See the World in Green and Blue

by parenthetical

Summary

Castiel spends a day learning what it's like to be human.

Notes

Spoilers up to episode 4.10. Much love and thanks to my beloved Zooey_Glass for beta-ing and keeping me relatively sane. Title from Beautiful Day by U2. Written for keire_ke as part of the Secret Angels exchange run by the deancastiel community on LJ. Prompt: Castiel swears off being an angel (no falling! Social experiment, like). He spends a day/week/month being the third Winchester, learning how to use a gun, how to drive, etc.

The first time, Castiel didn't understand.

"These people," he said, looking around at the children playing in the park. A dozen shining souls, bright with potential. "They're all my Father's creations. They are works of art."

Dean's reaction was unmistakable. To human eyes, his face would have merely seemed to tighten as he looked away, but Castiel was no less an angel for being inside a human vessel: souls and emotions were more real to him than the flesh. He saw the shudder that passed through Dean's soul, the wounds and shredded edges left by his time in Hell swirling with color like a bruise.

Castiel didn't understand why his words had provoked that reaction, but it was not his intention to cause Dean pain, not when he knew the burden Dean was under. He continued talking, even
confided in Dean, in the hope of repairing whatever damage he'd done. As they talked, the light of Dean's soul and the eddying colors of his emotions slowly steadied, and Castiel left him.

He had a great deal to worry and to think about, but he found his mind returning to that moment, the way Dean's soul had shuddered, and he wondered.

The second time it happened, Castiel asked him.

"Why does it disturb you when I say that?"

The colors of Dean's emotions flared with annoyance, and Castiel was not surprised when Dean rounded on him. "Stay the hell out of my mind."

Castiel frowned slightly, but decided this was not the time to enter into a discussion of the finer points of how angels perceived human souls and emotions. "I would like to understand why it disturbs you so deeply."

Dean laughed, a sound with no amusement in it. Castiel watched him carefully.

It had been a trying day. Uriel had shown his usual lack of tact in dealing with the Winchesters, and they had responded in kind. Castiel had not bothered to ask Uriel to use less offensive terms when referring to humans, knowing the judgments that would color Uriel's speech and thoughts no matter what words he used. Now, however, he was wondering whether that had been a mistake.

An uneasy truce had eventually been reached, and they had succeeded in defending the Seal without sacrificing human lives, but Dean's weariness and barely contained rage - at Uriel, at Castiel, at himself - had led Castiel to seek an opportunity to speak to him alone. The vehemence of Dean's reaction to an innocent comment had surprised him, and Castiel wanted to understand.

"You don't get it at all, do you?" Dean said. His flare of anger was suppressed now; still present, but no longer directed at Castiel.

Castiel waited, silent.

"Humans are human," Dean said, an edge still in his voice. "Some are good and some are assholes, and they drink and fight and fuck and live, and... you don't see that, not really. A work of art is something stuck up in a museum for you to look at, it's not... not real. Not alive." He raised his eyes, and for once Castiel found it hard to meet his gaze. "Uriel calls humans mud-monkeys, you call them works of art - but it's not that different, not when you get right down to it."

Castiel wanted to argue, wanted to say that Dean had misunderstood, but Dean had a point. One he needed to think about.

"You should sleep," he said.

Dean snorted and turned away, and Castiel identified the flash of grey in Dean's emotions as disappointment. He didn't like seeing it there, not when he was the cause.

He left with a silent beat of wings, knowing Dean would not look back.

"Here you go," the waitress said, pouring the coffee into his mug.

"Thank you," Castiel said earnestly. The woman's soul was dim with tiredness at the end of a long
day, but sparked a little at the sincere gratitude in his voice as she went on her way.

Castiel wrapped his hands around the mug and considered.

Dean had not been wrong about him not understanding humans, or at least not entirely. Castiel had observed humans over many years, so it was not that he lacked knowledge about them. But it hadn't been until he'd taken a vessel - the first time he'd ever needed to do so - in order to communicate safely with Dean, that he had realized the gap between knowing and understanding.

