scattered groans and he leaned against the podium with one hand, raising the other to run his fingers through his hair in a long hated habit. He didn’t notice how disorderly his once neatly combed hair appeared, or how several students grinned at the gesture, perhaps enjoying the disheveled look on the neatly dressed professor.

He smiled crookedly at the class, looking around at his students once again. “If you will turn to the third page of your syllabus, you will notice a list of the works we will be covering this session.”

As pages were flipped, there were a few more groans as the extensive reading list was taken in. Castiel couldn’t bother hiding the sadistic edge to his smile, “This will not be a throw away course, ladies and gentleman. You will not be able to watch Clueless and write a paper on the content of Emma. You are actually going to have to do the reading.”

With another quick grin, Cas continued, “Your first assignment is due at out next meeting. I would like fifteen hundred words on your impression of Lord Byron’s “Darkness”. You will find the poem on the class webpage.”

He walked to the front of the podium with his tablet in hand, “But, today in class, we are going to discuss another poet. ‘Tiger, tiger, burning bright

In the forests of the night’

I’m sure a few of you did the suggested reading.” He looked around the classroom, “Who wrote that?”

Castiel watched as the majority of the class looked awkwardly at their notebooks, tablets, or laptops, avoiding eye contact with him. Finally, one hand was raised in towards the front. To Castiel’s surprise, it was the young man from last night. For all of his cocky attitude and brash demeanor, not to mention the outward appearance of a typical guy’s guy, he would have thought this was a student who was used to sliding through his classes on charm and looks. It was a pleasant surprise to be proven wrong.

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Professor Milton nodded in his direction, acknowledging Dean’s correct answer with barely a pause in his lecture. Dean continued to watch him prowl confidently in front of the class. The difference between the self-conscious man he saw last night at the laundry mat and the confident instructor in front of him was surprising. Dean couldn’t tell if the professor persona was a skin he could shrug on in the classroom or if this was the one place the man felt confident enough to be himself. While Professor Milton read Blake’s “The Sick Rose” to the class and began to lead a discussion about the short poem, Dean listened with half an ear, wondering how he could get to know this riddle of a man a little better.

Dean’s musings were interrupted by a deep voice, “Who would like to explain what this poem means to them?” The dark haired man asked, gazing around the class with his freakishly blue eyes.
Dean looked around at his classmates as they sat quietly. No one wanted to be the first to respond. Finally, a skinny, shaggy haired guy near the back of the room raised his hand.

“Isn’t it about a worm killing a rose?” he asked, with a shrug.

Professor Milton pointed a hand at the student, an intense look in his eyes but a smile on his face. “On the surface, yes. But, if we look a little deeper mister…?” He asked.

“Garth Fitzgerald the fourth, sir.” The guy answered, a happy-go-lucky smile on his face.

“Alright, Garth.” Professor Milton answered with a smile, “On the surface, it is about a rose being told that it is sick and dying because of a worm. Anyone else see anything else?”

Dean raised his hand slowly. The instructor looked over at him.

“Yes, Mister…?”

Dean filled the blank space, saying, “Winchester. Umm… Dean Winchester.”

The teacher raised his eyebrows and waited, studying Dean. “What are your thoughts, Dean?”

Dean leaned back in his seat and rested on elbow against the top of his tablet desk. “It’s about perversion. The rose is this beautiful thing, like love, and the worm is symbolic of perversion sneaking in and destroying it. Kind of like the snake sneaking in and destroying the Garden of Eden.”

Although his face was blank, Dean had a felt like there was a smile in the blue eyes studying him. He felt a quiet sort of approval at the look. “Very good, Mr. Winchester.”

Looking up at the rest of the room, he continued on describing Blake’s childhood and the poet’s belief that angels spoke to him.

Dean, unlike many of his classmates, wasn’t bothering to take notes. His laptop sat forgotten in front of him. If he needed notes later, he knew Charlie would email hers to him. He didn’t think he would need any. He had gone through a Blake phase after he had watched the movie Red Dragon a few years ago. Most of the authors work and history he could remember. He hadn’t really found the appeal in Blake’s poetry, although many of his paintings had been interesting.

Before he knew it, the class was standing and gathering their things. The sounds of laptops snapping shut and being slid into bags, papers rustling, and the dull thud of footsteps filing past surrounded him. Charlie looked at Dean questioningly as she grabbed the strap for her messenger bag, “Want to grab some coffee? My next class isn’t until one.”

Dean nodded and waved her on, “I’ll meet you at Leaves in a few.” Charlie gave him an odd look but she nodded, “Alright, see you in a bit.”

The room was empty once Charlie left, leaving just Professor Milton sorting through some papers at the front of the room. Dean slid his laptop into his bag and stood, walking up to the lectern.

“Nice clothes, Teach,” he said, pausing next to the other man.

He stopped rustling his papers and turned to look down at Dean, a surprised look on his
face, “Thank you, Dean.”

Dean bit his lower lip and fought back a grin, adjusting the strap of his bag on his shoulder before asking, “Did you use the Magic Fingers?”

The other man was unable to hide the blush creeping up the tan skin of his neck, even if his face belied any other reaction. “Can I help you with anything class related, Mr. Winchester?”

Dean grinned and winked. “I think I’m good, Teach. I’ll see you around.”

Dean walked out with a grin on his face, aware that his professor was watching his departure with a confused expression on his face.
Leaves

Chapter Notes

Bonus chapter. And, thanks for all of the comments and kudos. You guys are awesome :)

Castiel returned to his office and slumped into the ergonomic chair behind his barren desk. Other than the laptop sitting on its surface, and a small stack of papers, there wasn’t anything of his in the entire office. Maybe once the moving truck finally dropped off his things that afternoon, he could bring a few photos and some of his books in and make the space appear more lived in. There was a chair situated in front of his desk, a few empty bookshelves, and an old sofa in the corner. He was looking around the room, mentally making a list of changes he would like to implement, when a knock at his open door caused him to look up. A tiny, round faced woman with dark eyes and a fall of dark hair was leaning into the room.

“How did the first class go?” She asked with a small smile pulling at the corner of her mouth. Meg Masters, former college girlfriend, currently probably best friend, who also happened to be the person who had gotten Castiel this job, was a welcome distraction.

“Fine. I think I might have scared them with the workload.”

Meg smirked, “That’s a good thing. Fear is good for them. Want to grab some coffee?” She asked. “I’ll show you around a little before you next class. How much time do you have?”

Cas looked at his watch, “About an hour and a half.”

“Perfect,” Meg grinned.

Castiel followed Meg out of the building and listened as she related a story about one of her earlier classes. She led him towards a small brick building down the street and on the corner.

Meg indicated the word Leaves painted in gold on the front window, “This place is great. It used to be a tea shop about a century ago. Now it’s been renovated into a café. The cafeteria coffee is disgusting, so this place is definitely worth the trip.”

Castiel opened the red painted wooden door and stepped into the building, immediately assaulted by the smell of ground coffee, the sound of milk being steamed, and some kind of music playing over the sound system that sounded like a mixture of folk and rock.

He looked around at the mismatched furniture, scraped pine floor and the giant wall behind the counter painted with chalkboard paint and covered with different kinds of beverages written in chalk. He thought he recognized a red headed girl from his first class sitting against the far wall. Meg stood next to him and nudged his arm with her shoulder. “Step up to the counter. You look like you’ve never been in a coffee shop before, Clarence.”

Castiel rolled his eyes at the old nickname and fought a smile. He was glad Meg hadn’t changed. He stepped towards the counter, ordered a medium Americano with room, and after
counting out the proper change, stood to the side under a hand pained sign that said ‘Pick Up’. After ordering an overly complicated drink, Meg stepped up beside him.

“So you’ve been awfully quiet. How have things been?”

Castiel grabbed the white coffee cup that the barista set on the counter in front of him, smiled at the whimsical sketch of a leaf on the brown cardboard sleeve and waited to answer Meg until they were settled at a small table near the window. He told her about the move, the moving company not showing up, and had just started to explain how he ended up doing his laundry the night before (leaving out the part of the story that included Dean Winchester) when he heard the bell jingle and a familiar voice place an order at the counter. He hadn’t realized he had stopped talking and was staring at the back of the young man as he waited for his coffee and chatted with the pretty blonde barista at the counter until Meg pointedly cleared her throat. Sheepishly, he looked back across the table at her. She returned his look with a glare and raised eyebrows.

“I know I ruined you for all other women back in college, but you don’t need to rub it in by checking out another guy right in front of me.”

Castiel tried to stammer out an excuse and Meg’s expression quickly transformed into a wide snarky smile he knew all too well.

“I’m just kidding. Although,” Meg turned to look at the man at the counter. “You might actually want to lay off of that one. He’s a student. I had him in my Intro to Fiction Writing class last semester. Guy’s a damn good writer. Must have been kind of childhood tragedy or something. Deep themes for a guy that age.”

Castiel couldn’t help the surprised expression on his face. “He was a student of yours?”

Meg nodded and took another sip of her drink. “Sure was, Clarence. I know, it’s shocking. Looks more like he should be standing in front of Hollister with his shirt off.”

Rolling his eyes at his friend’s observation, Castiel rolled the cup between his palms, enjoying the warmth that seeped into his hands. “He’s actually a student of mine, too.” Castiel said, pretending an interest in the grain of the tabletop.

Meg nodded, “I think he might be in my Advanced Fiction class this semester. I hope so, anyway. I would much rather read his papers than some of the crap these kids write. Jesus, if I have to read one more vampire love story I’m going to kill someone.”

Dean ordered a black coffee and made small talk with Jo, the barista, while she filled his cup.

“How late are you working? And I should warn you, Sammy’s cooking tonight.” He added, wondering if she would be stopping by the apartment later like she usually did to mooch dinner before heading to the dorms. He still wondered at the choice to live in the dorms even though she had grown up nearby with Bobby and Ellen. But, Jo craved independence, even if that meant she had to live with a roommate in a dorm room the size of a small walk-in closet.

She sighed and slid the cup across the counter, “Only until three. Mom wants me to come home for dinner tonight.”
Dean gave her a stern look and took the steaming cup, “She’s your mother, Jo.”

Jo rolled her eyes, “I know. I know. I’m going so you don’t need to nag.”

“You’re such a brat.” Dean told her, getting ready to turn and walk to where Charlie was waiting at their usual table.

Before he could leave, Jo hissed at him, “Don’t look now but some guy is checking you out.”

“Where?” Dean asked.

“He’s sitting by the window with Masters. Dark hair, blue eyes, cheekbones that could cut glass. Totally not your type. Send him my way,” She teased with a wink. Dean surreptitiously glanced toward the window and saw Laundry Guy sitting with Professor Masters.

“Yes, that guy is a professor here too.” Dean quietly told Jo.

Jo whistled, “What class, I want to sign up.”

Dean answered with a grin, “Romantic Lit and Culture.”

Jo rolled her eyes and shooed him away, uninterested in anything outside of her criminology field, “Go away nerd.”

Dean backed away and called back loud enough he’s sure most of the room heard him, “Whatever, brat. I’ll remember you said that next time you show up at my place.”

He walked over to Charlie and placed his cup on the table before spinning his chair around and straddling it. Charlie looked up from her iPad and narrowed her eyes at him.

“So, Dean Winchester is a poetry expert. The things you learn about your best friend.”

Dean shrugged and took a sip of coffee, hissing after he swallowed, the steaming liquid burning his tongue. “What can I say? I have hidden depths.”

“Well, Mr. Hidden Depths, I totally noticed you eye fucking our prof for most of the class. And yes, I know he is sitting by the window. What was that about?”

Smirking, Dean looked across the room where the uptight professor was frowning at whatever Professor Masters was saying. “I have no idea, but I’m pretty sure it’s a bad idea.”

Charlie just shook her head and looked back at her iPad. “Just don’t get him fired or yourself kicked out. ‘Discretion is the better part of valor.’”

“I can’t believe you are quoting Shakespeare at me,” Dean said, shaking his head.

Charlie smiled up at him, “I didn’t even know that was Shakespeare. I just like to say that during my Queen of Moons speech before I send the troops into battle.”

Dean shook his head, “And Jo calls me a nerd.”

As they finished their coffee, Dean looked over at Charlie and asked, “What are the rules about students and teachers here?”

Charlie looked at him like he was crazy. “I was joking, Dean.”
“I know but seriously, how big of a deal are we talking about here?”

She groaned and started typing something onto her tablet. “You are an idiot. Just be glad I love you so much.”

“I know,” he answered, grinning cockily.

After a few minutes of tapping on her screen, Charlie looked up. “Frowned upon but it isn’t really forbidden. But the guy is new so first of all, if he even swings that way, which you don’t know yet…,” She paused,” Ohmygod…do you know?”

“No, I don’t know.” He laughed.

“Okay,” she continued, “first of all, he is new. So he isn’t tenured. They could just not hire him back next year. And secondly, he is your professor. It’s just a really bad idea. People could think you were trading sex for grades or something.”

“Okay,” Dean answered.

“Okay?” Charlie asked.

“I said okay, okay.” Dean shrugged looking towards the window.

Charlie groaned and began to type something on her phone. Dean watched her curiously, “What are you doing?”

“Texting Jo and Victor, planning an intervention.”

“You aren’t.”

“Wanna bet?” Charlie shot back, flipping her phone towards him so he could see the message she had sent.

“You suck.”

“Whatever. This would only work if you knew how to be discrete. And you don’t. You were totally obvious in class today. If he is half as bad as you are, if he is even interested, you two would spend all of your time sending UST filled glances at one another.”

Dean frowned into his coffee. “You still suck.”
Responsibilities

Chapter Notes

This chapter didn't get much in the way of proofreading so I'm sorry for any errors. This chapter is also a little unbalanced, being more from Dean's POV than Cas's but that will probably switch back and forth throughout the story. Once again, thanks for the comments and the kudos :) And, also, there are a few comments from readers who I think used to follow Waiting Rooms and Elevators. Thanks for reading this one too! You guys are so awesome :)

Castiel was ridiculously happy to see the moving truck pull up to his apartment that afternoon. Once the movers had brought in his boxes and placed his furniture in the designated places, he spent the rest of the evening unpacking boxes and eating Chinese food he’d had delivered while sitting at his small kitchen table.

After he had placed his empty water glass in the dishwasher and closed the cardboard cartons, placing them in the nearly empty fridge, he noticed how completely silent the apartment was. He made a mental note to search out his iPod dock so at least he could listen to music. He thought about buying a television. He had never had much use for one before, but at least it would provide some background noise. He also needed to make a list of groceries he would need at the store.

He wasn’t much of a cook, when he had lived closer to his family they often took pity on him and invited him to dinner. Anna would even bring groceries over and cook for him, making sure he wasn’t starving and ensuring he had some social interaction. Castiel often thought his family worried over him needlessly. They often thought of him as shy and reclusive, when in reality he just had little patience for small talk and conversation empty of meaning. He didn’t feel the need to fill every empty silence with hollow chatter. He preferred to only speak when he had something significant to add. His siblings had dragged him to too many parties only to hover and goad him along when he only wanted to sit on the fringes and occupy himself with people watching, or sitting silently, wishing for a good book to read.

He shook himself from thoughts of his overbearing but well-intentioned family, ready to get back on the task of unpacking and then finish the lecture outline for tomorrow.

~

Dean left school after his afternoon classes and went to work at Bobby’s for a few hours. It was his off night at The Roadhouse, so instead of rushing home to shower off the oil and grime before rushing back to his second job, he spent some of the extra time working on Sam’s birthday present. Bobby had given him an old junker that Dean was slowly restoring. His goal was to have the car finished for Sam’s next birthday which was still months away.

Bending over the open hood of the car, Dean quickly lost track of time. Not realizing until he felt his phone vibrate in his pocket that it was nearing evening. Wiping his hands on a shop rag, he fished the phone out of his pocket and glanced at the text from Sam.

Sammy: Dinner will be ready in 40 minutes.
After quickly cleaning up his work area, he slipped out of his overalls and scrubbed up at the shop sink. Dean watched the water run gray with grease and muck as he rubbed granular soap onto his skin. Thoughts that had been floating around the back of his mind drifted to the forefront as he was busy with the mindless task. He was thankful for the insurance money that had been left after his dad had died. It was enough that he knew he would be able to finish college and send Sam to school when the time came. But, Dean wanted to be able to fulfill Sam’s big dream of going to Stanford. For some reason the twerp had fixated on a fancy school that might as well have been a lightyear away. Other than using the insurance money to pay for college, the funeral, and settle a few small debts John had left behind, Dean refused to touch the remainder of it.

Instead, he worked for Bobby and Ellen as much as he could to pay for his and Sam’s living expenses. He picked up odd jobs now and then when he had extra time when classes weren’t in session. Over the summer he had worked for a landscaping company and during the holiday season he worked at a Christmas tree farm. He knew Sammy thought he was crazy, leaving all of that money to sit in the bank while he worked two jobs and clipped coupons to stretch his paychecks farther, but Dean refused to budge. Sam deserved the best. If that was Stanford, so be it. And Dean wasn’t going to let the kid sign his life away on student loans he would be paying on until his kids were in high school. So what if Dean lost a little sleep and their apartment was tiny? He was making it work.

Once the water ran clear, Dean quickly dried his hands, waved a goodbye to Bobby, who was working on some paperwork in the office, and jumped in his car to head home. His car, a 1967 Chevy Impala that had been his dad’s pride and joy, felt as familiar and home-like as anyplace Dean had ever known. Certainly, even more than the apartment he and Sam currently occupied. From Bobby’s, it was a short drive into town and soon, Dean was parking his baby in her parking space outside of their apartment.

He walked up the two flights of stairs, turned his key in the lock and shoved his shoulder into the door, using a little more force than usual because it had been sticking lately. He yelled, “Sammy, I’m home,” as he hung his keys on a hook by the door and shrugged out of his jacket.

Sam called back from the kitchen. Dean popped his head in to check on Sam before heading to the bathroom to shower. Sammy was sprawled in one of the rickety kitchen chairs, long, gangly limbs emphasizing that his sixteen year old frame would soon pass Dean up in height at any moment. His brown hair was just starting to flop into his eyes, Dean had been nagging him about getting a haircut, but so far Sam had just shrugged him off.

“Smells good,” Dean said, eyebrows raised in surprise. Usually, when Sam cooked, the food ended up barely recognizable. “What did you make?”

Sam looked up from the textbook he had been taking notes from, “Chicken enchiladas. They should be done soon.”

“The frozen kind?” Dean asked, astonished.

“No,” Sam replied, sounding offended. “Real ones, from scratch.”

Dean shot Sam a knowing look. “Jess helped you didn’t she?”

Sam just shrugged and looked back to his notes, a blush staining his cheeks.

Dean laughed, “I like her. That Ruby girl you’ve been bringing around makes me nervous.”
Sam rolled his eyes before glaring at Dean. “There’s nothing wrong with Ruby, Dean. She’s just going through some stuff.”

Shrugging, Dean turned into the hall to go shower, “Whatever, man. Don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

After his shower, Dean pulled on a pair of sleep pants and a worn out t-shirt. Barefoot, he walked into the kitchen. Sam had moved his homework and set the table while Dean was in the bathroom. Together, they sat down with loaded plates and stuffed their faces with enchiladas.

Another point for Jess, Dean thought, the food was amazing. Dean wished some of that cooking skill would rub off on Sam. He listened while Sam talked about his soccer game after school the next day and while Sam debated on whether or not he should try out for drama club. The fall production was Out Town this year. Dean watched his brother ramble about school and his friends, practically glowing with that precious optimism and just all around general sun-shiny niceness that was Sam Winchester. Dean was thankful at that moment for the reminder of why he was doing all of this: busting his ass with school and two jobs. Dean’s largest goal in life, at this point, was to keep Sammy happy and safe. He wanted Sam to grow into the amazing man Dean knew he would become.