Knowing that humans needed sustenance to survive and that there were variations in the taste and nutritional value of different kinds of food did not help him to understand Dean's fascination with pie. Knowing that humans needed to touch each other did not mean he understood why Dean and Sam tended to kick each other under tables, despite how deeply they cared about each other.

Having a human vessel was not the same as being human, and Castiel was well aware of that. But if that meant failing to see humans for what they were, the full spectrum of what they could be, then there was a problem.

He looked at his mug of coffee again, then in sudden decision raised it to his lips and tilted the liquid down his throat. It was hot and strong and unpleasant: his throat burned in protest. The appeal eluded him. Perhaps he would ask Dean, the next time he saw him.

"Refill?" the waitress offered, returning to stand next to his booth.

Castiel made a conscious effort to focus on her physical appearance, superimposed over her soul like an illusion. Her face betrayed the tiredness he'd seen in her soul, and her smile was polite, not reflected in her eyes. Castiel looked around. There was almost no one else there; perhaps she wished to leave. "No, thank you. But perhaps you could help me. What would you say is the greatest work of art in the world?"

The woman stared at him. "What?" She hesitated. "I'm no art expert -"

"I do not want the opinion of an art expert," Castiel reassured her swiftly. "Simply the opinion of a normal human being."

He could see the puzzlement in the swirl of her emotions, but she answered, slowly, "Well, there's the Mona Lisa, I guess. It's probably the most famous painting in the world, right? Her smile and all that. Or I like those paintings Monet did, with the water lilies. But really, you'd be better off asking -"

"Your answer is perfect," Castiel assured her. "You have assisted me greatly. Thank you. How much do I owe you?"

The museum wasn't due to open for another hour, but that didn't pose a problem for an angel.

Castiel studied the painting thoughtfully. It was smaller than he'd expected.

He thought he understood a little better what Dean had meant now, though. The painting was undoubtedly a masterpiece, but it was two-dimensional, static. The smile offered the only hint of who the woman had once been; Castiel was used to seeing people's souls, and the painting captured only her physical appearance.

Perhaps Dean had been right. Perhaps he was wrong to refer to humans as works of art, no matter how beautiful they were. The painting was beautiful, but it was not alive.
Perhaps Castiel truly had failed to appreciate what it meant to be human.

He felt the air stir, and then Uriel was standing beside him. "Your thoughts are dangerous."

Castiel continued to gaze at the painting. "I do not believe so."

"Even after seeing 'Anna', you can say that?" The sneer of Uriel's voice on her human name was clear.

"I have no desire to Fall as she did," Castiel said simply. He remembered the expression on Dean's face, the moment before the demons had arrived, the moment when he'd thought their plan had failed and his actions would cause Anna's death. He remembered the kiss they'd shared before the fighting had begun.

"You are lying to yourself," Uriel said, attuned to his thoughts. He sounded weary, almost resigned. "Sooner or later, he will want you to Fall for him."

Castiel smiled at his brother, appreciating the concern, knowing it was not entirely unfounded. Yet - "You underestimate Dean Winchester," he said, thinking of the amulet Dean always wore, what it symbolized to him. "He understands better than you think." Dean would no more expect him to Fall than Castiel would expect Dean to abandon Sam. It was not in either of them.

Uriel shook his head, and Castiel left.

Uriel's thought followed after him, brushing against his mind. Be careful. I do not wish to lose another brother.

The motel room was dark when Castiel reached it, both Winchesters asleep in their beds. Castiel settled down on a chair to watch them, the cool swirl of Sam's emotions in sleep, the rushing darkness of Dean's as he dreamt. He did not think Dean would sleep much longer, and though Castiel wished he could soothe him into more restful sleep, he would not interfere that way without permission. This burden was Dean's to bear.

It was only half an hour later that Dean became physically restless, and Castiel shifted to perch on the edge of his bed, studying him carefully. It didn't take long after that: Castiel saw the ripple pass through Dean as he woke, and then Dean was turning on him, the knife that had been under his pillow now in his hand.

Castiel caught his wrist, held it steady between them, watched as Dean blinked and recognition filtered in.

"Oh. It's you."

The fight went out of Dean, but Castiel did not release his hold, simply lowered their arms to rest on the bed. "Yes."

Dean sat up. "Wasn't expecting you to appear again this soon. There a problem? The Seal -"

"No," Castiel assured him. "Nothing of that kind. All seems to be quiet. We expect Lilith will need a few days to consider her next strategy."

Dean nodded, frowning, and Castiel could see the swirl of confusion in his emotions. "So what's up?" he asked flippantly. "Because believe me, this isn't the most comfortable bed I've ever slept in, so I'm not quite clear why you're so keen to sit on it."
Castiel looked down at the bed, wondering how to explain. "I have been thinking," he said finally, "about what you said before."

He felt Dean tense. "If you're expecting me to take it back -" 

"You were right," Castiel said, and hesitated for a moment at the blaze of purple-tinged surprise that shot through Dean's emotions. "I did not mean the term quite as you understand it, I think - but you were still right. I observe, but I have not experienced; I know, but I do not always understand."

Surprise was still surging through Dean, but his voice barely held a trace of it when he said, "Well, it's not your fault. It's not like you're human. Some times that's more obvious than others."

"Yes," Castiel sighed, and looked down at the bed again. "But I would like to understand. I would like..." He trailed off.

He heard Dean's sharp intake of breath, and suddenly Dean pulled free of Castiel's grasp and seized his arm instead, fingers digging in hard. Castiel raised his head in surprise and saw Dean's eyes wide and intent on his, his emotions bright with fear-concern-shock-longing.

"Castiel," Dean said, the name an indication of how serious he was, "you're not - you don't - you're not planning to... Fall, right? I mean -"

It was a strange, warm feeling, to know he'd been right about Dean when it came to this.

"No," he said, holding Dean's gaze. "Never that."

Dean's hand relaxed its grip, though he didn't let go, a strange mirror of Castiel's own actions before. "Good," he said roughly, and cleared his throat. "Because that would be stupid, right? I mean, we're in the middle of - you can't just go and - yeah."

There was a not-quite awkward silence for a minute before Dean broke it. "So. What did you mean, then?"

"I would like to understand," Castiel said again, unsure how to explain his idea. "You were right - I do not really understand humans, even though I am in a human vessel. My brothers do not either. Perhaps our ignorance leads us to make... mistakes. And so I would like to learn, to understand better."

"How?" Dean asked. "I mean, I'm all for you lot learning enough about us to act less like dicks, but..."

Castiel held his gaze. "We have a day, perhaps two, before I will be needed elsewhere. I would like to experience what it is like to be human for a day - the everyday reality of it. Humans being human." He did not need to add that he wanted Dean to show him: the understanding between them was still intact, unaffected by their argument earlier that evening.

Dean made a small, surprised noise. "Huh. You can do that? Just... shut off the whole angel thing?"

"Not entirely," Castiel admitted. Part of his mind would inevitably remain open, in case his Father or one of his brothers summoned him. He couldn't afford to lose sight of the bigger picture, even though he thought this would help, in the long run. "But enough to be valid."

Dean nodded thoughtfully, and seemed to come to a decision. "Why the hell not?"
Perceiving the world as a human proved to be... disconcerting.

Castiel found it difficult to tamp down on his senses, to force himself to look only through his vessel's eyes, eyes which could see only flesh, not souls or emotions. It was not easy, and it was strange to be suddenly so aware of people's physical appearances. Normally the shining light of their souls made their physical forms all but irrelevant to him.

It was strange to think that this was how Dean must see people all the time. It was even stranger to realize that the appearance of his vessel must be how Dean thought of him.

"You okay?" Dean asked, his tone seemingly casual. Castiel was tempted to look, to see the real emotions behind that question, but restrained himself, focusing on Dean's face instead, the tiny lines around his eyes and on his forehead, the glances he was darting in Castiel's direction.

Faces were difficult for him to read, but Castiel thought that Dean might be concerned for him. It was a warm feeling.

"It is... disorienting," he tried to explain. "Being cut off from some of my senses, having others become more sensitive to compensate..."

Dean nodded in understanding. "Yeah, I've been there - it takes a while to adjust. You sure you're ready to go in here? You don't need to, you know. Though it's early, so it should still be pretty quiet."