When they were finished eating, Dean cleared the plates, loaded the dishwasher, and wrapped up the leftovers. Because, in the Winchester house, if you cooked you don’t have to do clean up detail. Once everything was back in its place, with the table, counters, and stovetop wiped down, Dean joined Sam to work on homework.

After a search for the poem he needed for Romantic Lit, he pulled it up on the computer screen and began to read.

Jesus, he thought to himself, could Milton have found a more depressing poem? With a weary sigh, he scrubbed his hands across his face, before he pulled a notebook nearer to him and began taking notes.
Thursday morning, Castiel looked around his lecture hall, noting the location of Dean Winchester and his red headed friend, a Ms. Charlie Bradbury, located in the first row. With a glance toward the clock, he called the room to order.

“Good morning. I hope you all had a productive week. Please pass your essays forward. I will expect your e-mailed copies by the end of the day. Then, turn your attention to the projection at the front of the room and read “She Walks In Beauty”."

As he collected the stacks of papers from those seated in the front row, Castiel glances around at his students. Most were squinting at the words on the front screen, some mouthing them to themselves, others were taking notes. Dean Winchester, he noticed, was doing none of those things. Instead, he appeared to be playing a game on his phone. Castiel narrowed his eyes before he shhok his head and moved back to the podium. He rifled through the stacks of papers, skimming the essays, trying to get a grasp on where the class stood in their comprehension.

When he came to Dean’s, he pulled it from the stack and read it in its entirety. After he was finished, he stared at the neat double spaced lines for a moment while he collected his thoughts. Once again, he was surprised by this particular student. He looked up at the class. Winchester was still playing on his phone. Irked, Castiel tugged a hand through his hair, distracted and not realizing the dishevelment he caused.

“Ms. Bradbury,” he said, because she, at least, seemed to have been paying attention. “What are your thoughts?”

She looked up at him, surprised. “About the poem?” She asked.

Castiel smiles and leaned against the podium. “Yes, your thoughts on the poem.”

Charlie glanced back up at the words being projected on the screen. “Well, it seems like whoever wrote it loved her very much. Isn’t the whole poem about how beautiful she is?”

“Anyone else,” Castiel asked the class as a whole. “Is this poem about physical beauty?”
Another student near the back chimed in, “He talks about goodness and grace, aren’t those more about inner beauty?”

Castiel smiled and pressed his hands together in front of him, “Maybe it is a combination of the two. Her dark natural beauty could be being compared to a glow from within.”

When Castiel’s gaze moved to Dean, he noticed an odd look on the other man’s face. Castiel thought the other man obviously had some thoughts about the poem, but for some reason, he was unwilling to participate in the discussion. Dean glanced up and met Castiel’s eyes,

“Mr. Winchester,” the professor asked, “do you have something to add?” Considering he hadn’t even seemed to read the subject matter in the first place, Castiel was interested in what the younger man would add.

Dean glanced at Castiel, clearly unhappy at being called upon. He was silent for a moment, jaw tense, his normally warm eyes hardened into cold chips of emerald.

“She’s dead.” He said, finally, just short of hostile.

Castiel noticed some of the other students looking to one another in confusion. Several were rereading the poem, trying to glean the meaning Dean had derived from it. He noticed Charlie looking worriedly at her friend, biting her bottom lip. Castiel had a feeling he was several pieces of a bigger puzzle.

“There are some who believe the poem was written about a relative of Byron’s after he attended her funeral, but it is not one of the more commonly held theories. Why do you interpret it that way?” Castiel asked quietly, forgetting for a moment, the room filled with students.

Dean shrugged, rubbing the back of his neck with one hand, unsure of himself, a direct contradiction of every other glimpse Castiel had had of him. Finally, he answered, “Byron said she was “at peace with all below,” to me, that always meant she was somewhere else… in heaven. Plus, the part of her beauty being “like the night” makes me think of funeral clothes.” He looked up then, tilting his head back, some semblance of arrogance entering his posture. Castiel was reminded of an actor slipping into a character before going on stage.

Dean added, “And, Byron didn’t seem to have a hard on for her, unlike other women he wrote about.”

Castiel barely restrained himself from rolling his eyes. He looked to the rest of the class, calling on a student whose hand was raised, guiding the discussion back to other student’s interpretations.

He continued with his lecture until a quick glance at the clock led him to dismiss his students. As the class began to file out, he held up a hand, halting Dean. Dean nodded, turned to his friend and said something quietly to her before she walked out.

After waiting for the last student to leave, Castiel turned to Dean, noticing for perhaps the first time the evenness of his bone structure, the golden hue from the remainder of his summer tan spread with freckles, and green eyes surrounded by a fringe of dark lashes…and his mouth…

Castiel caught the direction of his runaway thoughts and mentally shook himself, ignoring the curl of heat spreading down his spine. This is unfortunate, he thought to himself. While he often could appreciate physical beauty from an aesthetic standpoint, generally any sexual attraction Castiel felt for another person was a rare occurrence. He just wasn’t wired that way.
And, sexual attraction to a student… well, that was just something he had never thought about. He felt a confusing, conflicting series of emotions working their way through his mind. He pushed them away and focused instead on the question he had meant to ask Dean.

Blinking, he realized he had been staring dumbly, while Dean had been waiting.

“I’m really sorry,” he said quietly, feeling rather embarrassed. “I was just wondering, um, I mean, I noticed you didn’t need to read the projection today. I also read through your essay. Some of your observations were very insightful—”

Dean cut him off before he could finish the rambling train of thought. “Yeah, I already knew it.”

“From a previous course?” Castiel asked, finding himself more and more curious about the mystery before him. Something flickered behind Dean’s eyes. Castiel felt like he was watching the mask slip back over Dean’s face. Suddenly, he was the cocky kid from the Laundromat once again.

Dean obviously surveyed Castiel’s body from head to toe before he shot a coy look toward the older man. He reached out with one hand and minutely adjusted the professor’s blue tie. When he answered, his voice was pitched low. Castiel fought the shiver it elicited, but he couldn’t stop his eyes from widening and returning Dean’s stare with a shocked look from his blue eyes.

“Listen, Professor, I don’t really have time to chat right now.” Dean grinned and smoothed the tie down. Castiel could feel his fingertips trace a path from the hollow of his throat to the tip of his breastbone.

“But, maybe we could meet somewhere in the evening and talk about it. Get to know each other a little better?” He ended the question with a lift of eyebrows and a knowing smirk.

Castiel felt like every thought process he had ceased to function. Finally, he stammered, “I don’t think that would be appropriate.”

Dean leaned in a little closer, near enough that Castiel could feel his breath stir the air next to his ear. With his voice pitched even lower, he said, “We wouldn’t have to tell anyone. I can keep a secret.”

Dean took a pen and wrote a phone number on the back of a crumpled receipt he pulled from his pocket and folded it. With a wink and another smirk, he tucked the folded scrap of paper into Castiel’s pocket and walked out of the room. Castiel stared at his broad retreating shoulders, completely unsure of what he should do next.
Thank you for the amazing comments. They really kept me going this week.

Dean sat through one more lecture after lunch before driving to The Roadhouse to work the rest of the afternoon and evening waiting tables. Ash was behind the bar pulling drinks while Benny was working tables with Dean. During the lull after the dinner crowd cleared out, Benny and Dean commiserated over Professor Masters’s Advanced Fic class.

“Masters makes my papers bleed,” Benny complained.

Dean nodded as he wrapped silverware, “I know, man. She loves the red ink.” Ash walked over and tapped the countertop next to Dean, “A couple of those professor types just sat down in your section.”

“Speak of the Devil,” Benny said under his breath. Dean looked across the room and grimaced when he spotted the couple sitting at a four-top. Masters and another professor, Dean couldn’t remember his name, he only remembered suffering through his art history course his second year, were seated in his section. The guy was pretentious, British, and had a habit of wearing v-neck shirts.

Dean pasted his best ‘My Name Is Dean, How Can I Help You’ smile on his face and walked over to their table. Before he managed to say anything, Professor Masters looked over.

“We’re still waiting on someone.”

The other guy, Dean finally remembered his name, Roche, interjected, “Wait! Meg, let’s order drinks before Cassie gets here.”

Dean looked between the man and woman, before asking, “Alright, Professor Masters, what can I get for you?”

She looked up at him with a smirk, “I’m not at work, call me Meg.” Motioning to the man across from her, she continued, “And this fantastic fashion victim is Balthazar AKA Professor Roche.”

Dean nodded and gave a half smile to the other man, “Yeah, I remember, I was in your session last year.”

Meg continued, motioning to the empty seat next to Balthazar, “I think you know our friend, too.”

Dean shrugged, “I haven’t known anyone named Cassie since this girl I dated a few times in high school.” For some reason that Dean didn’t understand, Meg thought this statement was hilarious and laughed loudly. Sending her an odd look, Dean hesitated before asking, “So, what can I get you two to drink?”

“Vodka tonic for me,” Meg said. Balthazar added, “And I’ll have a bourdon neat.”
Dean nodded and walked to the bar to turn the order in to Ash. He glanced around the bar while he waited for the drink order. He noticed that the crown had thinned out and only a few of the tables were occupied. The regulars were seated on their usual stools, dipping hands into bowls of pretzels and nursing beers, while their eyes were glued to the flatscreens hanging above the bar. Tomorrow night, Friday, would be a different scene entirely. The weekend crowd consisted of mostly college kids, a live band would be playing on the stage and Dean would be lucky to get home before 3 AM instead of 11 like tonight.

Ash slid a tray with two drinks and a bowl of pretzels across the bar. With a quick thanks, Dean walked back to Meg and Balthazar’s table to deliver them. He smiled politely, feeling like he was on the outside of a private joke when Meg sent him a Cheshire cat grin after he said he would be back to get the rest of their order after the rest of their party arrived. After stopping at another table to fill his tray with empties, he was distracted thinking about why Meg was acting so oddly smug, when he turned, and narrowly avoided running into someone. A firm hand gripped his right shoulder to steady him and Dean’s train of thought abruptly ended.

If he had thought the man dressed in his professor suits, ties, and sweater vests had hit kinks Dean wasn’t even aware he had, seeing him in his street clothes was enough to cause him to swallow his tongue. The professor was wearing old jeans that hung just low enough on his hips to be intriguing, a blue plaid shirt with the sleeves rolled up his lower arms and worn open over a faded gray t-shirt. The shirt was misshapen from too many washings and hung loose at the neck, exposing a few inches of collarbone and the hollow of his clavicle. The shirt made his eyes even bluer, as did the five o’clock shadow. His hair, which had been neatly smoothed to the side during the start of class this morning, was tousled and wild, giving the impression someone had been running their fingers through it, making Dean’s fingers itch to touch the dark strands.

The two men stood, staring at one another, before Balthazar yelled across the room, “Hey, Cassie, get your ass over here.”

Dean started at the voice and the other man dropped his hand from where it had been gripping his shoulder. Dean asked, confused, “You’re Cassie?”

“Castiel.” The other man corrected. “Balthazar insists on using that ridiculous nickname. Mostly, I’m sure, because he knows how much it annoys me.”

Dean adjusted his grip on the tray of glasses and Castiel glanced down at it. With a sheepish smile, he stepped backwards, “I should let you get back to work.” He turned and Dean watched him walk across the room to join Meg and Balthazar.

“Hey, Cassie, get your ass over here.”

“Sorry,” Castiel said, looking to his friends, “I was just thinking about work.”

Meg laughed, “God, you are a shitty liar.” Balthazar snorted before tilting his head back to drain his drink, “We know what you were thinking about, Cassie.”

Castiel could feel the heat rising in his cheeks, he looked down at the wood grain of the table, tracing the lines with his fingertips.

“You’re doing it again,” Meg said, throwing a pretzel at Castiel’s face. Castiel flushed, catching himself staring, again, at the young man leaning against the bar talking to the bartender, who Castiel recognized as the desk attendant from the motel.

“Sorry,” Castiel said, looking to his friends, “I was just thinking about work.”

Meg laughed, “God, you are a shitty liar.” Balthazar snorted before tilting his head back to drain his drink, “We know what you were thinking about, Cassie.”

Castiel could feel the heat rising in his cheeks, he looked down at the wood grain of the table, tracing the lines with his fingertips.

“If you need some advice, I’m sure Balthazar could give you some. He’s one of those
professors that likes to creep on his students.”

“Oh, shut up,” Balthazar replied, “It’s only happened a few times.”

Meg rolled her eyes and added, “A year.” Castiel sighed and reached for the glass of water in front of him. He took a long drink of the cool liquid before looking over towards Balthazar.

“I thought student/professor relationships were against the rules.” He asked.

Balthazar rolled his eyes. “Of course they are, but no one actually enforces it. I mean, as long as no one draws attention to themselves, it happens all the time.”

Castiel fidgeted with the wrapped bundle of silverware in front of him. “I’m lucky to even have this job at my age. I’m not going to jeopardize it by acting untoward.”

Meg laughed, “Yeah, I forgot you are the baby of the Fine Arts department. You realize you are only a year younger than I am.”

Castiel continued. “You know what I mean, you’re thirty, I’m twenty-nine, professors our age are almost unheard of. And, we would both like to remain on the tenure track, I’m sure. I just really don’t want to ruin this opportunity.”

“Cassie, my dear, you need to lighten up.” Balthazar said.

As he finished speaking, Dean appeared at the table carrying a tray with their meals. He set everything in front of them and after checking to make sure no one needed anything else, began to walk away. Meg, reaching for the ketchup, knocked a glass over, dousing Castiel’s shirtfront with cold water and ice cubes.

Castiel jumped up with a yelp, causing Dean to turn back towards the commotion. He walked back while Meg was attempting to dab at the soaked shirt with a napkin.

“Shit, man. You are soaked.” He stated, obviously, taking in the saturated clothing. “Everything else okay?” He asked, looking at the food, making sure no one’s orders were ruined.

Castiel ineffectively wiped the shirt with a drenched napkin, “I think everything is fine. I was the only thing that got in the way.”

Dean rubbed the back of his neck and hesitated before saying, “We might have some spare uniform shirts in the employee locker room. You come back with me and we can check. Then you can at least eat your meal in dry clothes.”

Castiel looked up and smiled tentatively at Dean. “Thank you, I would appreciate that.”

Meg and Balthazar exchanged a look as Castiel followed Dean away from the table.

XXXX

Once they were in the locker room, which was really just a small room with a fridge, two tables with chairs, and old television playing a football game on mute, and a row of lockers that had been rescued from a dumpster after the high school had been renovated, Dean gestured to Castiel,

“Go ahead and strip that wet stuff off, I’ll look around and see what we have.” He began to rummage through a box he pulled off of the top of the fridge. Castiel stood uncertainly in the
middle of the room before he pulled the damp plaid off, dropping it to a pile at his feet.

Dean let out a sound of success and held up a red t-shirt emblazoned with The Roadhouse logo, “Found one.” He looked up and froze and he watched Castiel’s right arm reach behind his head and grip the collar of his wet t-shirt, pulling the sodden grey fabric up and over his head one-handed. *Another kink he didn’t know about*, Dean thought to himself. *Who knew watching someone slip off a t-shirt could be so sexy.*

Dean was still staring, watching the play of muscles under taught tanned skin, when Castiel looked up at him. As blue eyes snagged on green and held, Dean felt like something shifted in the air. Dean slid his tongue out and licked his lips, fighting down the flash of triumph as Castiel’s eyes followed the movement. Without thinking, the younger man stepped forward until he was firmly in Castiel’s space. The other man watched him, eyes wide, pupils flaring until the blue was almost a thin ring around the pools of black.

“This is a really bad idea,” Castiel said lowly, voice even more gravelly than normal.

“I know,” Dean answered right before he closed the gap between the two of them. He curled one hand around the back of Castiel’s neck, pulling him closer, before pressing their mouths together. Castiel leaned fervently into the kiss, tilting his head and licking into Dean’s mouth. He took a step backwards, Dean following, unwilling to break apart for a moment, until Castiel’s back was pressed against the door. Dean leaned his body against the other man’s, hissing into his mouth as Castiel slid his hands underneath Dean’s shirt, spreading a path of heat across his skin.

After what felt like endless minutes of exploring each other’s mouths Dean slid his lips along the edge of Castiel’s jaw and nibbled a path down the other man’s neck, stopping to scrape his teeth along the sharp jut of collarbone. Dean slid a thigh between the juncture of Castiel’s thighs, biting his lower lip at the hard line of Castiel’s arousal. Castiel lolled his head back against the door, closing his eyes and drinking in the sensation.

Dean paused and tilted his head back, “Cas, give me a second to lock the door and check my bag for a condom.”

Suddenly, at those words, Castiel felt like he had been doused in ice water again. He opened his eyes, taking in the sight before him. Dean’s hair was mussed, his lips reddened and swollen, green eyes burning with lust.

“I can’t do this,” the older man said.

Dean blinked, surprised. “Are you serious? It’ll be fine. Just let me lock the door. If Ellen finds out I’m fooling around back here again she’ll have my ass.”

Castiel shook his head as if trying to shake off a stubborn dream. He pulled away from Dean and grabbed his wet shirt off of the floor. Pulling the plaid on over his bare chest, he looked away from the astounded man.

“Do you do this often, then?” He asked as he buttoned up the wet garment.

“Do what?” Dean asked, still trying to shake off the haze fogging his brain.

Castiel gestured with one hand at the two of them, “This, back here. With people you barely know.”

Dean shrugged, once again Castiel felt like he was watching the younger man slip on another persona right in front of his eyes. Dean crossed his arms and leaned against the wall, “I’m
sorry, but about 30 seconds ago, you were just as into this as I was. And now, you are judging me? Fuck you. I’m twenty-one. So what if I want to hook up with a random attractive guy in the back room once in awhile. It doesn’t mean anything.”

Castiel finished with his shirt and looked up at Dean, there was a hint of sadness in his blue eyes. “Maybe for you it doesn’t mean anything,” he said, “but for me, it has to mean something.”

Castiel walked to the door and hesitated before his hand turned the knob, he looked over his shoulder at Dean, “I don’t know you well, but I think you deserve more than this.”

“You’re right, you don’t know me. You don’t know a single thing about me,” Dean answered, venom in his voice. “So the next time you want to act like you have a clue about my life, do me a favor and just… don’t.”

Cas swallowed and nodded stiffly, once before opening the door and walking into the direction of the bar. He made his excuses to Meg and Balthazar, feigning a sudden headache and left shortly after.

Dean stayed in the locker room for a long while, leaning against the wall, jaw tense and furious, before he felt composed enough to go back out to work and fake feeling normal again.
“Ok, what’s the deal?” Charlie asked, a few weeks later, as they were walking across campus towards Leaves after an afternoon lecture.

“What are you talking about?” Dean asked, looking ahead, as he continued walking and adjusted the strap to his messenger bag.

“You’ve been kind of a dick in Milton’s class lately. What’s up?”

Dean continued to walk, squinting into the sun as he swiveled his head to watch a car cruise by. “I just think he’s a pretentious asshole, that’s all.”

Charlie narrowly avoided getting stepped on as she stopped dead on the sidewalk. “Are you serious? You were like all nauseating heart-eyes over the guy not too long ago. What happened?”

Dean veered off to the left when the sidewalk split before it ran into a road, Charlie half-jogged to catch up.

“So what happened?” She asked.

Dean stopped in front of the entrance to Leaves. “You buying?” He asked, with a raised eyebrow.

Charlie snorted, “Only if you tell me what’s going on.”

Dean rolled his eyes and pushed the door open with his shoulder. “Fine,” he grumbled.

Once they were seated, with steaming cups between them, Dean recounted the events of the night at The Roadhouse. When he was done, Charlie sighed and shook her head softly side to side, a few strands of her short red hair slipping forward into her eyes. She brushed them back with one hand before leaning her elbow onto the table and cupping her chin in her palm.