They were standing outside the diner Castiel had visited the night before. Dean had seemed convinced that Sam would require coffee when he woke up, and had demanded to know whether Castiel had ever tried it before. Castiel had attempted to explain how disagreeable it had tasted, but somehow that had just made Dean even more determined; he'd grabbed Castiel's arm and all but dragged him out of the motel room.

"I'm ready," Castiel said firmly. "Besides, I wish to understand why you are so determined for me to like coffee."

Dean grinned, the kind of grin Castiel had found blinding even when he was mostly distracted by the brightness of Dean's soul, and led the way into the diner.

"Let's try adding another sugar," Dean said, ripping open a third packet and pouring it into the coffee. He stirred it and pushed it back across the table towards Castiel.

Castiel was very aware of Dean's eyes on him, steady and expectant, as he raised the mug and took another sip. He wasn't quite sure what reaction Dean had been waiting for over the past twenty minutes of coffee experimentation, but he smiled a little as he lowered the cup again and said, "It is quite good."

Dean grinned at him, but waved a hand dismissively. "Nah, trust me, it's not. This isn't exactly the best place to get really good coffee. But we'll stop by a proper coffee shop later on, now we know you like it sweet. I bet you'd like one of the froofy coffees Sam gets."

It still didn't make much sense to Castiel, but he was content to go along with Dean's plan.

"Okay, let's get some more coffee to go, and head back and see if Sam's stopped sawing logs yet." Dean said, getting to his feet.

The phrase was unfamiliar, and they were halfway back to the motel by the time Castiel had figured
out what Dean had been referring to. He couldn't help a faint huff of laughter, and Dean's eyes swung immediately to meet his. "Dude, what?"

"Sawing logs," Castiel said by way of explanation. "It's a very... vivid image."

"Very accurate, too, in Sam's case," Dean said, with a mock grimace. Castiel couldn't help but stare in fascination: Dean was capable of twisting his face into the most intriguing expressions, though Castiel had never paid close enough attention before to his physical presence to notice. He jumped as Dean's hand clapped down on his shoulder. "Guess I keep forgetting English probably isn't your first language, right? Hell, human probably isn't your first language. Or is English one of the things you're picking up from your vessel?"

"No," Castiel said. "He is no longer here. I do not have access to his memories."

There was a moment of silence. "He's dead?" Dean asked finally. There was some complex emotion in his voice, one Castiel could not put a name to.

"His soul left this body before I entered it," Castiel said, trying to explain. "An angel cannot enter a vessel where a human soul is already present: it would not fit. We are something like souls ourselves, and one body cannot hold two souls."

"Huh," Dean said thoughtfully, but they had reached the motel again, and he did not pursue the topic further. Instead Dean shifted the cups he was holding with the ease of long practice, pulling out the key and opening the door.

Sam had indeed stopped 'sawing logs', Castiel observed. He was awake and standing by the window, but swung around as they entered. Castiel noted the way the tension went out of Sam's body as he saw his brother. Only to return when he caught sight of Castiel.

"What's going on?" Sam asked at once. "Is something -"

"We got you coffee," Dean said, handing one of the cups to Sam. Castiel didn't think that was what Sam had meant, but the slight smile tugging at the corner of Dean's mouth made him think Dean knew that.

It was getting easier to read the changes in Dean's expressions. It wasn't the same as watching the emotions play over his soul, but Castiel was starting to think that if he watched Dean for long enough, he'd learn to interpret what he was feeling just from the way his face changed. It was a surprisingly pleasing thought.

"Seriously, Dean," Sam was saying, sounding exasperated. "Is -"

"We've got an angel for the day," Dean said casually, sliding his jacket off.

Sam paused and turned to stare at Castiel. "What?"

"I wish to understand humanity better," Castiel explained. "I have decided to spend a day as if I were human. It has been very... informative, already."

Sam stared at him for a moment longer, and then he said, "Dean, a word?"

Dean grinned at Castiel, and gestured towards a chair. "Grab a seat, make yourself at home, dude."

Then he allowed Sam to steer him out of the room.

Casting sat down carefully. He wasn't sure how to go about making himself at home, but he carefully
removed the lid on the cup of coffee Dean had insisted on buying for him, even after the strange and not entirely successful round of coffee experimentation. It was still hot, and he sipped at it slowly.