“You’re being kind of an idiot,” she said bluntly but with affection coloring her voice.

Dean looked up, “I don’t know if I should be insulted or pissed off.”

“I know you’re Dean Winchester and you like to make everyone think you are allergic to feelings, but remember, aside from Jo and Sam, I probably know you better than anyone else on this planet, so I’m going to be honest. I’m using my one-chick flick moment allowance up for the semester. You’re making this all about you. Some people don’t have random hook-ups with strangers. There are even some people who only have sex if they have an emotional attachment to someone. You, on the other hand, seem to be the opposite.”
Dean twirled the cardboard sign perched on the table advertising a new selection of latte flavors and avoided eye contact.

Charlie raised a brow and angled her head slightly, “Think about it. When was the last time you had sex with someone who wasn’t practically a stranger. Or, even called the next day… or ever. I’m not judging at all, believe me.” Charlie smiled impishly. “I’m not the posterchild for meaningful relationships. But, even I think you deserve more than what you let yourself have. I love you like a brother, but you have issues, sweetie.”

He took a drink of his coffee and watched the ripples on the surface of his cup as he set it back down. Charlie waited a beat, and after deciding Dean wasn’t going to answer, she pushed on.

“I’m not saying there is anything wrong with y’know, “she gestured towards Dean with one hand, “the way you are living your life. But, just because someone else isn’t as cavalier about sex as you are, doesn’t make them an asshole.”

After Charlie’s little speech, Dean quickly changed the subject; ignoring the look she shot him that said she knew he was avoiding any further discussion. They exchanged offhand comments about classes and conferred about a party the next weekend they might go to, before Charlie realized the time and darted out with a quick farewell.

Once Charlie was out of sight, Dean pulled his phone out of his pocket and slipped in his earbuds. The hipster music playing on the sound system was getting on his nerves. He turned on his Metallica playlist, pulled a notebook and pen from his bag, and wrote; refusing to let his thoughts wander to the things Charlie had said.

He worked late enough, that afternoon turned into early evening. The autumn sunsets were falling earlier and earlier, and the weather was unpredictable as it often was in the fall. Dean looked up towards the window as a rumble of thunder rolled through the air. The morning had started out warm enough he had decided only wear a hoodie instead of a jacket. He had also parked all the way across campus. *Fuck*, he thought to himself as enormous raindrop began to splash on the sidewalk outside. Waiting the storm out from inside the coffee shop was out of the question, he needed to pick up Sam in half an hour from some meeting at his school. With a sigh, he shoved his things back into his bag, and walked to the door. After throwing the strap of his messenger back across his body, he pulled the hood of his sweatshirt up and dashed into the increasing downpour.

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Castiel was preparing to leave his office just as the deluge began. After donning his tan trench coat, he grabbed his briefcase and the umbrella leaning near the door before walking from his office. He had parked in one of the large lots that were set a ways behind the Fine Arts complex. While there was plenty of parking at the college, it was rarely conveniently placed.

As he left the building and walked brusquely down the sidewalk, the lights set in the iron lampposts began to flicker on. The glow created from the lights reflecting through the millions of droplets of rain pounding down around him created a haze, giving everything a softer appearance. When he made it to the parking lot, Castiel was just unlocking the door to his compact car when he heard a loud metallic clang ring through the thunder of the downpour followed by the indistinct sound of cursing. Castiel hesitated before he stepped away from his car and walked farther into the lot. He stopped abruptly when he saw Dean Winchester, standing in the rain, soaked to the skin, staring at a flat tire on the black beast of a car, while holding a tire iron in his hand.

“Can I be of some assistance,” he asked, once he was close enough to be heard over the
Dean jumped and looked at his with a shocked expression on his rain streaked face, “Where the fuck did you come from?” He yelled, startled.

Castiel took a step back and pointed in the direction of his car, “I was just getting ready to leave and I thought I heard someone in distress.”

Dean gestured towards Castiel with the tire iron, “You’re lucky I didn’t hit you with this thing. You can’t just sneak up on people like that.”

Adjusting his grip on the umbrella handle, Castiel shrugged, “I’m very sorry I startled you. Are you having some trouble?” He asked again.

Dean turned to look his car, pointing at the bad tire. “I had to walk across campus in this goddamn storm and then I saw I had a flat tire. I’ve been trying to change it but this lugnut must be freaking crossthreaded or something because I can’t get it loose. Shit,” he muttered, looking back at Castiel. “Do you know what time it is?”

Castiel glanced at the watch on his wrist, “Almost six.”

“Son of a bitch,” Dean muttered, “I’m supposed to be picking Sam up any minute.” He tossed the tire iron back into the trunk, pushing the trunk closed, before swiping the back of one arm across his face. He looked up hopefully, “You got a phone I could use? Mine died about half an hour ago.”

Castiel took enough steps nearer so that the edge of the umbrella protected Dean’s head as well as his own from the rain. “Could you hold this?” he asked. Once Dean took the umbrella handle, Castiel reached into the inner pocket of his coat and removed his phone. He slid his finger across the screen, unlocking it before holding it out to Dean.

Dean wiped his free hand on his soaked jeans before taking the phone with a small smile, “Thanks, Cas.” He quickly dialed and was soon talking to whoever Sammy was. Castiel stood awkwardly, trying to look over Dean’s shoulder and avoid eye contact while the other man had a private conversation while the two men were sharing the same small space under the shelter of the umbrella.

After a moment, Dean said goodbye and hung up the phone. “Thanks, man. I was supposed to pick up my brother from school but he said his friend’s mom can give him a ride home.”

Castiel took the phone and slid it back into his pocket. “It was no problem Dean.” The two stood in uncomfortable silence for a moment before they both began speaking at the same time.

“Thanks for the phone-“ Dean began, before Cas said, “Can I give you a ride somewhere?”

“What?” Dean asked.

Castiel motioned to the tire, “This storm isn’t supposed to let up for a few hours. Would you like a ride somewhere?”

Sighing, Dean patted his hand along the sleek side of the car. Cas thought it almost seemed like he was sending it a silent apology.
“Yeah, I’ve got to get home. I’ve got work later. I’m going to be cutting it close as it is. You really don’t mind?”

Shaking his head, Cas answered, “No, not at all. Grab your things and I’ll take you wherever you need to go.”

Dean quickly opened the door to his and grabbed his bag before following Cas back to the other man’s vehicle. “Sorry about your seats,” he said, once they were securely inside and out of the rain. “They are going to be soaked.”

After starting the engine, Castiel checked the rearview mirror and back out of the parking space, “It’s fine, Dean.”

Other than a few short directions to Dean’s place, neither man spoke during the short car ride to Dean’s apartment. Dean hesitated once Cas had parked in the empty spot near the door, unsure of what to say. “Thanks for the ride.”

Castiel looked over at Dean, face illuminated in the green glow of the dash gauges, and “It was really no problem. I was happy to help.”

The younger man smiled slightly, and Castiel could see that this was the version of Dean that wasn’t wearing any masks. For a moment, he was unguarded.

“Nice trench coat, by the way. Are you working on your Constantine cosplay?” He asked with a smile.

Castiel looked down at his clothing with a bewildered expression, “I don’t understand that reference.” Dean chuckled and shook his head, “Never mind, Cas.”

“Well, whatever. You looked pretty unreal back there, standing in the haze all backlit by the streetlights. Look up John Constantine. You’ll see what I’m talking about.” Castiel smiled back, unsure of whatever it was about this other man’s presence that made him feel like he was finally warm again. Whatever it was, Castiel was loath to leave.

Dean slid his hand to the door handle, before he could pull the door open, Castiel said in a rush of breath, “Dean, I know this is inappropriate, but would you like to have coffee sometime?”

Dean stopped as if frozen for a moment, before looking back at Castiel. Something, sadness maybe, hiding deep in the green depths of his eyes.

“I’m no good for you, Cas. I don’t think that would be a good idea.”

“Okay, Dean. I understand.” Castiel answered back, quietly.

“You really don’t, man. But really, just trust me. Thanks for the ride.”

Before Cas could say anything else, Dean was out of the car and dashing through the rain, quickly entering the building and disappearing from sight.

Castiel sat in the car, listening to the rain pound down on the roof for a long time before he finally drove home.

Dean took a scalding hot shower before work, mentally berating himself in turn for
turning Cas down and for thinking about accepting his offer. By the time he was walking back out
the door to the parking lot, where Benny was waiting to give him a ride, he had talked himself into
believing he had made the right decision. Castiel was a smart, good looking guy; a professor with
a great career ahead of him and a life full of possibilities. Charlie had been right, there wasn’t
anything wrong with wanting to know the person you were hooking up with past their first name
and what kind of drink they like. But, Dean was just a nobody with a lot of messy scars he kept
hidden on the inside. One who would probably work as a mechanic for the rest of his life, reading
stories written by authors who actually had talent, like Bradbury, Edlund, Card, and Novak, while
he filled notebooks with stories no one was ever going to read. Dean also spent every day of his
life feeling like something fundamental was broken somewhere deep inside of him.

That night at The Roadhouse, Dean was his normal cheerful self. He flirted with anyone
who was receptive, smiled and cracked jokes like nothing was weighing him down inside. If he
went home with the girl who was sitting at the end of the bar nursing a drink, and whose eyes
weren’t quite the right shade of blue, and thought about someone else while the lights were off,
well that was nobody’s business but his own.
Sorry for the long hiatus, lovely readers. Holidays and family have really played havoc on my free time. Just want to give a heads up – there is some description of depression and a depressive episode in this chapter. I based this on my own personal experiences with a family member so please forgive me if I make any mistakes or errors. That wasn’t my intention. I promise things will start looking up soon. Just some issues to get through first. As always, thank you so much for your comments, without them I don’t know where I would get the drive some days. Thanks :)

Castiel stood at the podium, watching the class as pens scratched across exam papers. The students were writing a midterm essay on the work of their choice. A few looked lost, most wore a slightly panicked expression, and then there was Dean Winchester. He appeared to be breezing through the exam, which was unsurprising, given the quality of work he turned in on a regular basis. While he had completely stopped participating in class, even going so far as to don sunglasses and prop his feet up on the chair in front of him and nap through one lecture, Castiel had only rarely been able to find fault in his work. He had quit calling on Dean during lecture two weeks after the flat tire incident. Dean had gotten so outrageous in some of his responses; Cas had decided avoiding any more potential embarrassment would be the best course of action. And then, Dean had started missing classes. His assignments were still being turned into Cas’s inbox on time, but he hadn’t attended a lecture in two weeks.

Dean looked tired and haggard. Castiel, knowing that any concern on his part would be unwelcome, knew he shouldn’t press the issue, and watched helplessly as Dean seemed to struggle.

Once all of the exams were turned in and the students had gone, Castiel gathered them into a pile and walked down the hall to the stairs to make his way to his office.

“Cassie,” he heard someone call from behind him. He turned and looked, to see Balthazar trying to catch up to him.

“Are you ready to go?” Balthazar asked, once he was next to him.

“I’m sorry?” Cas answered, bewildered. “Where are we going?”

“Did you forget, Cassie, my boy?” Balthazar steered him towards the stairs where they began to make their ascent. “I got roped into talking to a high school art club and you, my lovely friend, are going to keep me company.”

Cas turned to look at the other man with narrowed eyes, “I don’t believe this was ever mentioned before, Balthazar.”

Balthazar shrugged unapologetically and practically shoved Castiel into his office. “Maybe I forgot. Grab your coat. It’s a bit nippy out.”

After dumping the exam papers on his desk, Castiel glared at his friend while shrugging
into his coat, “Who thought it was a good idea to let you around impressionable children anyway?”

“Boggles the mind, doesn’t it.” Balthazar answered as he led the way out of the office.

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After the short introduction Balthazar gave Castiel at the beginning of his talk, Castiel quickly paced to the back of the room and proceeded to observe the group from an out of the way location next to the refreshments table. He was wishing he had been able to bring some of his exams to grade while he waited, when a voice spoke up from next to him, startling him out of his musings.

“Excuse me,” a tall boy with brown hair that seemed to have a habit of falling forward into his eyes, said as he tried to pass by Cas without touching him.

The boy grabbed a bottle of water and a few carrot sticks from the table before looking sideways at Cas.

“I think you teach my brother at the university,” he said, after a moment of careful observation.

Cas turned his head to meet the boy’s eyes. “Who is your brother?” He asked, careful to talk quietly and not interrupt Balthazar.

“Dean Winchester.” The boy said before uncapping the water bottle and taking a drink. He brushed the hair back from his face before continuing, “My name’s Sam.”

“Hello, Sam.” Castiel said, feeling like Dean’s brother pointedly coming up to him was slightly odd. “Yes, I do have Dean in one of my classes.”

Sam nodded and looked towards the front of the class where Balthazar was still speaking.

Feeling slightly awkward, Castiel attempted to make conversation. “Are you interested in art, Sam?”

Sam shrugged and turned a rueful grin in Cas’s direction. “Not especially. My friend Jess is really into photography. Also,” he said, motioning to a tall girl with blonde hair who was listening to Balthazar and a small Asian boy who appeared to be taking notes, “my friend Kevin joined because his mom thought it would look good on his college applications. I kind of got talked into joining.”

Cas nodded, unsure of where to go with this conversation. Before he could give it much thought, Sam turned abruptly and asked quietly, “I know you have a lot of students, but you gave Dean a ride home that one time so you might be able to answer this. Has he been acting different?”

Looking into Sam’s hazel eyes, much more serious and adult than most people his age, Cas thought carefully before answering.

“I don’t know Dean very well, Sam. But, he has seemed more run down lately. I assumed it was exam stress since midterms are upon us right now.”

One corner of Sam’s mouth flinched downward before he seemed to force a quick, brittle smile. “You’re probably right.” He said. “It was really nice meeting you Mr. Milton.” The boy nodded once and walked back to his seat with his friends before Cas had a chance to respond.
Once Balthazar was finally done talking, the students trickled out slowly. Many stopped by the table at the back to grab a snack before heading out. Cas watched as Sam, Kevin and Jess walked out into the hallway. Balthazar was still talking to the art club sponsor at the front of the room. After waiting patiently for another ten minutes, Castiel realized Balthazar’s ulterior motives for talking to the high school group.

“You can head back, Cas.” Balthazar said after he crossed the room, once the sponsor started to tidy up from the meeting.

“How are you going to get back to your car?” Castiel asked with irritation, wishing he had known this information earlier.

With a leer and a wink, Balthazar inclined his chin in the direction of the teacher at the front of the room, who was pulling on her coat. “Heather has agreed to have dinner with me so we could discuss our teaching methods.”

Castiel rolled his eyes so hard it was a wonder it wasn’t audible. “I’m sure you’ll be discussing a lot of ‘technique,’ Balthazar.” He replied, curling his index and middle fingers in agitated parenthesis.

“Have a nice night, Cassie,” Balthazar called as Castiel slung his coat over his arm and stormed out into the hallway.

He pushed his way through the heavy glass double doors and walked into the frigid autumn air. The sun had long since gone down, night falling earlier and earlier as the season progressed. Before he could make his way to his car, Cas noticed two shapes standing near a bike rack at the edge of the parking lot. Sam Winchester was huddled miserably into a brown Carhart jacket, hands thrust into his pockets and a bookbag slumped at his feet; while Kevin was bundled in a parka, gloves, scarf, and some sort of fuzzy stocking cap with a ball at the top.

“Do you boys have a ride?” Castiel asked, worried about the boys standing out in the unseasonably cold temperatures for very long.

Sam and Kevin exchanged a look before Sam responded. “My brother is supposed to be on his way. He isn’t answering his cell phone, but he never forgets to pick me up. If he wasn’t coming he would have called.”

“What about you?” Cas asks, looking at Kevin.

“Dean’s supposed to give me a ride home too, my mom’s out of town on business.”

Narrowing his eyes and glancing between his car and the boys, Castiel hovers uncertainly. A strange man shouldn’t really offer to give two teenage boys a ride home, but Dean and Cas were at the least acquaintances, so maybe it would be permissible.

“Why don’t we wait a few more minutes? If Dean doesn’t show up, I will either call you boys a cab or give you a ride home.”

Kevin shrugs while Sam gives Castiel a measuring look.

After a moment, Sam nodded his head. “Alright. Thanks, Mr. Milton.”

“You may call me Castiel, Sam…or Cas.” He answered. Sam gave a tight smile and turned his gaze to the driveway.
When Sam stormed into the apartment, Dean was curled on the sofa, covered in a blanket, television muttering in the background. The front door slamming open sounded like a gunshot, startling Dean from his cocooned slumber. He blinked blearily and looked around in a daze before taking in the nuclear level bitch face Sam was sending him as he shrugged out of his coat and practically flung his bookbag across the entryway.

“What the hell, Dean?” Sam asked, voice raised and obviously upset.

Dean rubbed sleep from his eyes and fumbled for his cell phone lying on the coffee table. He glanced at the screen. After he realized the time and saw the multiple missed calls and texts from Sam, he leaned forward and buried his face in his hands.

“Shit, Sammy. I’m sorry. I don’t know—“

Same cut him off before he could continue. “Are you still taking your meds?”

Dean straightened up and glared at him, voice rising in anger as he answered. “What kind of a question is that?”

“Look around, Dean.” Sam said, gesturing to the apartment. Where, normally Dean was a bit of a neat freak. Being raised by a former marine can rub off on a person. Dean grew up with hospital corners, organizing canned goods and food boxes labels alphabetical and facing out, minimal clutter and daily tidying. Within the past few months, Sam had noticed Dean’s normal habits dropping off. Laundry was piled in the living rooms, dishes constantly in the sink, and the entire situation was so unlike Dean, that Sam was worried. It wasn’t that Sam minded cleaning and helping out, he didn’t mind at all. And, he had been trying to keep the apartment clean but the total lack of care and effort on Dean’s part was completely out of character.

“You aren’t acting like yourself. Jo and Charlie are both worried about you. I’ve talked to Ellen and Bobby; they think something is wrong too.” Sam’s voice rose and grew more brittle as he continued. “You’ve missed shifts at The Roadhouse and at the shop and half the time I don’t know where you are sleeping at night. I even talked to your professor today, Cas, and he’s noticed.”

Dean’s jaw tightened angrily before he asked, “How did you meet Cas?”

“He gave me and Kevin a ride home today after you didn’t show up.” Sam shot back.

Dean stood and stomped angrily to his room, before he slammed his door he shouted back to Sam, “I don’t need a fucking babysitter, Sam. Give me some space.”

Sam stood and scowled down the empty hallway at the closed door, before he turned and walked into the kitchen. He opened the door to the cabinet above the microwave and grabbed the two amber bottles inside and dumped the first onto the kitchen table. With a heavy sigh, he began counting pills.

“I’m calling Dr. Barnes, tomorrow,” Sam said later, after quietly opening Dean’s door and taking in the huddled form on the bed.

“Jesus fucking Christ, Sam. I’m taking my meds. Leave me the hell alone,” Dean replied, his voice sounding too weighed down and beaten to be angry.
“I know you are, but obviously they aren’t working.” Sam walked the few steps into the room and dropped down on the edge of Dean’s bed.

“Fine. Call her. But I’m not going back to therapy so tell her to leave out her spiel about Dr. Moseley.”

“You can tell her that at your appointment.” Sam answered, hesitating before placing a hand on Dean’s back. He rubbed softly between Dean’s shoulder blades, remembering when Dean would do the same for him when he was sick or hurting when they were younger.

Dean was quiet for a long time. The only sound in the darkened room their quiet breathing, the muffled sound of a television in the next apartment and the occasional car passing outside.

“I’m so tired, Sam.” Dean’s voice hitches, a broken sound, buried in the pillow beneath his head. “I’m just fucking exhausted.”

Sam nods even though he knows Dean can’t see it. “I’m here, Dean. I’m here.”

Sam waited until Dean’s shoulders quit shaking and his breathing evened out. Once he knew his brother had managed to fall asleep, he returned to the living room and kitchen to straighten up and make dinner before trying to finish his homework without getting distracted by his thoughts.
Dean knew better than to try and bullshit Dr. Barnes, or Pam as she insisted he call her. She could always see right through any posturing he would try. So here he was, sitting in the chair in front of her desk, answering the questions she was asking with a bored look on his face, just waiting for the exam to be over so he could go back home and crawl back in his bed. But he couldn’t, because Sam was out in the lobby waiting, making sure he went to his appointment and he would drag him to the pharmacy afterwards and make sure Dean picked up his new meds, and watch him swallow his pills every day, twice a day, until Dean began to feel like he was living in a fish bowl. He’d been there before, done that.

“Have you lost interest or pleasure in doing things?” Pam asked, pen posed above the pad of paper on her desk. Pam might have been a doctor with several degrees and a hundred dollar pen, but she dressed her trim figure in jeans and band t-shirts and had framed concert posters hanging on her office walls between shelves packed with books and the occasional chunk of crystal or geode.

Dean rolled his eyes before answering, “I don’t know, Pam. I’ve got a lot on my plate right now.”

Pam stared him down. “I saw the Impala in the parking lot this morning.”

Dean’s felt a flush rise on his cheeks. Pam had talked to him about the car before at previous visits and knew that Dean treated Baby more like a child than a car. “I’ve been really tied up with things at home. There hasn’t been a lot of time for the car.”

“It’s filthy, Dean. If that doesn’t say something about your mental state, I don’t know what does.”

Shaking her head, Pam looked at the papers in front of her and said, “I’m marking that as a yes.” Then she asked, “Are you sleeping too much, having trouble falling asleep or staying asleep?”

“Do we have to go through this list every time?” he asked, rubbing his eyes with the heels of his hands.

“You know these are important questions to establish a baseline. Now, how are you sleeping?” Pam asked, watching him closely.

Heaving a huge sign, Dean sank farther into the chair. “I’m tired all the time. Right now I just want to go home and go back to bed.”

Pam continued to ask questions, with Dean answering them truthfully. Finally, after what felt like an hour of pointless back and forth, Pam flipped through a few pages of Dean’s records. She looked up and said, “So here’s what we are going to do. I’m going to adjust your meds. You know the drill, you are going to feel like crap for seven to ten days until your body regulates. You might experience headaches, nausea, dry mouth, sleep pattern changes, loss of appetite, but those should pass after a few days. If you are still having trouble after a week, call me. We might need to try something else. I want to see you back in two weeks. And, I’m making you an appointment with Ms. Moseley. I will know if you don’t show up. Don’t get on my bad side, Winchester.”

With a sharp smile, Pam slid a prescription slip across the desk and stood up to walk with Dean back out to the waiting room.
“Don’t forget. Be back here in two weeks and I’ll have Becky call you later with the time for Missouri’s appointment.”

Dean scowled as he and Sam walked out to the car.

Waiting in the lobby of Ms. Moseley’s office, Dean paged through an old cooking magazine. The first week on the new medication had been rough. The nausea and loss of appetite had been stronger than ever before for the first few days, leaving Dean with even less energy than before. Now, seven days later, he felt, if not one hundred percent, at least more human. He was sleeping a normal amount, eating three meals a day, and going to work and school was a tiny bit easier. He wasn’t better. He didn’t know if he would ever feel ‘better,’ but there was some improvement.

“Hello, Dean. How are you feelin’, honey?” Missouri asked as she opened the door between the earth toned schemed lobby and her office. Dean stood and walked into the room, torn between the relief he always felt in Missouri’s presence and a sense of failure for being back here again.

He waited until he was settled in one of the matching comfortable chairs next to a large picture window in Missouri’s office.

“I’m starting to adjust to the new meds Pam put me on. Eating and sleeping better now.” Dean answered, fidgeting with the hem of his flannel shirt and avoiding eye contact.

Missouri smoothed her bright blue floral patterned skirt as she sat in the chair matching Dean’s. Her bracelets clinked together, and Dean looked up into chocolate brown eyes that radiated wisdom and kindness. Something about Missouri always made Dean feel like he was in a safe space. Catching his glance, Missouri smiled widely, bright white smile contrasting sharply with dark brown skin, causing soft wrinkles to form around the corners of her eyes.

“Well, that’s a start then,” she said. “Why don’t you tell me how things have been going? Pam told me you’ve been having a rough time.”

Dean had come to the appointment with every intention of withholding everything but the bare facts. But, as always when around Missouri, the floodgates opened. With an ease of familiarity, Dean began to talk and talk. He poured everything he had been feeling and withholding from Sam, Charlie, Jo, Bobby, everyone important in his life; people he hadn’t wanted to burden with his problems. He spoke of the pressure from raising Sam, going to college, his jobs. Somehow he even brought Castiel into the discussion. After his long ramble, he looked up to see Missouri watching him, a small kind smile on her face. Dean finished with a final statement, “I feel like I let everyone down. I always mess everything up. I just don’t know why these people put up with me. I feel like I’m waiting for them to see through me and realize how broken I am and leave. Because, eventually, they will leave me.”

Leaning forward and patting his hand, Missouri nodded her head, “Let’s see what we can do to help, honey.”

That night as he sat down to dinner, Sam watched him swallow his meds and then asked, “How was your visit with Ms. Moseley today?”

Dean sighed and slumped down in his chair, staring at the square of lasagna on his plate.
“It was fine Sam.”

“Are you going to go back?” Sam asked timidly.

Dean looked up and caught the worried expression in Sam’s hazel eyes. Somewhere, along the line, Sam had started to think Dean was one of his responsibilities. Dean wasn’t sure how he felt about that. After a moment, Dean nodded. He picked up his fork and sliced a corner off of the lasagna.

“I’ll go back.”

“Good.” Sam smiled, blindingly. Dean looked back down at his plate and nodded again, more firmly this time, trying to ignore the pricking sensation behind his eyes and the lump in his throat.
Sorry this chapter is so late getting out. I like to update every week, but my daughter has had some health issues and writing has been on the back burner. I have a three day weekend coming up - Hopefully I can make it up to you all. Thank you so much for reading. Your comments really keep me going. Also, a HUGE thanks to Gaelicblue, who beta read this chapter for me. I really appreciate the help. You are awesome :)

Charlie slid a to-go coffee cup onto Dean’s desk as she walked past to take her own seat. Dean looked over at her and mouthed “thank you” with a tired grin before bringing the steaming cup up to his mouth and taking a tentative sip. The past month of visits with Missouri, trips to see Pam to “check in” and medication adjustments had left Dean feeling like he was on a roller coaster ride. This week had been pretty great, actually. Dean felt on the upswing for the majority of the time, until this morning. He had woken up dragging and feeling like the proverbial black cloud was hanging over his head. But, he had dragged his sorry ass out of bed, taken a shower and even choked down some breakfast with his meds. He knew that days like this, days where hopelessness crawled under his skin and threatened to pull him down again, were expected while he was still pulling his way through the mess of depression, but it didn’t make him feel like any less of a failure while he struggled through the day. It was hard to think of anything other than how much he wanted to go back home and curl up in his bed in his dark room.

Dean caught himself before slipping deeper into his funk and shook his head. He took another sip of coffee and looked at the clock at the front of the room. Cas was running late. With a small frown, he turned to Charlie.

“Where do you think Milton is?” he asked quietly.

Charlie shrugged and looked up from her iPad, “Not sure. We would have gotten an email if class had been cancelled.”

Five more minutes passed and several of the other students were grumbling in their seats and making noises about leaving when Cas burst through the doors. He looked more harried than usual. His hair was mussed like he had been running his hands through it in agitation. He wore a white button up shirt, dark suit jacket and trousers, and a blue tie that looked like it was backwards. With an unassuming grin at the class, he dropped his briefcase and a stack of papers on the desk at the front of the room before waving one hand in apology.

“I’m sorry, class. I had a meeting that ran over.” Cas slid the suit jacket off and tossed it next to his briefcase, before unbuttoning the cuffs of his shirt and rolling the sleeves up toned forearms. As he was looking down while working on his sleeves, a lock of dark hair slid forward and curled over one blue eye. Dean’s fingers itched to push it back.

Cas looked up, straight at Dean, and smiled a sort of quiet, close-lipped smile. A shock of something, some primal sense of awareness, zinged down Dean’s spine. He didn’t even realize it, but he smiled back.

Something about Cas’s smile seemed to send a wave of warmth through Dean. Maybe it
was the genuine goodness that seemed to radiate from the guy, or maybe the fact that he hadn’t treated Dean like a quick fuck when he was offered the chance, whatever is was, they mutually seemed to catch themselves staring and quickly looked away. Dean stared down at his coffee cup, while Cas stood behind the lectern and began to speak.

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While a girl in the back of the classroom gushed about the romance in Jane Eyre between Jane and Rochester, Dean doodled in the margins of his notebook and halfway listened. Finally, he couldn’t take anymore and turned to look at the back of the class, trying to find the speaker.

“Are you serious, right now?” he asked disbelievingly. “You really think this is an example of a great love story?”

The girl, taken aback by Dean’s vehemence, nodded uncertainly. “Well…yes,” she answered.

“Do you have something to add, Mr. Winchester?” Cas asked from the front of the class. Dean turned to look at the professor, unable to stop himself from rolling his eyes.

“Okay. I’m sorry, but Rochester was an asshole. He led Jane on throughout the whole book, was going to marry another chick, practically married Jane and then you find out he’s already married and has locked his mentally ill wife up in the attic. I’m sorry but the whole thing doesn’t scream romance to me.”

Charlie, like the huge dork she is, reached over and fist bumped Dean once he stopped speaking. Castiel appeared to be fighting back a grin as he looked out upon the class.

“Mr. Winchester has a good point. Does anyone else have anything to add?” Several students raised their hands and Cas called on one. Dean sat quietly and listened to the class discussion, sneaking an occasional quick look at the dark-headed professor directing the conversation. During one such glance, Dean looked up to find Cas grinning directly at him, and bobbed his pen in surprise causing it to roll down the tiered steps and on toward the front of the room. While two students debated the merits of Rochester’s character, Cas leaned over and grabbed the pen, before tossing it to Dean with a quick wink. Dean caught it and looked down at his coffee cup, chewing on his bottom lip and fighting back a grin.

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Dean was walking down the sidewalk pulling his ear buds out of his pocket, when he heard a familiar voice call out from behind him.

“I saw that, y’know!”

Dean turned to look at Charlie, who was jogging up behind him, with a sly grin on her face.

“What are you talking about?” he asked, looking down to plug the cord into his phone’s headphone port.

“The flirty smiling and winking that just happened during Lit. Don’t deny it Dean, I know you know what I’m talking about.” Charlie cackled as bumped her shoulder into Dean’s arm while they walked down the sidewalk.

Dean rolled his eyes, pretending to search through his playlists. “He wasn’t flirting with me, Charlie. After the way I acted the last few times I was alone with the guy, I’m pretty sure he
Thinks I’m insane.”

Charlie just snatched his phone and scrolled through his songlist. She selected one and yanked the headphone cord out. “Don’t Stop Believin” began blaring from the phone’s speakers. Dean bumped her with his elbow, snatching his phone back. “You are such nerd.”

Charlie hugged his arm and leaned her head against his shoulder as they walked along. “I’m not the one with Journey on my phone.”

Later, when they were sitting in a cracked vinyl booth in the diner near the Fine Arts buildings, Dean dipped a fry in ketchup and debated the contents of the pie case that they had walked by on the way to their seats. Charlie was tapping away at her phone. She looked up and asked,

“Jo wants to know if you are working tonight.”

Dean shrugged, internally deciding on pecan, before he answered, “I’m working over at Bobby’s for a couple of hours but I should be home around 6:30.”

Charlie nodded and began tapping away again.

“Jo says she is coming over for dinner.”

Dean nodded. He took a sip of his soda and asked, “You want to come over too?”

“Depends on whose turn it is to cook. Last time Sam made spaghetti it was a big congealed glob of noodles and burned tomato sauce,” Charlie said, stealing a fry from Dean’s plate.

“My turn. Barbecued chicken,” he answered with an eyebrow wiggle.

“Um, hells yeah I’ll be there.” Charlie opened her mouth to say something else, but quickly got distracted by something behind Dean’s shoulder. She quickly grabbed her phone and coat, stopping to throw a few bucks on the tabletop before she turned to Dean. “I’ve gotta head out, but I’ll see you later. Don’t look now, but Professor Milton just walked in. Order some pie. I’ll tell him you want some company for dessert.”

Dean tried to call Charlie back with an angry stage whisper, but she darted away with a smirk, stopping to say something to Cas before she walked out the door. Whatever she said, caused a pleasantly surprised expression to move across his face before he looked in Dean’s direction. Cas raised his eyebrows with a questioning look. Dean froze for a moment, unsure of what to do next. Finally, he smiled sheepishly and rubbed the back of his neck before he gestured toward Charlie’s abandoned bench with a nod. Cas walked over and slid in the seat across from Dean with a small, shy smile.

“Hello, Dean.”
Cas opened his mouth to say something, but before he could utter a word, Dean asked in a rush, “What exactly is going on here… between us?”

Folding his hands before him on the checked paper placemat, Cas narrowed his eyes, studying Dean momentarily before answering. “Look, I think we can both agree that there is something elemental here, between us. But at the moment, I’m your professor and you are my student. So, right now we are going to eat pie and maybe have some conversation.”

Dean nodded and stretched one leg out across the booth, letting one jean clad leg brush up against Cas’s underneath the table. He raised an eyebrow and shot a cocky grin across the table, “This is just a teacher student relationship then?”

Maybe it should have felt awkward, but it didn’t. Cas slid into the booth across from Dean, looked into slightly sheepish green eyes, and smiled before saying, “So, I hear the pie is good here.”

Dean answered with a small smile, “The pecan is awesome.”

Cas shrugged out of his coat before reaching for the laminated card listing the pie flavors. He studied the list of desserts with raised eyebrows, while Dean surreptitiously took in Cas’s appearance. He was still wearing the suit from earlier, backwards tie and all. A waiter approached, notepad in hand, and asked for their orders.

“I’ll have the pecan,” Dean said. Cas looked up at the waiter and added, “And I’ll try the apple honey crumble with a cup of coffee.”

As the waiter walked away, Cas tapped the dessert card on the tabletop three times before slipping it back behind the metal napkin holder. “I take it you aren’t the greatest fan of Jane Eyre,” he finally said after a moment.

Dean shrugged and leaned against the back of the booth, forearms still resting casually on the tabletop in front of him. Cas chuckled and stood up to slip out of his suit jacket, folding it neatly and laying it over the back of the booth bench. “I tend to agree with your opinion that Rochester was an ass. I hope you don’t mind, but I just want to get a little more comfortable.”
Then he sat down and rolled his sleeves up to his elbows as he did in class earlier. Dean watched him silently, pressing his palms against the tabletop, fighting any instinct to reach out and touch. When Cas slipped his hands up to his tie, quickly unknotting it and sliding it off, Dean swallowed hard and looked towards the window. He looked back and noticed Cas had unbuttoned the top button of his collar and was now studying the regular menu that had been leaning against the condiment station.

“I’ll have to try to come here for lunch sometime. I love a good burger,” Cas said offhandedly.

“The bacon cheeseburger is good,” Dean commented.

Cas opened his mouth to say something, but before he could utter a word, Dean asked in a rush, “What exactly is going on here… between us?”

Folding his hands before him on the checked paper placemat, Cas narrowed his eyes, studying Dean momentarily before answering. “Look, I think we can both agree that there is something elemental here, between us. But at the moment, I’m your professor and you are my student. So, right now we are going to eat pie and maybe have some conversation.”

Dean nodded and stretched one leg out across the booth, letting one jean clad leg brush up against Cas’s underneath the table. He raised an eyebrow and shot a cocky grin across the table, “This is just a teacher student relationship then?”

Cas began to answer, but was interrupted by two plates of pie and a cup of coffee being plunked down between them. Instead, he sat up a little straighter, moving his leg just enough to withdraw contact with Dean’s. He poured cream and sugar into his coffee, concentrating on the task, before stirring it slowly and looking back up to Dean.

“Why don’t we try friendship first and get to know each other a little better.” Cas finally answered. “After all, you will only be my student for a few more weeks. Let’s see what becomes of us after the semester ends.” He tilted his head slightly, studying Dean’s reaction to his words. Dean watched him for a moment, wariness on his face, before the look in his eyes softened and he nodded with a smile.

“Alright, Cas. Let’s try that.”

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Later that night, Dean sat on the tiny patio off of the back of their apartment warding off the cold with his leather jacket and a cup of coffee, chicken sizzling on the tiny Weber grill next to him, his thoughts drifted back to the diner that afternoon. They had talked between bites of pie and sips of coffee, each sharing small details about their lives. Cas described his large family and his overbearing mother. Dean talked about Sam, Jo, Bobby, and Ellen and the odd extended family of collected friends. Cas mentioned briefly that his father had died when he was a young boy. Dean nodded and stared down at his hands when he explained that his own father had died last year, leaving him and Sam behind in the shock of his unexpected passing.

Dean had realized with a jolt just how much he had been sharing with a near stranger, and quickly changed the subject to favorite books and movies, completely shocked when Cas explained that he didn’t have a television and had never seen Dr. Sexy. Cas had smiled widely back at him, nose wrinkling and small crinkles appearing at the corners of his eyes, and Dean realized there were a lot of little things that he liked about Cas. Small things that added up to make the idea of a relationship, which until now had seemed like a terrifying idea, a little less frightening.
Dean jolted when Sam tapped on the sliding glass door before inching it open so he could talk and still avoid letting as little of the heated apartment air escape as possible.

“Jo is here. She said Charlie is going to be here in five minutes.”

Dean nodded and lifted the lid to the grill, after setting down his mug. “Sounds good. Chicken ought to be done soon.” He flipped the meat with the tongs hanging from the hook on the grill before grabbing a bowl of barbecue sauce and the basting brush he had brought out earlier.

Sam hesitated before he asked, quietly, “Did you take your meds yet?”

With a sigh, Dean glared up at him. “Yes, Florence Nightingale, I did. Now, can you stick the bread in the oven to warm up? The salad is already made up in the fridge.”

Sam nodded and went back into the apartment, sliding the door closed behind him. Dean coated the chicken one more time with the tangy sauce before replacing the lid. Then, he pushed the door open with his elbow and carried the bowl and brush, along with his coffee, into the apartment and dumped them in the sink. He washed his hands and picked the platter up off the counter and walked back towards the patio. Just as he was getting ready to open the glass door again, there was a knock at the apartment’s front door. Rolling his eyes at Sam and Jo, who were sprawled across the sofa, both too focused on Mario Kart to notice the sound. He walked across the small apartment to the door to see Charlie’s excited face.

Before he could get in a word, she was bouncing on her heels, “So, how did the little rendezvous go this afternoon, Prince Charming?”

Dean furrowed his eyebrows and jerked his chin towards Sam and Jo sitting on the couch, trying to get the point across without speaking that he would really appreciate it if Charlie would just shut up now. Charlie, never one to take a hint, brushed past him and began shedding her layers of winter outerwear and continued to babble as she made her way further into the apartment.

“I’m not gonna lie,” she said as she dumped her stuff onto the floor behind the couch, “I peeked in the window while you two were sitting there, talking, and you looked adorable. I really think you owe it to me to name your first child after me.”