The Winchesters came back in a few minutes later, Dean breezing across to sit on the other side of the table. He grinned when he saw the cup in Castiel's hand. "How's the coffee?"

"Fine," Castiel said politely, because he appreciated Dean buying it for him, even if he still didn't understand the appeal.

Dean laughed. "Yeah, convincing. Don't worry, we'll find you the real deal later on, then you'll get it."

Sam had a strange expression on his face, one that reminded Castiel a little of their first meeting, when Sam had been overwhelmed at the idea of meeting an angel. It was harder to read his expression than Dean's - perhaps simply because Castiel had spent less time studying Sam - but Castiel almost thought he looked nervous, just a little.

"So," Sam said, clearing his throat. "What do you want to do today, then?"

"Laundry," Dean said. Sam stared at him, and Dean pulled a face Castiel hadn't learned to categorize yet. "What? I'm down to my last shirt."

"You want to take an angel to do laundry?" Sam asked him. "Seriously, Dean?"

"Sure, why not?" Dean said. "Maybe he could wash his coat."

Castiel looked down at his coat - which looked fine to him - as Sam dragged Dean over into a corner of the room to argue with him more privately.

"What the hell, Dean?" Sam was hissing. "We've got a chance to convince an angel that human beings are important and worth saving and taking a chance on, and you want to take him to do laundry?"

"What do you think we should do, then?" Dean demanded. "This I've got to hear."

Sam gestured with his barely touched cup of coffee. "Anything! We could take him to a church, or - there's got to be some charity groups with some good projects around here -"

"A church," Dean said, his voice incredulous. "Dude, he's an angel. I'm pretty sure he already knows way more about churches than me or even you. He's here to see people being human, Sam - this isn't some kind of hard-sell, okay? He just needs a day of... you know, normality. Laundry, driving - introduce him to the wonders of good coffee. And pie. And alcohol."

Sam pressed a hand to his forehead. "This is going to end in disaster."

"Fun, though," Dean said, and wandered back towards Castiel. "Hey. What do you want to do on your day off? There anything in particular you really want to see or do?"

Castiel looked at Sam, then back at Dean. "I would like to spend a normal day with you both. What would you normally do during a day of rest?"

Sam snorted. "Day of rest? Us?"

Dean shot an odd look in his brother's direction. "Like I say - laundry, cleaning the weapons and the car, maybe some sparring, have a few beers..."
"Then that is what I would like to do," Castiel said firmly.

"Awesome," Dean said.

"- And you keep the whites and the coloresds separate, or the color runs and everything gets ruined," Dean explained. "Plus with our job, we usually have really disgusting shit on some of our clothes - bloodstains and mud and ectoplasm and whatever. So things with really bad or supernatural stains we usually put in a separate washer."

Castiel watched as Dean and Sam continued sorting through their washing, stuffing it into three separate machines. It seemed a much more involved science than he'd ever suspected.

"If the stains are really supernatural, sometimes we put in some holy water instead of fabric softener," Sam added. "Though most things just have to get thrown away if they're that badly damaged."

Dean snorted. "There was this time Sam didn't notice one of his socks had been sprayed by some kind of demonic gunk, and it crawled right out of his bag and went for his throat."

Sam rolled his eyes. "You're never going to let me live that down, are you?"

"Not in a million years," Dean agreed cheerfully. "Fun times."

"Bit like that time when your shorts -" Sam began.

"So, Cas," Dean interrupted hastily, "you going to do any laundry? Or does your angelic mojo take care of that kind of thing on its own?"

Castiel had been listening to their banter, amused by the back-and-forth between them. "I do not need to do laundry, no." But he remembered Dean's suggestion about his coat, the amused gleam that had been in his eyes. And anyway, he would like to be a part of the experience, not just watching from the outside, as usual. "But it would be interesting to wash my coat for once."

Dean lit up. "Awesome! I don't think I've ever even seen you take it off, dude."

Warmed by Dean's enthusiasm, Castiel carefully slid the coat off and folded it up. "I simply put it in the machine?"