Sam, finally overhearing enough of the conversation to realize this might be something he wanted to pay attention to, paused the game and swiveled his head to look back at Dean. Jo, mirrored his movement a fraction of a second later, and Dean found himself stuck in the middle of three sets of inquiring eyes.

“I’ve gotta get the chicken,” he muttered, walking back to the balcony.

Sam looked from Jo to Charlie before asking, “Did Dean have a date?”

Jo, snorted and pushed at Sam’s shoulder, “You make it sound like he never goes out.”

Charlie walked around the couch and sank down onto the rug, “We know he goes out, Jo. But, dating is a horse of another color entirely.”

Dean walked back into the apartment with the plate of chicken and foil wrapped potatoes. “It wasn’t a date,” he said, as he walked to the kitchen. “If you three are done gossiping, get in here and eat.”

As they followed him into the kitchen and began to load up their plates, Sam asked, “At least tell me who it was.”
Dean meticulously sliced into his baked potato and loaded it with butter and sour cream, having decided avoidance was the best tactic for the day. Charlie caught Sam’s eye and mouthed. “Professor Milton.”

Sam made a considering face and nodded agreeably before setting to work on his own meal. After a moment, he looked up at Dean with a smirk on his face, “I really think you ought to name your first kid after me.”

Jo, not to be outdone in the annoying little sibling department, added, “If you guys use a surrogate, you should use his stuff. He has really pretty eyes.”


Smiling back cheekily, Charlie shrugs. “Hey, you know you love me.”
Sitting with Meg and Balthazar in the staff lounge during finals week, Cas stirred the cup of watered down coffee in front of him and listened to the two banter back and forth. Today was the Romantic Lit final. Once grades were posted, Dean would no longer be his student. There had been a handful of short conversations between classes, two quick runs for coffee, and one long conversation during office hours between them over the past few weeks. Everything had remained strictly platonic even if there had been an underlying thread of tension running between the two of them.

“What are you mooning about, Cassie?” Balthazar asked, nudging Cas’s spoon away from his coffee cup.

“Really,” Meg continued, “you’ve been stirring that coffee for ten minutes.”

Cas looked from Meg’s face to Balthazar’s, “I’m just looking forward to the semester break.” He tried to answer nonchalantly.

Something in his expression must have given him away because Meg perked up like a hound on the hunt.

No way,” she said, with narrowed eyes. “I know that look.” She slid a glance to Balthazar, “He met someone.”

Balthazar leaned back in the chair he was sitting on and spread an arm across the back of Meg’s chair. “Do tell, Cassie. Secrets don’t make friends.”

Meg looked disdainfully at the arm just brushing her shoulders. “If you don’t move your arm in the next ten seconds, I’m stabbing it with my fork.”

Rolling his eyes, Balthazar dropped his arm onto the table, “So prickly, Meg. Aren’t you curious about Cassie’s new beau?”

With a short, delicate snort, Meg leaned forward onto steepled hands and directed her sharp stare at Cas. “I already know who it is.”

Cas took a drink of the awful coffee and avoided eye contact.

“How do you know who it is and I don’t? I’m really offended here, Cassie.” Balthazar gestured expansively with his hands, leaving the perfect opening for Meg to elbow him just below the rib cage.

“Would you shut up. You would know who it was if you thought about it for a minute.”
“Oh good lord. You aren’t still hung up on that student?” Balthazar asked once he was able to draw a proper breath. “I thought you would have worked that pretty boy out of your system by now.”

Cas frowned before he answered, anger tightening his lean frame and drawing his posture higher. “I don’t want to ‘work’ Dean out of my system, Balthazar.”

Balthazar leaned across the table as if he was imparting a bit of top secret knowledge, “Listen to me my friend, I’ve picked up on a few things during my extracurricular activities—” Meg cut him off before he could continue.

“What he means is he’s been trolling in a lot of bars.”

“What I mean,” Balthazar began again, “is that I’ve been at the Roadhouse enough to know that that Winchester kid isn’t the relationship type, Cassie. He’s the cheap hotel room, car in the parking lot, back alley kind of type. Fuck him if you must. Please do, actually. We all know you need to get laid, but don’t go into this with your heart on your sleeve and all wrapped up in your Crusading Prince Charming complex. It won’t end well.”

Cas set his coffee cup down very precisely and quickly stood, fighting every instinct that was pouring through him to plow his fist into the other man’s face. He brushed his hands across the front of his trousers and walked away without a word.

Balthazar sent a hurt look towards Meg. “What did I say?” He asked.

Meg shoved his shoulder and stood up. “You’re an asshole, Balthazar,” she shot over her shoulder as she walked away, leaving Balthazar looking quite bewildered and alone at the table.

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“Sammy!” Dean yelled as he entered the apartment. “Sammy, you home?”

“In here.” Dean could hear Sam’s muffled voice calling back from the back bedroom. After kicking off his shoes by the door, dropping his keys on the table, and shrugging out of his coat, Dean walked to the rear of the apartment.

“Hey,” Dean said, leaning against Sam’s door, “I’m going out tonight. Do you have any plans?”

Sam, sprawled out on his back on his bed with his laptop propped up on his legs, looked over to where Dean was standing. “I think some of us are meeting up later for a movie or something.”

“You need a ride?” Dean asked.

“If you could drop me off at Jess’s that would be great. Everyone is meeting up there and then we will take the bus or something.”

“Alright, I’m going to go get cleaned up.” Dean said, pushing away from the doorframe and walking towards his room.

Later, after Dean had showered and changed into a light grey henley with a dark green button up and his best jeans, he stood staring at the bathroom mirror talking to himself. “Normal people go
on dates. Its just dinner, you’ve had coffee with the guy a few times, you can handle dinner.”

“Who are you talking to, Dean?” Sam asked through the door.

“Goddammit, Sammy. Give me a minute. I’m almost ready.” Dean bellowed through the door. He could hear a muffled snort of laughter as Sam walked away from the bathroom.

When he finally opened the door and stepped into the living room, Sam raised his eyebrows. “Why are you dressed up?” He asked.

Dean looked down at his clothes, “What? I’m wearing jeans.”

Sam rolled his eyes and gestured, “There isn’t a band logo on your shirt, no holes in your jeans, and I don’t see an oil stain anywhere. In the land of Dean Winchester, you are dressed up.” Sam took a few steps closer and looked at Dean in amazement. “Are you wearing hair product?” Sam sniffed, “Dude, are you wearing cologne?”

Dean glared back at his brother and stormed away towards his coat, “Shut up, Sam. Who says hair product anyway?”

“Wait, wait, wait!” Sam called after Dean’s retreating back. “Do you have a date?”

Dean shoved his feet into his boots and grumbled under his breath about annoying siblings as Sam continued his gleeful mocking.

“Seriously, are you going on a date? I’ve never seen you actually put any effort into anything like this before. Don’t you usually just pull a Flynn Rider on these people and they just sort of fall over themselves?”

Dean crossed his arms and waited for Sam to stop talking. “If you are done giggling like a twelve year old girl now, we need to get going. I’m going to be late. Do you want a ride or not?”

Sam narrowed his eyes and studied Dean’s face thoughtfully. Finally, he said, “Let me grab my coat,” and turned towards his room.

When they were finally in the Impala and on their way across town towards Jess’s house, Sam slapped his leg loudly, finally putting two and two together. “Oh my god, you are going out with your teacher.”

Dean’s knuckles whitened as he gripped the steering wheel harder. “Shut up, Sammy.”

Sam turned and looked at Dean with a big dopey grin on his face. “Do Charlie and Jo know?”

When Dean didn’t answer or look away from the road, Sam’s smile got wider. “Can I tell them? Charlie will want to hack into the security feed at whatever restaurant you guys are going to and spy.”

Dean sent Sam a side-eyed glance, “No, they don’t know. No one does. This isn’t a big deal so if you tell anyone about it, you are going to end up with Nair in your shampoo bottle again.”

“Whatever, this is awesome. This is like a huge step for you, Dean. You need to tell Missouri about this.”

“Son of a bitch, Sam. This isn’t a breakthrough therapy moment. Jesus. Just chill out.”

Sam brushes his hair away from his face and looks out of the window, not even trying to hide his
grin, “Whatever you say, Dean.”
The Date

Chapter Summary

"You have a lot of books," Dean said, obviously, and kicked himself mentally even as the words left his mouth. "Well..." Cas answered with eyebrows raised and a sardonic tilt to his lips, "I am a lit professor. It kind of comes with the territory." Dean rolled his eyes and waved a hand towards the shelves. "I meant, not very many of them are romantic lit. It looks like you read everything." "I do read everything. Most of the texts I use for work are on the shelves in my office. These..." Cas reached out a hand and slowly ran his fingers along the spines of the books affectionately, “are just for me.”

Chapter Notes

I DIDN"T FORGET ABOUT YOU ALL!! I just suck. So here is the new chapter. Thank you so much for reading and having patience with me. Comments are always welcome. :) 

After pulling into a parking spot and looking at Cas's apartment building, Dean double checked the address written on the back of an old receipt before he looked back up at the building. The design was clean, simple and screamed expensive, doing nothing to settle the niggling feeling he was trying to shove down that whispered Cas was too good for him. He took a deep breath and opened his door, comforted by the familiar creak the Impala made. He could do this.

He walked through the lobby, mentally comparing the pristine paint on the walls and glossy sheen to the floor to the dingy hallway with one flickering fluorescent light that led to his and Sammy's apartment. He rode the elevator to the top floor, because not only did Cas live in one of the nicer buildings in town, he lived in one of the nicest apartments. Dean shook his head ruefully as he caught himself humming Metallica under his breath. He could do this, he told himself once again.

He rang the doorbell and waited.

And waited...

Until he could hear rapidly approaching footsteps and the door opened quickly. His heart began beating in doubletime as he took in the man in front of him.

Cas stood in the doorway with an apologetic grin on his face, hair still damp and curling from a
shower. He was wearing dark jeans that looked like he had tugged them on quickly and hadn't had time to fasten them and a blueberry colored shirt that he’d thrown on but only partially buttoned.

"I'm so sorry, Dean. Give me just a minute to finish getting ready. I had a meeting that ran over and I'm running behind." Cas backed up quickly and nimbly began buttoning up his shirt. He made a gesture towards the apartment. "Come in."

Dean took a step into the apartment, covertly taking a breath as he stepped close to Cas and taking in the scent of whatever shower stuff the other man used. Cas smiled before turning to walk deeper into the apartment.

"Make yourself at home while I finish," he called over his shoulder before disappearing through a doorway.

Dean shoved his hands into his pockets and slowly spun in a circle, taking in the spacious room. The apartment was open with a shared dining area, kitchen and living room floor plan showcasing brick walls, wide windows and glossy hardwood floors. There were four doors set into the far wall. Dean assumed they led to bedrooms and an office or something similar. On the wall that would be the interior of the apartment building, the brick was lined with rows and rows of shelves all filled with books. Paperbacks, hardbacks, leatherbound antiques, textbooks - all lined up in rows. The topics varied from professional periodicals, history, fiction, biographies, fantasy, sci-fi, young adult, modern classics...Moving closer, Dean could see the shelves were filled with anything and everything. There appeared to be an organizational system in place, but with a cursory glance, he couldn't begin to figure it out.

He was sliding a battered copy of “A Moveable Feast” back into its place, when he heard footsteps behind him. Cas walked in from one of the back rooms fully dressed. His hair was neatly combed but the shirt was still open at the collar and he had thrown a deep chocolate blazer over it.

"You have a lot of books," Dean said, obviously, and kicked himself mentally even as the words left his mouth.

"Well..." Cas answered with eyebrows raised and a sardonic tilt to his lips, "I am a lit professor. It kind of comes with the territory."

Dean rolled his eyes and waved a hand towards the shelves. "I meant, not very many of them are romantic lit. It looks like you read everything."

"I do read everything. Most of the texts I use for work are on the shelves in my office. These..." Cas reached out a hand and slowly ran his fingers along the spines of the books affectionately, “are just for me."

He looked up from the books and met Dean’s eyes, holding the contact for a split second longer than comfort would usually allow. Then, with a smile, he asked, “Ready to go?"

Dean nodded and looked at the bookshelves one last time. Castiel caught the longing look directed at the shelves and chuckled, “Maybe some other night we can stay in and you can explore them.”

Flushing at the promise of another evening together, Dean smiled almost shyly. “Making plans already, Cas?” He asked with false bravado.

Cas just shook his head and grabbed Dean’s hand, tugging him towards the door. “Let’s get out of here. I’m starving.”

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When Castiel had asked Dean out, he had asked if Dean had any preference for their meal. Dean had answered with, “Whatever, as long as I can drive.”

They ended up at a small pizza place with hand-tossed dough, sauce made in house, and cold beer. While they waited on their order, Dean quizzed Cas over the Cosmo-style date compatibility quiz printed on one of the placemats; then smiled a big goofy smile after he tallied up the results. Cas, in turn, read the pop trivia quiz on his place mat to Dean, who got every question right, while Cas failed miserably.

“I guess this is what happens when you don’t have a TV.” Cas joked, watching as astonishment flooded Dean’s face.

“You seriously don’t have a TV?” Dean asked, baffled.

Cas leaned back in the booth and looked back at the other man, “I believe I’ve mentioned this before.”

“Well, yeah. But I thought you were joking. How do you watch movies?”

Cas shrugged sheepishly. “I don’t really watch movies or television. I read, listen to music. My writing keeps me busy.”

“So wait…” Dean continues, amazed. “You’ve read the Harry Potter books but you haven’t seen the movies.

Answering with a slow shake of his head, Cas takes another sip of his beer.

Grinning boyishly, Dean tears the end off of his straw wrapper and blows into the straw, causing the remainder of the wrapper to hit Cas in the face. “You are in luck. I’ve got the whole set on DVD. We’ll have to watch them sometime.”

Cas smiled and traced a drop of condensation off of his glass before looking back up to Dean face, “I would like that, Dean.”

The pizza came shortly after. Between eating slices of cheesy, saucy goodness and washing it down with cold beer, Cas and Dean talked about books and writing. Dean started to make a mental list of all of the movies he needed to show Cas. Cas explained a paper he was working on that he hoped to publish in the near future. At some point, Cas’s calf had ended up pressed firmly against Dean’s under the table. Neither man made any attempt to move away from the contact. Dean tentatively told Cas about a manuscript he had been working on, off and on, for the last year. Someday, Dean thought to himself, I might even let Cas read it.

Before they knew it, all that was left of the pizza were a few lonely pizza crusts and the beer pitcher was empty. Cas looked around, shocked, that the restaurant had emptied out, leaving only a few waitstaff tidying up for the next day’s opening.

Dean looked at his phone’s face, “I didn’t realize how late it had gotten.”

“So you ready to go?” Cas asked.

After tossing a few bills on the table, Cas stood and shrugged back into his coat, Dean did the same. They walked out into the cold winter evening together, the back of Cas’s hand occasionally brushing against the back of Dean’s, sending sparks up his arm. Could he spin Cas around when they reached the car; kiss his way into the other man’s mouth out there in the cold night air, press him against the cold metal door of the Impala and cover his body with his own? Dean wanted
Castiel. Had wanted him for months now. Suddenly, with the night almost over, Dean felt almost light headed with expectation.

When they reached the car, though, Cas merely stood patiently next to the door and quickly slid into the seat after Dean unlocked it. He reached across the seat and unlocked Dean’s door as Dean jogged around the front of the hood. Dean kicked himself mentally for the missed opportunity. He was soon distracted when Cas asked about a song playing on the radio.

“Wait a minute. You don’t know this either? What kind of place did you grow up in, Cas? This is The Eagles...the song is called “Seven Bridges Road.” He looked disbelievingly across the bench seat.

Cas nodded his head in time with the beat, a small, quiet smile on his face before he turned to look out the window. “I like it.”

Dean shook his head and backed out of the parking spot, fighting back a smile.

They were soon back to Cas’s apartment building, Dean pulled into a spot. Before he could turn off the ignition, Cas turned and slid across the seat. Once he was practically pressed against Dean’s side, he spoke, the graveled tone sending fingers of anticipation up Dean’s spine. “I had a really nice time tonight, Dean.” He said very seriously.

Dean looked back into the eyes that had been occupying his mind with increasing frequency lately and bit the inside of his bottom lip. In the dark interior of the car, Cas’s pupils were huge, almost swallowing the surrounding rim of blue.

“Me too, Cas.” He managed to say, feeling tongue tied and not at all like the Dean Winchester that could go to the bar any night of the week and charm his way into someone’s pants.

Cas tilted his head slightly, looking deeply into Dean’s eyes, leaving him with the feeling that he was searching his soul for something that Dean didn’t even understand yet. Then, Dean watched, mesmerized as Cas cupped his face in his hands and pulled Dean’s mouth to his.

It wasn’t anything like when they had kissed before. This was soft and gentle, causing an ache somewhere in Dean’s chest. Cas angled his head a fraction and using the thumb of one hand, pressed against Dean’s lower jaw, gently coaxing his mouth open. As his tongue swept into Dean’s mouth, the other hand slid around his neck to the back of Dean’s head; Cas’s fingers toying with the short strands.

There wasn’t any urgency, this wasn’t a heated exchange, just a tenderness Dean hadn’t experienced since he didn’t know when. Finally, after endless moments or a few seconds that ended too soon, Dean wasn’t sure which, Cas pulled away, placing a small amount of distance between their faces.

“That should have been our first kiss.” He kissed him once more. “Goodnight, Dean.”

And with that, Cas quickly opened the door and left the car, leaving behind a stunned man who was realizing for the first time that he might not have a fraction of a clue as to what he was doing.

“What the fuck just happened?” Dean asked himself under his breath.
Chapter Summary

“It’s been five dates, Charlie. Five.” Dean said into his phone as it was wedged between his shoulder and ear, while he sorted through the mail on the counter. “I’m just saying, Dean, this is like, serious. Right?” Charlie’s asked, the sound of traffic in the background interfering with her voice coming over the line. “Jesus, Charlie. I don’t know. I’m kind of out of my element here.”

Chapter Notes

Ok. I'm really sorry guys. I've been at an absolute loss when it comes to writing lately. I finally got the whole story outlined and I knew where everything was headed and I got a really negative comment on something. I have had a really hard time feeling like I could finish this story. I honestly thought about setting it aside for awhile but I hate to do that. So, here is a new chapter. I hope you all like it. If you do, please comment. I love to hear from you all. Happy reading :)

Three Weeks Later

The crowd of movie goers had left the theatre and pulled their cars from the parking lot or climbed into their cabs, driving away into the night. Dean and Castiel had been the last to trail out of the darkened screening room, quietly talking about the movie and clasping hands between them. They stopped under the old fashioned marquee blazing with glowing filament bulbs. Dean watched the rolling lights highlight Cas's face as he animatedly extolled a scene from the film and without warning, the realization hit that he was dangerously close to falling over the edge into unknown territory with his feelings for this man.

Instead of allowing himself to follow that line of thinking any further, Dean reached forward and grabbed the lapels of Cas's coat, tugging him closer.

Cas looked up at him, surprise flickering across his face in the split second before Dean closed the distance between them and covered his mouth with his own. What started out as a quick kiss to cover Dean's inner thoughts, turned into a rush of passion. Exploring mouths and hands evolving into a blur of sensation. When Cas finally pulled back a fraction to stare into Dean's eyes, a questioning look on his face, lips red and swollen, pupils blown, hair disheveled and just curling over one brow, he asked, "Everything alright, Dean?"

Dean looked back as the crisp winter air caused their breath to spiral around them in puffs of fog. Without realizing, he had pressed Cas against a brick wall outside of the theatre. Dean brushed his mouth tenderly against Cas's once more, before stepping away. With a half smile and
a quick nod, he answered, "Perfect, Cas. Things are perfect."

They joined hands once more and walked to the car. Dean drove Cas back to his apartment, once again he had refused to ride in Cas’s car, which he referred to as a “glorified wind-up toy.”

He pulled the car into a parking spot and placed it in park, before turning on the seat to look at Cas. The other man had already reached to unfasten his seat belt and quickly slid across the bench seat. Before Dean reach out for him, Cas was in his arms, practically in his lap. Dean found his arms filled with a tall, lanky bundle of limbs that pressed Dean back against the seat with the insistence of his hands and clever mouth. Long minutes passed filled with the rustle of two clothed bodies brushing against one another, the sounds of two wet mouths sliding together and then moving apart as one would explore the hard edge the other’s jawline or curve of their throat, and the rush of rapid breathing.

When Cas finally pulled back, Dean looked up at him with lust blurred eyes, distractedly noticing the way the glare of the parking lot’s security lamps back lit his silhouette, giving him the appearance of being surrounded by a halo. Dean angled forward in his seat, attempting to close the distance between their bodies once more, before he was interrupted by Cas’s hands gently pushing against his shoulders, holding him back.

“Dean,” Cas said in a voice made rough with latent passion, “I wanted to ask…”

At his hesitation, Dean replied quickly, thinking that this is the invitation to accompany Cas up to his apartment that he had been waiting for, “Yes, Cas,” while reaching for his door handle to open the door.

Cas continued, “I’ve been thinking… Christmas is in a few days and I’ll be going to visit family for the holiday. I was hoping you and I and Sam could get together before I leave. I would like to meet Sam, formally instead of the way we met before. We could have dinner at my apartment? I’m not much of a cook, but I could put something together.”

Dean stared back into Cas’s hopeful eyes, stunned at the unexpected question.

“Sure, Cas. That sounds great… I would love for you to meet Sammy.”

Cas smiled quickly and leaned back into Dean’s space, sliding his long-fingered hands to the sides of Dean’s jaw and guiding their mouths back together. Dean let out a hum of appreciation and Cas’s tongue dipped inside his mouth and slid against his own. Too quickly, Cas broke the kiss and leaned his forehead against Dean’s. Dean could feel him take a shaky breath before he gruffly whispered, “Goodnight, Dean,” and slid out of the passenger side door.

Dean watched in a daze as the other man slid into the apartment building. As the door closed behind Cas’s retreating back, Dean leaned into the steering wheel and muttered, “What the hell is going on?”

XXXX

“It’s been five dates, Charlie. Five.” Dean said into his phone as it was wedged between his shoulder and ear, while he sorted through the mail on the counter.
“I’m just saying, Dean, this is like, serious. Right?” Charlie’s asked, the sound of traffic in the background interfering with her voice coming over the line.

“Jesus, Charlie. I don’t know. I’m kind of out of my element here.”

Charlie didn’t say anything for a moment. If it wasn’t for the occasional bit of background noise, Dean would have thought the call had ended.

Finally, Charlie said, "He actually brought up having you and Sam over for dinner? That’s like the equivalent of meeting the parents.”

“What?” Dean closed the cabinet and turned to lean against the countertop. “That is serious.”

“How did you not see this coming?” She asked.

Dean swiped a hand over his mouth and chin before looking up at the water spots on the ceiling. “I’ve never done this before, Charlie.” Dean hissed.

“What? Been in a real, grown-up relationship? Yeah, I know.” He could hear the sounds of traffic abruptly end signaling Charlie had probably entered her apartment building. “Are you working tonight?”

Dean glanced at the clock on the stove. “No, as soon as Sam gets home we are driving over to Cas’s place.”

Charlie called out to someone on the other end of the line, he could hear a muffled conversation before she said, “Sorry, Pam just walked past. She says Hi.”

Another noise, this time the thud of a door shutting, them Charlie asks, So does this mean you two finally...y’know.” Dean didn’t need to be in the same room as his friend to know that the question was accompanied by an awkward hand gesture.

“Nope.”

Dean also didn’t need to be in the same room as Charlie to hear the muffled snort and she attempted not to laugh at his response.

“I’m sorry.” She said, finally, laughter still brightening her tone, “I’m not laughing at you. You just sound so miffed by the whole situation.”

Dean slouched into the living room and threw himself onto the couch. “Shut up.”

“No, seriously. Just, have you talked to him about it? I can tell something is bothering you.” Charlie asked, tone much more serious.

“What the hell do you want me to say to him Charlie? I don’t want to sound like an asshole.”

Dean heard Charlie sigh heavily into the phone. “You should be comfortable talking to Cas about this sort of thing. He is your boyfriend or...whatever.”

Dean groaned and absently flicked the tv on with the remote. “I don’t even know what we are to each other, Charlie. Going out, spending time with him, it’s fantastic. And I haven’t made out just for the fun of making out for years...if I ever did. But maybe it’s more than that? For all I know he thinks I’m a huge man whore based on the first impressions he had of me. I wouldn’t blame him if he did. Maybe that’s why we haven't moved past making out in the car like teenagers.”
“Dean Winchester if I was in the same room with you right now I would smack you. I’ve seen you two together. Cas thinks you are amazing. It’s written all over his face whenever he looks at you. Don’t you dare go around putting yourself down because you are awesome.” Charlie paused for an indignant breath before adding, “And there is nothing wrong with a person being in charge of their own sexuality and enjoying themselves with another consenting adult. You’ve done nothing to be ashamed of.”

Dean shrugged and glared at an old episode of Roseanne playing on the TV. “He’s better than me, Charlie. In a lot of ways. I just keep thinking he’s going to realize it soon and let me down easy.”

“First of all, shut up. Second of all, he wants to get to know your brother - your family, better. So that doesn’t say to me that he is trying to let you out of anything. If anything…” Charlie paused and made an excited sound. “Oh my god…” she said. “I know what he is doing.”

“What?” Dean asked.

“He’s wooing you.”

Exasperatedly, he groaned. “Charlie, shut up.”

“No, seriously!” She exclaimed. “Think about it. He teaches Romantic Lit. All of those good manners probably soaked into his psyche. He’s courting you! You have your very own Mr. Darcy.”

Dean rolled his eyes so hard, Charlie should have been able to hear it through the phone. “Yeah, you’ve lost your mind.”

“No, its perfect. He’s all quiet and well-mannered. You have your very own regency era suiter.

“I’m hanging up now.” Dean said. He could hear Charlie cackling with glee as he ended the call. His friends were ridiculous.

Before he could dwell on Charlie’s words any longer, he could hear Sam’s key turning in the door. As he walked into the apartment, heading towards his room to dump his things, Sam called, “Let me change my clothes, then I’ll be ready to go to Cas’s.”

“Alright, Sammy.” Dean answered. Then, Dean’s phone buzzed. He looked down at the text message on the screen.

Charlie: I was wrong. Cas would be more like Edward Ferrars.

Dean threw the phone to the other end of the couch, swearing to ignore it for the rest of the night. Then, it buzzed again. He checked the text before he could talk himself out of it.

Charlie: WAIT! NO! HE’S CAPTAIN WENTWORTH
Dean laughed to himself upon reading the last message. He thought to himself that Cas would be more like Edmund Bertram. Instead of responding to Charlie’s text, he walked to his room and started to get ready for the evening with a grin on his face.
The Dinner

Chapter Notes

I cannot apologize enough for the huge gap in updates for this fic. I feel awful. For anyone who is still following and reads this, thank you for your patience.

Dinner had turned out pretty perfect… at least in Dean’s mind. Sam and Cas had talked about transformative literature and dead languages while Dean had listened with a smile on his face. Watching Castiel and Sam fangirl about something so nerdy made Dean incredibly happy. It was a huge relief that the most important person in his life and the person who was rapidly coming up on second place to that title got along so well. If he discounted the random Austen themed memes Charlie kept sending to his phone, he would consider the evening to have been a huge success.

Once dinner was over, Cas had chased Dean and Sam out of the kitchen, refusing any offers of help to clean up. Dean had snuck back into the kitchen while Sam was drooling over Cas’s bookcases. He leaned against the doorway, enjoying the way the other man’s pants had tightened as he was bent over the dishwasher. Dean let out a low whistle, causing Cas to straighten up quickly. He looked back at Dean and smiled before rolling his eyes.

“What did you do with Sam?” He asked, as he leaned back against the counter.

Dean didn’t try to fight the smirk that was pulling against the corner of his mouth as he slowly walked from the doorway into the room.

“He’s having a nerd-gasm over your library in there, Professor.”

Cas folded his arms across his front, his eyelashes flickering slightly downward as he watched Dean advance across the kitchen. Other than the quick flick of his tongue darting out to whet his lower lip Cas remained motionless, even as Dean caged him against the counter with one hand planted on the countertop on either side of his waist. Dean tilted his head to the side and leaned down to pepper barely there kisses along the side of Cas’s neck, while Cas attempted to remain motionless.

“Dean,” he said, attempting to remain stoic, “I really think we should refrain while Sam is just in the other room.”

Dean spoke softly into Cas’s ear, keeping his mouth close enough that the warmth of his breath would send prickles of sensation of the other man’s skin, “You’ve never seen Sam around books. He’ll stay in there for hours until I drag him away.”

He punctuated the end of his sentence with a quick nip to the sensitive lobe before chuckling softly and working his way down to Cas’s collarbone. “C’mon Teach, steal a couple minutes here with me.”

Two heartbeats later, Dean found their positions reversed with pinned against the cabinets and Cas leaning against him holding him in place with his body. The kitchen light backlit the older man's silhouette, leaving his features in shadows as he leaned his head towards Dean’s, capturing his mouth in a rough kiss. His hands shot out and circled Dean's wrists, preventing the younger man
from reaching out to touch while Cas plundered his mouth. Just as Dean was fighting back a moan, Cas drew back.

"Inappropriate timing, Dean." He whispered before releasing his hold on Dean's body and turning to walk into the other room. Dean watched his retreat while fighting a rueful grin.

After Dean pulled himself back together, he followed Cas into the living area. Sam was typing out a text on his phone and looked up as he heard Dean enter the room.

"Hey Dean, do you mind if I go to the movies with Kevin and Jess and some of the others? Kevin's mom already said she would drive and Mrs. Moore is going to take us back home after."

Dean shrugged, trying to hide his disappointment that the evening at Cas's was going to end earlier than planned.

"No that's fine. We probably better head back to the apartment soon though, so Ms. Tran can pick you up."

Sam shot a quick, sneaky look between Cas and Dean and said." Actually, I already told Kevin we weren't at home. They are just going to pick me up here...if that's ok, Cas?"

Cas shot an indecipherable look in Dean's direction before turning back so Sam. "No, Sam. That is perfectly acceptable."

After a moment's hesitation, Cas asked, "Would you like dessert before you leave, Sam? I bought a pie since I know your brother is so fond of it."

Sam glanced at his phone once more, thumbs flying over the screen as he responded once more.

"Jess just texted me, actually. They are out in front of the building so I'm going to have to go right now."

Dean raised his eyebrows at his brother's behavior with the sneaking suspicion he was being set up. He wondered how long Sam had been planning this little scene.

Sam said a quick goodbye to Cas and darted towards the entryway. Before he could reach the door, Dean called out.

"Hey, Sammy. Wait."

He followed him to the door and opened it, gesturing for Sam to follow him out.

"What are you doing?" Dean hissed.

Sam smirked, dimples breaking through with a vengeance, "I'm doing you a favor. I'm staying at Kevin's tonight so you don't have to worry about being home when I get dropped off."

Sam tugged the zipper of his jacket up.

"Really, you probably don't have to worry about going home at all tonight." He said with a grin before turning and walking down the hall.

Dean leaned back against huge closed door to Cas's apartment and let his head fall back into the wood with a dull thud. He fought back a fleeting sensation of panic, thought racing through his mind. Because, while Dean had been talking a good game in the kitchen earlier, he knew Cas wouldn't let things go any further while Sam was around. And, while Dean could handle a casual
encounter with a blink of an eye, this thing with Cas mattered more than any other relationship he had ever been a part of. Deep down, Dean believed he was a fuck up. Moving his relationship with Cas past the physical level terrified him. Only because he knew that being with Cas would break down every defensive wall he had, walls that had already been crumbling for weeks. Being with Cas would leave Dean more exposed and vulnerable than he had ever been. And there would be no going back. But, maybe all of this worry was for no reason, Dean thought to himself, he and Cas had been moving at a snail’s pace. Maybe tonight wouldn’t be any different.

Dean pressed the back of his head into the door and took a deep breath. Then, he opened his eyes and turned the handle. Walking back into the kitchen, Dean smiled as he saw Cas placing two golden triangles of pie, ruby red cherries spilling from between layers of flaky crust, on simple white plates, at their places at the table.

Cas looked up with a quiet smile.

“Would you like to stay, Dean?” He asked.

Dean looked back as he took his seat, slightly confused.

“Of course I want to stay, Cas. You ever know me to turn down pie?”

Dean lifted a forkful of the pie to his mouth and almost choked as Cas answered in a huskier version of the rough voice he had grown accustomed to.

“I meant stay the night, Dean.”
Chapter Summary

The room was dark, except for the thin watery light from streetlights sneaking around the edges of the curtains and everything else was bathed in the lambent light of the fire. Cas had fallen asleep some time ago, in the middle of sleepily talking to Dean about his family’s plans for the holidays. Dean had watched his eyes grow heavy and his blinks grow longer until his voice sleepily faded away.

Chapter Notes

ok. Couple of things 1) I stole something from The Big Theory. Its easy to spot and I'm not that clever. 2) Thank you for your patience. Things have been weird lately and the words just haven't been coming but I'm almost in the home stretch with this one. 3) Don't be mad about the last bit. You know I'm a sucker for happy endings.

UPDATED AS OF 11/16/15

Normally, Dean would have savored every bite of pie. But before he knew it, his fork scraped on the empty plate and all that was left was a smear of red filling and a few crumbs. The ball of nerves and anxiety in his gut had occupied his mind enough that he had eaten the entire slice on autopilot. Dean looked across the table to Cas, who was still eating quietly. Cas had apparently been watching Dean while he ate, because when Dean's eyes caught his, Cas quirked the corner of his mouth in a small smile and stood to clear their plates.

Dean remained seated at the table uncertainly trying to decide if he should follow Cas into the kitchen, wait until he came back, walk back to the bedroom and start undressing. He felt like the knowledge of years of accumulated one night stands had abandoned him. While he is still sorting through ideas in his head, trying to decide on the best move, and feeling like a clueless high school kid freaking out about losing their virginity, Cas appeared back in the kitchen doorway. He leaned against the doorway, watching Dean closely, the slightest hint of concern in his eyes.

“Dean, when I invited you to stay…” He paused to measure his words. “I don’t want you to think there is any obligation. I would rather the timing be right than to have you feel like you were doing something you aren’t ready for.”

Dean stood and slowly pushed his chair under the table. Then, he turned and made his way across the room until he was within touching distance of Cas. Dean lowered his head and rubbed the back of his neck roughly before looking Cas in the eyes.

“I don’t know what’s wrong with me,” he admitted sheepishly. “I mean, I’ve obviously done this before.” After a moment, he adds “A lot,” under his breath, before continuing. “Like, an hour ago, I was trying to put the moves on you in the kitchen, with my brother a few rooms over. And now, that we have the all clear, I’m like a virgin on prom night. Second guessing myself over every move.”
Cas fought a grin and bit his lower lip, looking down at the floor until he was sure he wasn’t going to break into a smile. Finally, he looked up at Dean through the screen of his lashes and reached out, taking Dean’s hand in his. He squeezed the calloused fingers gently, before leaning in to softly kiss the other man’s lips. When he pulled back, he looked deeply into Dean’s eyes, taking in the confusion and uncertainty in their green depths, before saying quietly, “I finally bought a TV. Why don’t we go watch a movie in the other room?”

XXX

Later, after Indiana Jones had finished saving the world, Cas was leaning against one arm of the couch, with Dean on his other side, absently running his fingers through the short strands of hair at the base of Dean’s neck.

“I don’t understand this movie,” Cas said, a puzzled look on his face.

Dean turned his head and leaned back a bit so that he could see the expression on Cas’s face in the blue-white light of the television screen. “What do you mean? Indiana Jones is awesome.”

“Well, just that his entire role in the movie is pointless.” He answered, still frowning as the musical score played over the credits.

Dean scooted away from Cas enough that he could turn his body and pull one leg up, bent at the knee, onto the couch, while stretching an arm across the back, allowing his fingertips to brush the back of Cas’s neck. “He’s the hero of the movie. What don’t you understand?”

Cas pressed his back against the couch cushions a little more, encouraging Dean to gently run his fingers up and down the back of his neck as they talk, “Maybe. But, if you think about it, his entire role in the plot is pointless. Without him, the Nazi’s would have opened the Ark and killed themselves anyway and would have probably failed in their endeavor more quickly. Really, he was just a plot device to stretch the story out longer.”

Dean had a feeling he resembled a fish out of water as he listened to one of his most beloved fictional characters be brutally reduced to a plot device. Finally, he said, “I’m almost afraid to let you watch the rest of the movies.”

Laughing almost silently, Cas leaned his head back against the couch and closed his eyes. “Just consider it payback for ruining Jane Eyre for me.”

Dean bit his lower lip and studied Cas as he rested against the cushions. With his head tilted back, Dean couldn’t help but remember one of the first glimpses he’d had of the other man while they were both in the laundromat late that night. Even then, the long line of the other man’s throat had tempted him. His hair was tamer tonight, instead of the flyaway mess of that first night, it was still mostly brushed over to the side. Suddenly Dean had the strongest urge to mess it up. His earlier nerves long faded, Dean slid across the couch slowly, swinging one leg over Cas’s body until he was straddling Cas’s thighs. Cas opened his eyes sleepily, catching Dean’s gaze in wide pools of calm blue.

“This is okay,” Dean whispered as he leaned forward, unsure if he was asking a question or stating his feelings. Cas nodded almost imperceptibly, carefully watching Dean’s expression. Dean curled the fingers of his right hand around the back of Cas’s neck, feeling the silky brush of strands of dark hair against his work roughened fingertips. Leaning forward at the slight pressure, Cas met Dean’s mouth in a heartbeat.

At first the slide of mouths, was gentle, almost testing. Even though it was nowhere near the first
time they had kissed, there was a fragility about the moment, that they both seemed to be trying to preserve. Dean tilted back a fraction and looked into Cas’s eyes before a tiny quicksilver grin shot across his face and he leaned back into the other man. This time, he pressed harder and faster; enjoying the blaze of heat that shot through his nerves. Cas leaned his upper body closer and wrapped his arms around Dean’s waist, pulling his closer. Dean tilted his head to the side and licked his way into the warm heat of Cas’s mouth; gasping as Cas retaliated with a quick nip to his bottom lip, before he licked the sting away, and dived back into the kiss.

Long minutes passed where the only sounds were soft inhalations and the rasp of clothing rustling against upholstery. It wasn’t until Dean’s hands had slid under Cas’s shirt and he was trying to slide Cas’s leather belt out of its loops that Cas broke away and tilted back enough to study Dean’s face.

“Are you sure about this?” He asked.

Dean nodded once, firmly and without any hesitation. “Absolutely.”

“Let’s go to my bedroom.”

XXX

As soon as they were across the doorway, they each started divesting the other of their clothing. There was a brief struggle with a shirt sleeve that wasn’t unbuttoned getting stuck on Cas’s wrist, but with a rapid stream of profanity on Dean’s part and a quiet laugh from Cas, the situation was quickly resolved. Then, they were finally skin to skin. Wrapped up in each other, reluctant to remove their hands and mouths from the other’s body, there was a stumble as Cas slowly guided Dean backwards toward the bed. This time Cas was the source of profanity and Dean was the one with the chuckle. Then, before he could quit laughing, Dean was falling backwards onto the soft, forgiving mattress with Cas landing on top of him. Cas braced his weight on his elbows on either side of Dean’s head, lining up every inch of skin from his neck down against Dean’s, and smiling wickedly down at the other man before he tilted his face towards Dean’s body and traced his collarbone with his tongue. Dean would later deny the whine he wasn’t able to keep from escaping his throat.