"Wait, check the label first," Dean told him. He took the coat from Castiel's hands and pointed out a small white label on the inside. "See? The symbols tell you how you should wash it - what temperature the water should be, that kind of shit."

Castiel followed Dean's patient instructions, and it was with a small flash of pride that he finally pressed the button that made the machine rumble into life.

"Awesome," Dean said, clapping him on the shoulder.

"What happens now?" Castiel asked, curious.

"Now we wait," Dean told him, leading the way over to a row of plastic chairs. "It takes a while. Sometimes we leave and come back when it's time to move things into the driers, but it's not always worth it. Plus, it's not a bad idea to hang around in case one of Sammy's demon socks chews its way out of the machine..."

Sam snorted. "Knock it off, Dean." He hesitated, then said, "I think I'm going to take a walk up to
"Nah," Dean said, settling down onto one of the chairs and stretching his legs out in front of him. "I'll stick around here."

Castiel was a little taken by surprise when Sam looked at him next, seemingly extending the same offer. He hadn't thought that Sam would be willing to spend time with him alone, had assumed he was uncomfortable with him now. Perhaps he'd been wrong. It was with an odd sense of gratitude that Castiel answered, "Thank you, Sam, but I will stay here for now."

"Okay," Sam said, and gave him a tentative smile. "Try to keep Dean out of trouble, please."

"Hey," Dean protested.

"I'm only an angel - some miracles are beyond my powers," Castiel answered gravely, pleased when Sam laughed.

"Hey," Dean protested, more loudly.

Castiel settled down on the chair next to Dean as Sam left. "What do you normally do while waiting?"

Dean shrugged. "Talk to people, sometimes. Read a magazine. Watch the machines, they can be kinda hypnotic. Whatever, really."

Castiel nodded thoughtfully, watching his coat through the glass of the machine. He could imagine that having this kind of opportunity to do nothing was a luxury in itself. He tilted his head to look at Dean. "You explained it well."

Dean shrugged. "I was the one doing most of the laundry, growing up. Taught Sam how to do it."

They sat in silence for a while, watching the washing spin in the machines. Castiel was conscious of the warm press of Dean's arm against his own, the lazy way in which Dean was sprawled in his seat.

"So," Dean said finally, breaking the easy silence, "how are you enjoying this whole 'live-life-as-a-human' thing so far?"

"It is very interesting," Castiel admitted. "It is not what I expected."

Dean tilted his head to look at him. "No? Because if you want to do a different kind of thing, we can do that. I just figured you might have had enough of churches, you know?"

Castiel could not help a slight smile at that. "I do like churches. But I'm very familiar with them. This is the kind of thing I wished to experience."

"Well, feel free to stop by and help us do the laundry any time," Dean said with a snort.

"Wonder where Sam's got to," Dean said as he dropped his bags of clean laundry onto the nearest bed. "Probably got lost in the bookshop again."

Castiel smiled at the fond exasperation in Dean's voice. "Perhaps we should go and look for him."

"'Bout time for lunch, anyway," Dean agreed. "How's your coat?"

"It's good," Castiel told him. It was far better than he'd expected, if he were honest. He hadn't
realized it would feel different. He could smell, very faintly, the washing powder and fabric softener. The coat smelled a different, more human kind of fresh, and it was surprising how much he liked it.

Dean grinned at him. "Awesome. Okay, let's go find Sam."

Sam was easy to find: Dean had been right about his brother still being in the bookstore. He was standing absorbed in one book, with several more piled on the shelf next to him.

"It's a curse, very sad case," Dean informed Castiel in a loud whisper. "Every time Sammy's within six feet of more than five books at one time, he goes blind and deaf. And loses all ability to keep track of time. Some evil witch cast it on him when he was just a kid, and it seems like there's no cure."

Sam looked up from the book he'd been browsing, blinking. "What? It -"

He broke off as Dean tapped his watch meaningfully. "Lunchtime, Sam, c'mon."

Sam checked his own watch and blinked again, gathering up the books he'd collected and heading for the counter. Castiel watched with interest as he chatted with the woman there, swapping views on some of the authors he'd selected. Seeing Sam like this - seeing only the way he ducked his head and smiled at the woman, thanked her for putting the books in a bag for him, not the vivid marks demons had left on his soul - it was easy to understand why Dean believed in his brother so absolutely. It gave Castiel hope.