Cas nipped the point of his collarbone then laced the spot with his tongue before sliding down Dean’s body, leaving a trail of damp kisses. Dean squeezed his eyes shut and pressed the back of his head deeper into the pillow, fighting to keep his body from arching into the sensation. Cas slid his hands over Dean's chest and torso, trailing down slowly until he stopped right at his hips. Dean could feel the hot puffs of breath feathering over his belly, underneath his belly button. He finally opened his eyes to look down. The bedroom fireplace was the only light in the room, sending flickers of light across the bed, causing the rest of the shadows around the room to deepen. Cas was looking up at him, watching his reaction in the firelight. The shadow of his beard appeared darker, his eyes wider and deeper above the hollows of his cheekbones. He grinned wickedly up at Dean before he slid down a little farther on the bed and, without breaking eye contact, pressed the flat of his tongue against the underside of Dean’s cock, arching a brow as he slowly traces his length from root to tip. Dean moaned and dug his heels into the mattress, squeezing his eyes shut again as sensation flickered through every nerve in his body. He choked on a moan as Cas swallowed him down, encasing his cock in tight wet heat. Endless moments later, he snapped his eyes open when Cas abruptly stopped the amazing ministrations of his mouth

“Cas, fuck… Why did you stop?” Dean groaned.

Cas crawled back up his body and lined their pelvises up, rocking his hips against Dean’s, letting their lengths slide together in a slow drag of sensation. Dean couldn't help but dig his fingers into
the firm planes of Cas’s back, pulling him closer. Cas studied his face for a moment, sucking his plush lower lip into his mouth and worrying it slightly with his teeth. He leaned forward and slid their mouths together, plundering Dean’s mouth with his tongue, rocking his hips faster, sliding his hands up Dean’s shoulders and neck, until his fingers were laced into the short strands of his hair. He slid his mouth the side, trailing his lips across Dean’s cheekbone until his mouth was hovering right over his ear.

“I want to be in you, Dean,” he said voice hoarse and low.

Dean blinked, face flushed, eyes wide, lips spit slicked and red from friction, before he smiled almost bashfully, “I kinda thought that was the whole point of this, Cas.”

Cas leaned over to rummage through the nightstand. He quickly tossed a foil packet and a bottle of lube next to them on the bed, before bracketing Dean’s face with his elbows once more and languidly dipping his face closer, taking Dean’s mouth with his. After another soul wrecking kiss, Dean rolls his hips upwards, into Cas’s and tilts his head to the side, breaking the contact of their mouths.

“Cas, I swear to god, if you don't hurry up I'm going to lose my mind.” With a dark chuckle that sent vibrations through Dean’s chest and a rakish grin that made his heart skip a beat, Cas grabbed the lube and unsnapped the lid, coating his fingers generously. Dean quickly made to roll over, but Cas stopped him with a firm hand on his shoulder.

“I want to see you, Dean.”

Dean flushed deeper, and bit his lower lip, averting his eyes to look over Cas’s shoulder. “I've never done it like this before, Cas.”

“What do you mean?” Cas asked, pausing, aware that Dean’s body, a moment ago with muscles coiled in anticipation and passion, had tightened in what seemed like anxiety.

Dean spoke again, almost too quietly for Cas to hear, “Never face to face, with another guy before.”

Cas’s eyes softened before he leaned to nibble Dean’s jawline, trailing his mouth down his neck then journeying back to his lips again before leaning back.

“If I were to live for a thousand years, I would belong to you for all of them.”

All of the tension drained from Dean’s body as he fought a laugh, “Did you just quote a young adult novel to me?”

Cas grinned as he moved down Dean’s body, nudging one of Dean’s knees up over his shoulder, once he was in position, the finger coated with lube slowly slid across Dean’s perenium, trailing back to circle around his hole.

“Don't be a literary snob, Dean.” He reprimanded gently, before slowly breaching the tight ring of muscle. He peppered kisses across Dean’s thighs and hipbones as he slowly worked him open. When Dean was practically writhing underneath him, muttering curses and adoring phrases equally under his breath, Cas finally decided he was ready. He broke away from Dean, biting back a grin as Dean grabbed for him, he quickly tore open the condom and rolled it over himself. Then, he coated himself with lube and moved back between Dean’s thighs. He nudged them farther apart and lined himself up, preparing to slide, finally, into the man he loved. He ran his gaze over Dean’s flushed body, the smooth muscles and long limbs all perfectly knitted together to form this
amazing specimen of a man. The flush running over his chest and neck up to his cheeks caused the freckles that dusted the entirety of his skin to stand out in stark relief. Someday, Cas would love to sit and map every one with his fingers and mouth.

“Dean, look at me,” he whispered, gruffly. Dean opened his eyes and dazedly met Cas’s eyes. “I want to be able to see you.” Cas stared into the gorgeous depths of green and felt something in his chest slide into place as he slipped home.

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Much later, when they were both pleasantly exhausted and sore, Dean lay on his side under the mounds of blankets of Cas’s bed watching the light from the wall-mounted gas fireplace flicker across Cas’s face in the shadows. The room was dark, except for the thin watery light from streetlights sneaking around the edges of the curtains and everything else was bathed in the lambent light of the fire. Cas had fallen asleep some time ago, in the middle of sleepily talking to Dean about his family’s plans for the holidays. Dean had watched his eyes grow heavy and his blinks grow longer until his voice sleepily faded away. Dean took in the other man’s appearance, from the dusky shadows of lashes resting against his cheeks, the rumpled hair, the shadow of stubble on Cas’s angular jaw, and the golden stretch of skin that eventually disappeared under the creamy sheets sloppily thrown over his waist.

His heart rolled over slowly in his chest at the sight and Dean remembered something he read once. He’d read Anna Karenina the summer after his freshman year. Everyone always talked about reading Anna Karenina and Dean wanted to see what all of the talk was about. When he’d finished the novel, he’d decided it was a book people liked to talk about reading but he always wondered if very many people actually finished it. The writing had been beautiful and hypnotic. Even though Dean hadn’t been in love with any of the characters, one line had stuck with him, as certain words from great literature seem to like to do. He remembered reading “He stepped down, trying not to look long at her, as if she were the sun, yet he saw her, like the sun, even without looking.” He had covered the page with his hand and looking out the window to savor the words.

In that moment, watching Cas sleep, Dean truly realized what the line meant.

And he panicked. Sliding from the bed silently, Dean gathered his clothing quickly, and slipped through the door, leaving Cas lying in the bed. Alone.
When Dean got home from Cas’s place, he threw his keys on the table and dropped his coat on the floor. After kicking his shoes haphazardly off in the hallway he started to walk into the kitchen. He stopped at the doorway, suking in a huge noisy gulp of air and grasped the wooden doorframe until his knuckles whitened from tension. He could feel the thoughts buzzing around in his brain anxiously until it felt like they hijacked his bloodstream and itched under his skin. Dean rubbed the palms of his hands roughly over his stubble scuffed cheeks before sliding his hands upwards until he could scrabble his fingers roughly into his scalp. So many emotions; panic, fear, regret… a huge part of him knew that he had made a massive mistake. Images of Cas lying in the bed, sleeping peacefully, Cas’s eyes laughing into his over dinner, Cas rising over him as their bodies moved together, firelight sending the shadows of his face into dark relief as he arched above him - a thousand still-frames flickering through his mind, taunting him with their perfection.

Dean shook his head in an effort to stave off anymore and grasped the short strands of his hair, tugging sharply in an effort to ground himself. He fought the simultaneous urge to run to the car and drive back to Cas’s house and the opposite urge to run to his car and head to the highway. To drive until he couldn’t think anymore, all thoughts lost in the sounds of tires vibrating over the asphalt and blurred lights shining through the windshield. In the end, he turned and walked back to the door, picking up his dropped keys and placing them neatly in the bowl. Then, he leaned down and lined the shoes up carefully on the rug, toes against the wall, each shoe precise and straight to the edge of the rug. He noticed Sam’s shoes were kicked sideways so he straightened those too.

While he was straightening Sam’s shoes, he realized there was dirt on the floor at the edge of the rug. Dean stood and grabbed his coat from the floor and stepped to the closet to hang it up and grab the broom. He carefully slid a hanger into the coat and zipped it up, placing it to hang in the closet. Some of the other coats weren’t hanging neatly, so Dean pulled them out of the closet, zipped or buttoned them all and hung them in the closet so that they were all facing the same direction.

When his phone rang, he turned it to silent. The vibration from messages in his inbox annoyed him until he turned his phone off. Then, he grabbed the broom and started sweeping.

Sweeping led to mopping. Mopping led to window washing. By lunch, the living room had been deep cleaned and the apartment smelled like bleach. He stripped the beds and washed all of the linens. While he was gathering up the bedding, he bundled all of the regular laundry into baskets and drove to the laundromat. Dean sat in the car and stared into the plate glass window before starting the car again and driving farther away from the apartment to find a different laundry place that didn’t make him think of Cas.

Eventually, the laundry was clean and folded. Dean drove back to the apartment, remade the beds, and put everything away. The apartment was silent. He started dusting. When he finished dusting, he walked into the kitchen to make a sandwich, realizing he hadn’t taken his meds when his stomach started to feel odd. He opened the cabinet to grab a plate and his pill bottle but instead
he started to pull things from the cabinets and pile them onto the countertop until all of the cabinets were bare. Then he started reorganizing the kitchen.

Sam came home at six in the evening. The days were winter short and without the blinds on the windows open, the apartment was gloomy and dark. He dropped his keys on the table, walked through the living room to his bedroom without turning on any lights, grabbed his laptop and a change of clothes, and turned to walk back to the front door. He didn’t notice the light from the bathroom trickling under the hallway door until he glanced back at an odd noise. He dropped his bag on the floor and clutched the laptop tighter. Carefully, Sam placed the laptop on the end table next to the couch and sniffed the air tentatively,

“Did you clean today? It smells like Mr. Clean in here.” He asked out loud, assuming Dean was the source of the noise, before he reached over to the end table and switched on the table lamp.

After a quick glance, Sam proceeded to snap the other lights on and looked around the room. The worried look on his face faded into grim acceptance. All of the dvds and books were pulled from the bookshelves and piled in stacks covering half of the floor. He proceeded to walk through the apartment, turning on lights and opening closet doors and drawers as he examined the rooms.

He walked back into the bathroom and found Dean crouched in the tub, scrubbing the tile grout with a brush.

“Dean.” He said quietly.

Dean startled, dropping the brush as he looked up. It hit the tub with a sharp clatter, causing both men to flinch.

“How long have you been doing this?” Sam asked.

Dean grabbed the brush and started scrubbing again before answering. “Most of the day. This place was a real mess.”

“You’re wearing the same clothes you were last night, Dean. What happened?” Sam slowly walked into the room and sat on the closed lid of the toilet.

Dean shrugged and didn’t look up, “Nothing happened.”

Frustrated, Sam sighed and ran a hand through his hair. “It looks like you’ve been cleaning all day. You know that I know what is going on. It’s not like I haven’t seen it before, Dean. You reorganized the kitchen. And, apparently you started alphabetizing the living room before you got distracted by the tub grout.”

“I’m going to put the books back as soon as I get this done.” Dean muttered. Sam stood up,

“That’s not the point, Dean. Put the brush down and get out of there.”

Dean didn’t look up. Sam clenched his jaw before speaking sharply, “Dean!”

Dean’s arm shot out and he threw the brush across the room. Leaving a scuff on the painted drywall next to the mirror.

“Sammy, just let me clean the fucking bathroom!” Dean yelled.

“You need to take a break.” Sam said firmly, refusing to back down from his now furious brother. “You need to sit down and eat something, because I know you and when you start having an
episode you forget to eat. So come into the kitchen and eat and then you can go back to reorganizing the damn house.”

Dean stared at Sam, jaw clenching and unclenching before he finally rolled his shoulders and stepped out of the tub. He walked silently into the kitchen, with Sam trailing behind him.

Sam gently pushed him down into a chair and started to gather things to make sandwiches with. He made a sandwich and poured some chips onto the plate and made to set it in front of Dean, hesitating at the last second.

“Did you take your meds today?” Sam asked quietly.

Dean opened his mouth, ready to retort angrily, before shaking his head, “No. I started with all of this stuff and forgot.” He seemed to deflate as the anger left him.

Sam sighed and set the plate down with a click. “Eat.” He commanded before turning and grabbing a glass from the cabinet and filling it with water from the tap. Then, he opened the cabinet, pulled Dean’s pill bottle out and slid it across the table. Dean opened the bottle and shook a pill out into his hand.

“Thanks for reminding me. I haven’t forgotten to take one in a long time.” He said quietly before he tossed it into his mouth and swallowed it with a drink of water.

Sam nodded as he said, “I know.” Then, he spun the chair across the table from Dean around and straddled it, “Now tell me what happened.”

“I don’t know. I stayed the night at Cas’s place last night, y’know…” He trailed off looking down at the plate.

“Yeah, I don’t need details. Just skip ahead to whatever triggered the massive cleaning binge.” Sam said with a sad grin.

“Yeah, I don’t need details. Just skip ahead to whatever triggered the massive cleaning binge.”

Dean tore the crust off of the corner of a slice of bread, “And I just woke up and freaked the fuck out and left.”

“How did Cas react?” Sam asked.

Dean shredded more crust from the slice, not looking away from the sandwich. “I didn’t tell him anything. He was sleeping.”

Sam groaned and buried his face in his hands. Finally, he spoke, not bothering to uncover his face, his voice sounding hollow and muffled as he spoke through his fingers, “You left Cas asleep, without a word or a note or anything?”

Dean shrugged before nodding. “It was so stupid. I knew as soon as I shut his door that I made a mistake. But, I just panicked.”

Sam finally looked up, “But why, Dean? Why did you leave?”

“Sammy, I wanted to stay. Cas is amazing. He’s amazing and I’m this huge emotional disaster area. I can’t… I can’t wait around for him to realize I have all of these problems. He deserves so much better than me. And one of these days, he’s going to wake up and realize that he deserves someone better than anything I can ever be and he’ll leave… or worse, he’ll stay because he’s Cas and he’s amazing and he would feel bad leaving. But either way, I can’t wait for that to happen.”
Sam scrubbed his hands across his face, before stopping to study his brother’s face. Dean looked dejected and miserable, clearly believing every word he had just said.

“Listen to me Dean. Cas loves you.” Dean started to speak and Sam cut him off, “No, listen. The guy is crazy about you. Yes, you need to be honest with him and tell him about everything you’ve got going on, just because he deserves to know. But, he’s in it for the long haul and you need to let him show you that. He also deserves for you to have a little faith in him.”

Dean groaned and buried his face in his forearm. “I really fucked up.”

Sam nodded his head, “I’m not going to sugar coat it. You really did. He’s probably confused and angry you left this morning. You need to straighten this out.”

“What do I do?” Dean asked.

“Eat your sandwich, take a shower, put on clean clothes, and get your ass over to his place. Then, be honest. Tell him what is going on. Afterwards, you are going to have to deal with the fallout. He might not want to talk to you again. Who knows...but he deserves an explanation.”

Dean sat up and took a big breath. He nodded once, and started to eat.
Chapter Summary

Cas pushed a button on his key fob and the car chirped as the trunk popped open. He tossed the suitcase in the back before spreading the garment bag over it. Then, after shutting the trunk lid, he turned and looked at Dean. Instead of saying anything, he leaned back against the car and waited. Dean looked into blue eyes that were usually filled with warmth and quiet humor, and instead saw nothing. It was like Cas had put up walls and left Dean on the outside.

Dean leaned forward, raising a hand to touch the side of Cas’s face. When Cas flinched away, Dean dropped his hands and took a half step back, fighting the tremble he felt in his lower lip.

Chapter Notes

If you've been reading this fic for awhile, I just added a few paragraphs to Chapter 18 (11/16/15). You might want to go back and reread 18. Just wanted to give everyone a heads up. Almost done! one chapter and an epilogue and I think this will be all wrapped up. As always, thanks for reading and come and find me on Tumblr (I'm theawkward-1 over there) if you ever want to chat or read a lot of Stucky and Destiel misery.

Dean stumbled up to Cas’s door, grey t-shirt and jeans slightly clinging to him because he hadn’t taken enough time to dry off after a hasty shower, hair still a little damp and sticking up in odd directions, and out of breath from nerves. As he raised his hand to press the button to the buzzer, the door flew open from the inside. Startled, Dean stepped back, and found himself face to face with Cas.

A very tired looking Cas. A very tired looking Cas who was also carrying a garment bag and a suitcase.

“I didn’t think you were leaving until tomorrow?” Dean asked, feeling stupid even as he said it.

Cas stood on the step and sighed, “I decided to leave earlier.”

Cold wind blew across the front of the building. Dean shivered and wished his clothes weren’t slightly damp and that he had grabbed a warmer jacket.

Cas hefted the garment bag higher over his shoulder and stepped around Dean, pulling the suitcase behind him.

“I told my family I would be in tonight. I really need to get on the road. It’s supposed to start snowing later and I don’t want to be stuck in the middle of a storm before I can get to my parents’ place.”
Dean nodded and followed Cas’s walk through the parking lot with his eyes, before giving a sharp nod and darting after him.

“Could we talk for a minute before you leave?” Dean asked.

Cas pushed a button on his key fob and the car chirped as the trunk popped open. He tossed the suitcase in the back before spreading the garment bag over it. Then, after shutting the trunk lid, he turned and looked at Dean. Instead of saying anything, he leaned back against the car and waited. Dean looked into blue eyes that were usually filled with warmth and quiet humor, and instead saw nothing. It was like Cas had put up walls and left Dean on the outside.

Dean leaned forward, raising a hand to touch the side of Cas’s face. When Cas flinched away, Dean dropped his hands and took a half step back, fighting the tremble he felt in his lower lip.

“I shouldn't have left this morning.” He said, finally.

Cas sighed, crossing his arms over his chest, pulling his coat closer in the evening cold.

“You shouldn't have, Dean. Or, if, for some reason you had to leave, you should have left a note or maybe answered one of my texts or calls.”

“I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. It was shitty of me and I fucked up.”

Cas looked down at the pavement and scuffed the toe of his shoe across the dull surface.

“I need to be going, Dean. I've got a long drive tonight.”

Dean ran his his hand across the top of his head, before sighing frustratedly. “Could you go tomorrow? I don't want you to leave with this weirdness between us.”

“I'm going tonight, Dean. I thought this, what we have between us, was different for you. I need some time to think about things.”

Cas said, taking a step forward and adding gently. “I'll talk to you when I get back. Okay?”

Cas lifted one side of his mouth in a small, sad attempt at a smile before taking a step toward the car.

Dean fought down a rising sense of panic and he stared, mutely, as Cas pulled the car out of the lot and drove away until his taillights disappeared around the corner. Then, he sat down in the curb and dropped his head into his hands, back hunched against the cold.

Two hours later, snow was falling outside, and Dean was sprawled on the couch under an old blanket, watching Hallmark channel Christmas movies. Sam was due back shortly, he had to run back to Kevin’s and grab his stuff. He had planned on staying another night at the Tran’s but after seeing how stressed Dean was, he changed his plans.

Dean’s phone buzzed on the coffee table. He almost didn't reach to answer it, but worried it might be Cas, he grabbed it and checked the screen.

Charlie - Can you pick Jo up at Delta house on campus? Pretty sure she’s wasted from the drunk dial I just got. My car is shit on snow.

Dean sighed and swiped his thumbs across the screen, answering back.
Dean - Leaving now.

Then he shot a quick text to Sam after he shrugged on his coat and slid on his shoes.

Dean - Running to pick up Jo. Be back soon.

He grabbed his keys and slipped out the door.

Dean pulled up to Delta house and glanced up at the brick facade, decorated with over the top Christmas lights and at least one frat boy throwing up in the bushes. He heaved a huge sigh and hauled himself out of the Impala, stomping through the accumulating snow and walking into the throbbing music and crowded house. Everyone appeared to be wearing the most hideous Christmas sweater they could find and drinking frighteningly colored drinks from clear Solo cups.

He searched the entire first floor before he finally spotted Jo, leaning against the staircase half asleep.

“Dude, your mom is gonna kill you if she finds out you were here,” he says, as he lifts her arm over his shoulder and looks around for coats.

“You’re not gonna tell her, are you Deenie weenie?” Jo said, giggling as she slurred into Dean’s ear.

“Where’s your coat?” He asked, heading towards the front door.

“I don't know. Maybe I wasn't wearing one?” Jo answered, questioningly.

Dean spotted the big pile of coats underneath the small room off the entryway, “Nevermind. Found ‘em.”

He propped Jo up against the wall before sorting through the pile, eventually coming up with Jo’s blue jacket. Once he has her bundled up, he carefully lead her out to the car, trying to avoid a mishap on the slick sidewalk.

After he poured Jo into the car, he reached over and buckled her into her seat. “No puking in Baby,” he ordered sternly, before walking around the front and sliding into the driver's side.

“Where is your dorm, Jo? I can't remember what hall you are in.”

He turned to look at her after getting no response and groaned when he realized she was sleeping against the window. He knew Ellen will kill her, and probably him, if he took her home wasted.

“You’re sleeping on the couch.” He told her as she snored. Then, he turned the key in the ignition and drove home.

Snow was piling up on the roads, turning into a thick, heavy slush that fought the wheels of his car. The large flakes stuck to the windshield and accumulated on the wipers making it nearly impossible to see the slick surface he was trying to navigate. Cas had driven almost all of the way to his parents before he realized he was making a mistake. With a muddled curse and a prayer he wouldn't slide off of the interstate in this weather, he had pulled into the nearest exit he could find.
and turned around. Now, he was almost to Dean’s apartment. He didn't know what he was going to say when he got there, but he hoped Dean would be happy to see him. Cas could feel how wrong leaving had been earlier as he was pulling away, and after fighting the sick regret in his stomach during the long drive, he was feeling the edges of relief as the parking lot pulled into view.

He pulled the car into an available spot, luckily, right next to the Impala and had the door open nearly before he had the keys out of the ignition. He spared a glance at the Impala and noticed that the surface of the car only had a light dusting of snow, as if Dean had cleared it off recently. From the way the snow was melting in contact with the hood, he was guessing the engine was still warm. Cas was just glad Dean was home. He just wanted to see Dean’s face and assuage this feeling of guilt.

The entry door wasn't latched when Cas reached it, he pulled it open, not worrying about buzzing up to the apartment. Anxiously, he darted up the stairs, coming to a dead halt at the landing. He reached the top of the stairs just in time to see Dean’s back walk into his apartment with his arm around a small giggling blonde. The door was quickly kicked shut behind them without a backwards look and Cas felt something in his chest crumple.

With his old duffel bag thrown over one shoulder and his book bag hanging from the other hand, Sam was thankful someone had left the door I latched, even if it was a dumb thing to do. They didn't live in the greatest part of town and break-ins happened a little too frequently to leave the apartment entrance wide open.

He started to trek up the stairs, hoping Dean was holding it together. He knew it wasn't Dean’s fault when he went through a low, but he was really hoping they could have a normal, quiet Christmas without having to worry if Dean would leave his room and eat without prompting. Things had been so good lately, sliding backwards would be hard on all of them.

He looked up as he heard footsteps clattering on the stairs above him. He turned the next corner and came face to face with Cas.

“Hey, Cas, where are you going?” He asked, readjusting the duffel strap on his shoulder.

Cas halted, looking into Sam’s eyes as he took a huge breath. Sam realized that the other man looked shattered. He took a step forward, “Cas, what happened?”

Cas shook his head quickly and stepped around the boy, “I've got to go Sam. Have a Merry Christmas.”

Sam watched, dumbstruck as Cas darted away.

When he finally got in the apartment door, he looked confusedly at the lump covered in blankets on the couch. He could see a long fall of blonde hair hanging over the edge. Peeking, he saw Jo’s face, slack in sleep, alcohol fumes wafting off of her.

Dean walked out of the bathroom carrying a plastic trash can and a bottle of Advil. He placed them near the side of the couch as Sam dropped his bags. He turned, startled and looked at his brother, “Sammy, when did you get here?”

“Like, a minute ago. Hey, what happened with Cas? He looked really upset.” Sam asked.

Deans looked around Sam like Cas might be hiding behind him somewhere in the doorway, “What
do you mean? You know he went back to his family's for the holiday.”

Sam shook his hair out of his face and pointed towards the doorway, “I just passed him on the stairs and he was leaving. He looked really upset.”

Dean looked bewildered before he glanced at Jo. Realization rushed across his face, “Oh fuck.”

Dean rushed to the door, grabbing his keys and shoving his feet into his boots. “Keep an eye on Jo. I've got to try to catch Cas.”

Sam watched the door slam behind his brother and sighed.
Winter Wonderland

Chapter Summary

Then, Cas stepped forward and cradled Dean’s face in his hands. After another searching look into Dean’s eyes, Cas leaned into Dean’s space and placed his warm lips over Dean’s freezing cold mouth. The sudden warmth tingled. From the friction of Cas’s mouth upon his to the feel of his long cool fingers on Dean’s jaw, the warmth hurt almost as much as it soothed.

Chapter Notes

I can’t believe this is finished. Spin Cycle started out as a little one shot that I wrote bored waiting for my laundry one day and it has been the most frustrating thing I’ve ever written. My life kind of fell apart while I was writing this. And, a lot of things got better along the way. Thank you so much for reading. Whether you have been along for the entire ride, or you are just finding this later on, I really appreciate all of you so much. Thanks :)

The snow blowing across the road in front of the Impala’s headlights looked like ocean waves receding from a beach. Dean was thankful the old car’s body was so heavy as it banked through another snowdrift. The whole town would be snowed in by morning. He gripped the steering wheel tighter as he thought about Cas’s little car trying to ford through this storm. Most of the streets were deserted other than the occasional snowplow, attempting to keep the streets somewhat passable.

Finally, he pulled into Cas’s parking lot and let the engine idle as he scanned the snow covered, parked cars for Cas’s. The worry that had been growing in the back of his mind grew as he realized that Cas’s car wasn’t in the lot and his apartment windows were dark. Dean carefully turned and backed out of the lot, slowly pulled back onto the road, and tried to think about where Cas would be.

He didn’t know how to contact Meg or Balthazar, Cas’s only close friends in town, and he knew most businesses in town would have closed down with the threat of the worsening road conditions so it wasn’t like Cas would be in a bar somewhere complaining to a bartender about how big of an asshole Dean was. Dean’s mouth set into a grim line as he decided Cas might have tried to continue his trip up to see him family.

Well, he thought with a sigh, only one way to find out. He turned the Impala and started to navigate his way through the drifting roads towards the highway.

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After an hour of driving at a crawling pace through near white-out conditions, Dean was sick with worry. He had called Sam before leaving town and told him to keep calling Cas’s phone until he answered and then to call him as soon as he knew where Cas was. Sam hadn’t called back yet. The
radio had just ran an emergency announcement saying that the state department of transportation had closed all roads until morning.

Dean had to get off of the highway at the next exit and he still didn't know where Cas was. Just as he was about to turn onto the exit and hope for a truckstop or roadside motel where he could spend the night and hopefully call everyone he knew and try to track down Cas, Dean saw the muted glow of hazard lights blinking through a layer of built up snow on the back of a small car. The car appeared to have spun off the roadway onto the shoulder and had gotten stuck in a bank of snow.

Dean pulled his car as quickly as he could onto the shoulder and threw open the door, before jumping out and running back to the little car. As soon as he noticed it was the same blue as Cas’s, his heart lurched in his chest and he starting muttering under his breath, “Holy shit, Cas. You stupid fucking idiot. What the hell were you thinking driving out in this?”

He scraped his hand over the driver’s side window and looked into the car, heart sinking further when he realized Cas wasn’t in the car. He tried to pull the handle and the car was locked. Dean stood up and ran both hands anxiously through his hair, spinning in a circle and taking in the stretch of deserted highway the ran endlessly before and after him. His jaw tightened, green eyes wide and frightened as he looked around the car for footprints, but the snow was falling at such a pace, and marks would disappear quickly. The car’s hood had cooled, indicating Cas had left the vehicle some time ago. Just as Dean was about to grab his cell phone from the dash of the Impala and call the sheriff’s department, he saw headlights approaching from behind him.

A black SUV with a state police emblem pulled up alongside him, the window rolled down, and a female voice called out to him,

“You having some trouble, sir?” A small, dark haired woman in sheriff’s uniform leaned over the console and studied his appearance. “These roads have all been closed, we need to get you somewhere safe for the night.”

Dean indicated the blue car and fought from sounding panicked, “My boyfriend’s not in his car. I’ve been out looking for him and he isn’t answering his phone. I finally found his car but he isn’t here.”

The sheriff took in the worry on Dean’s face and reached for her radio, “Let me call in and see if anyone picked him up earlier. We’ve been patrolling this road all night. Hopefully someone saw him and helped him earlier.”

Dean nodded and heard the words the sheriff didn’t say, if Cas had gotten lost in the storm, it was unlikely he would be able to find shelter this far away from a town before hypothermia set in. The number one rule in this area during storms was not to leave your car during a blizzard.

“What’s your boyfriend look like?” The woman asked.

Dean held his hand up even with his eyebrows, “His name is Castiel Milton. He’s about this tall, lean, blue eyes, haircut like Clark Kent, dark brown hair, probably looks like he hasn’t combed it today. He wears this stupid beige trench coat that doesn’t keep him warm enough,” Dean’s voice cracks, and he continues even though the officer has started calling the description into dispatch, “his nose crinkles when he smiles.” Dean’s voice trailed off and he walked back to Cas’s car as they waited for a response.

He shoved more snow off of the window and shielded his hand over his brows as he peered into the dark car. He heard the SUV’s door slam and he straightened as footsteps crunched across the icy paved surface towards him.
“A snowplow driver picked your guy up about half an hour ago. He drove him into Redbud,” the officer raised a hand and pointed to the exit up ahead. “Take a right once you hit the main road off the exit and go about 6 miles. Tiny little town but there is a little hotel there. That’s where he dropped him off.”

Dean couldn’t fight back the huge smile that spread quickly across his face. “Thank you!” He exclaimed as he ran back to the Impala.

“Stay put for the night once you get there,” the sheriff yelled at his retreating back, warningly.

Dean waved a hand in acknowledgement before diving back into his car and carefully navigating her back onto the main part of the highway. The officer’s headlights followed him until he reached the exit and he heard her honk as he pulled off the highway onto the ramp.

The Redbud Inn was a tiny, mom and pop style hotel. The kind that went out of style decades ago but someone had maintained this one nicely. Dean pulled the Impala into the little parking lot and walked into the office. An older man, with a balding head and thick glasses, sat behind the desk watching the news report on the weather on a small television.

“Excuse me, sir,” Dean began.

The old man looked over at Dean, as if surprised he wasn’t alone in the office.

“Can I help you?” The man asked.

“I’m looking for a guy a that the sheriff’s department told me got stranded here earlier.” Dean said.

The old man narrowed his eyes and looked at Dean suspiciously. “We don’t give out private information about our guests.”

“Look, man,” Dean said, voice rising with irritation, “his name is Castiel Milton. Call his room and ask him if you can give me his room number. This is important.”

The man reached for the phone and shielded the room number he was hiding from Dean as he dialed.

“Dude,” Dean muttered under his breath, “there’s like ten rooms. I could just start knocking on doors.”

After a short inquiry, the man turned back to the news without looking at Dean and said offhandedly, “Room Eight. And keep it quiet, this is a respectable establishment.”

Dean choked back a laugh as he shoved his way back through the office door.

Before he could cross the parking lot and reach the door of Room Eight, Cas had opened the door and stood in the entry.

“You scared the absolute shit out of me, Cas.” Dean said after he came to a stop in the swirling snow.

Cas stood in the doorway, haloed by the warm yellow light spilling out the room. He was standing in his boxer briefs and a white t-shirt, looking wholly exhausted and like the best thing that Dean
“Don’t ever do that to me again,” Dean said, unable to keep the trembling out of his voice.

Cas frowned and look back at Dean solemnly. “Why are you here, Dean?” He asked, quietly.

Dean closed his eyes and tilted his head back so that his face was pointing up at the sky, he took a steadying breath before he answered.

“I forgot what you think you saw back at the apartment.”

Cas lifted an eyebrow and dryly responded, “What I think I saw?”

“That was Jo,” Dean said. “She called me earlier, she got a little messed up at a party and needed a ride home. That’s all it was. I know it looked bad, but Cas, I wouldn’t do that to you.”

Dean hesitated for a moment, when he spoke again, his voice shook, “I fucked up. I woke up this morning and left. And I know, that that was the last thing I should have done. But, I just… I don’t know how to say things sometimes. I feel like the feelings get stuck in my throat and try to choke me. I was next to you this morning, while you were asleep, and I was watching you, and it was like it was only a matter of time before you realized you deserve so much better than me. Here you are, this gorgeous, intelligent, kind man and you look at me like I’m something good. Like I can be something more than this guy who works two jobs and never leaves his hometown and probably fixes cars for the rest of his life. No one has ever seen me as more than a good time, Cas, but you look at me and you see something I didn’t know was there.”

When he was finished, he took a shaky breath and buried his hands in his pockets, before he looked down at his feet and scuffed one foot against the asphalt. He took a step back and sniffed, before meeting Cas’s eyes again. “It scares the shit out of me.”

Cas stared at him searchingly for a moment before taking Dean’s hand in his and stepping back into the hotel room. After closing the door behind them, Cas turned to look at Dean. With an inscrutable look into Dean’s eyes, Cas stepped closer and quietly started to remove Dean’s coat.

Dean waited as Cas hung the coat over the chair near the door. Then, Cas looked down at his boots.

“You’d better take those off. The snow will end up melting all over the room.”

Dean quickly obliged.

Then, Cas stepped forward and cradled Dean’s face in his hands. After another searching look into Dean’s eyes, Cas leaned into Dean’s space and placed his warm lips over Dean’s freezing cold mouth. The sudden warmth tingled. From the friction of Cas’s mouth upon his to the feel of his long cool fingers on Dean’s jaw, the warmth hurt almost as much as it soothed.

Dean backed up a fraction before leaning his forehead against Cas’s.

“I have a depressive disorder. On my low days, I’m a mess, Cas. There are times when I can’t get out of bed and even when I do everything I’m supposed to do, just the effort I have to put into being seems like it’s too much. My life isn’t like a drug commercial. It isn’t just going to be fixed even with the meds. I just want to be honest with you about that before you say anything else.”

Cas gently traced his thumbs from the curve of Dean’s cheekbones to the ridge of his jaw. He looked into Dean’s eyes, his own blue and clear and Dean felt like he was drowning in the love he could see reflected in them.
“I love you Dean. I love all of you. You aren’t going to scare me away if you have a bad day, or a bad week, or a bad month, or even a bad year. I. Love. You.” He enunciated the last three words deliberately.

Dean didn’t let himself look away, even though he wanted to. He wanted to look down and hide his eyes and make a joke about the beds having Magic Fingers or something else equally obnoxious but instead he stared back into Cas’s eyes and said in a voice rough with emotion and disbelief, “I love you, too.”

Cas smiled tremulously and leaned back into Dean’s body, kissing Dean’s smiling mouth. They both knew they had a long road ahead of them. There were things they needed to work out, obstacles they would have to overcome, and together, they would.
Epilogue

A few years later…

When Cas walked into The Roadhouse, his eyes quickly slid to the bar, where he knew he would find Dean and Sam sitting side by side. He was right. Dean was laughing and listening avidly as Sam gestured wildly with one arm as he told a story. When Sam was home from grad school, which wasn’t as often as Dean would have liked, they always spent his first night back, at The Roadhouse, catching up and enjoying the friends who would meet up there.

Cas had been out of town for a conference for a few days and was late for the party. He carried a large padded envelope and hastily loosened his tie as he crossed the crowded room to where Dean was sitting.

Dean saw him approaching and smiled widely. When Cas was standing next to him he leaned over and kissed him soundly on the mouth.

“I missed you!” Dean exclaimed as he wrapped his arms around Cas. “Why didn’t you change before you came here?” Dean asked, gesturing the the suit Cas was still wearing.

“I take it you didn’t go home before you ended up here?” Cas asked. During Sam’s senior year of high school, Dean and Cas had bought a three bedroom house on the edge of town. They’d spent their weekends haunting home improvement stores and bickering over tile samples and paint chips and generally grossing Sam out with their adorable level of domesticity.

Dean gave him an odd look, “Nope, I met Sammy here right after work.” Dean had taken a job working for an advertising agency after graduating college, proofreading copy and generally being bored out of his mind.

Cas grinned at him and lifted the envelope, “Something was delivered to the house for you today. I found it on the doorstep when I got home and rushed over as soon as I saw it.”

Dean looked at the envelope with awe, “Wow, I can’t believe it finally came.”

Sam looked between the two men, caught in the kind of private conversation couples who had been together forever seemed to be able to carry on without saying any actual words. Finally, Sam broke in, “Hey, what’s going on? What’s in the envelope?”

Dean looked down at the envelope in his hands and bit his lower lip shyly before gently tearing the side of the package open. A sheet of paper and a book fell out. Dean opened the letter and scanned the contents with a small smile on his face and looked at the cover of the book with a quiet look of pride in his eyes. He smiled up at Sam and placed the book in his hands.

Sam looked quickly at Cas, who looked like he was about to cry, before he looked back down at the book. It was dark blue, with a picture of a black car driving down a long, dark highway. The words The Broken Road were emblazoned across the top of the cover and the name Dean Winchester was written in neat typeface at the bottom.

“Your manuscript got published and you didn’t tell me?” Sam yelled in shock.

Dean just smiled that quiet smile again and nodded to the book. “Open it up and turn the page, Sammy.”
Sam flipped the first few pages until he came to the words:

*For Sammy, who was always there.*

*and*

*For Cas, who I love with all that I am.*

Sam fought back a very unmanly sniff and wrapped his brother in a giant bear hug.

*An hour later…*

Sometime ago, Sam had wandered off to shoot pool with Jo and Ash. Cas was leaning against the bar, beer bottle in hand. Dean looked over at him, and admired the way he looked in his white dress shirt, rolled up at the sleeves and unbuttoned at the collar. Cas’s cheeks were flushed and he was smiling as he listened to the story Dean was telling him.

Cas caught Dean’s look and grinned back. Their gazes held for a moment, and Cas’s smile widened mischievously. Suddenly, Cas accidentally-on-purpose tilted his bottle and spilled beer down the front of his shirt.

“Ooops,” he laughed.

Dean quirked his eyebrow with a grin, “What are you doing, Cas?”

Cas pushed away from the bar and grabbed Dean’s hand, pulling him towards the back where the employee locker room was. He glanced back at Dean and winked, “Someone told me once that they kept spare shirts back here. Maybe we’ll get lucky?”

Dean felt heat rush up his neck and spread to the tips of his ears. He stopped and tugged on the hand clasping his, pulling Cas flush against him. He angled his mouth over Cas’s with a searing kiss. Then, he stepped back with a grin, “Maybe we will.”

The End

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