"So what's the deal on the food front?" Dean asked once they'd finally made it out of the store. "Do you eat, Cas?"

"I can eat," Castiel told him. "But I've rarely done so."

"Right," Dean said with great determination, catching hold of his arm and pulling him down the street. "Time to put that right."

Castiel allowed himself to be pulled, somewhat bemused, but not about to protest Dean's touch on his arm.

"Dean has a thing about food," Sam informed him, keeping pace easily. He was grinning. "It's an epic love story. Just don't try to keep up with him - I don't think even angels can survive eating as much as Dean does."

"Don't listen to him," Dean said. "We're gonna order as many different things as we can and then you can try them all, okay? So you can see what they're like, and what you like. And then we're going to have pie. That I already know you'll like."

The waitress at the diner was somewhat skeptical when Dean placed their very complicated order, but Dean and Sam both smiled at her, and Castiel was surprised to be able to identify them as smiles intended to charm someone. He was definitely improving at reading expressions, he decided, and tried giving the waitress a charming smile of his own. He wasn't sure how successful it was, but she did head towards the kitchen, so something had worked.

"Not bad," Dean told him approvingly once she was out of earshot. "Work on that a bit more and you'll be able to charm all the hot chicks into bed."

Sam choked on the water he'd been drinking. "Dean!"

"What?" Dean said defensively. "I'm just saying."
"I'd better practice, then," Castiel said, and gave Dean a truer smile, with all his affection for him behind it.

Dean stared at him for a moment, then laughed, not looking at his brother's wide eyes.

The food arrived surprisingly quickly, considering how much they'd ordered; Castiel wondered if that was a side-effect of the Winchesters' smiles.

"Right," Dean said. He sounded very serious, almost as if he were announcing a strategy of attack. "You have to try everything, Cas. Well, except maybe the salad, I mostly just ordered that for Sammy, no normal person likes salad -"

Sam rolled his eyes and carefully transferred a portion of salad onto Castiel's plate. "It's much healthier than most of the crap Dean ordered, you might like it better."

"Nah," Dean said cheerfully. "Cas has taste. Try the fries first. Can't go wrong with fries."

The fries were indeed good, particularly when he took Dean's advice and dipped them in ketchup.

The salad was good in an entirely different way. In fact, Castiel enjoyed everything he tried, though he didn't feel as strongly about any of them as Dean clearly did. It was surprisingly nice, watching Dean devour his food with such obvious enjoyment.

"And now," Dean said firmly, when they - well, mostly Dean - had finished everything, "we've got to order pie."

Sam just shook his head in something like disbelief, but didn't say anything. Castiel had the distinct impression that they'd had a specific argument about this so often that they no longer needed to say it aloud.

The pie, when it came, really did taste good, though if he was honest, Castiel couldn't be sure how much of his enjoyment was due to the taste and how much to the look of near-rapture on Dean's face as he ate his slice.

"Damn, that was good," Dean said finally, leaning back with a groan. He looked at Castiel expectantly, almost hopefully. "What did you think?"

Castiel couldn't disappoint that look. "I liked the pie the most," he said.

The way Dean beamed made it the truth.

Sam was fidgeting.

Castiel wondered if he felt uncomfortable, now that he was more or less alone with an angel. They were both sitting on the stairs outside the motel room, while Dean worked on the Impala across the parking lot. Sam had one of his new books open, but hadn't turned a page in a while; he seemed preoccupied with watching Dean instead, like Castiel. And fidgeting, unlike Castiel.

"Um, Castiel?" Sam said finally.

"Yes, Sam," Castiel said. "Something is worrying you."

Sam huffed a laugh. "More like lots of things. But - I mean, I just wanted to say I hope you don't mind it when Dean says stupid things like in the diner, or - or calls you 'Cas' or whatever. He doesn't mean anything by it, he just..."
Castiel couldn't help smiling. "You do not need to worry about that, Sam. I am not offended."

"Really?" Sam said. "I mean - good. That's good."

"Dean is who he is," Castiel said. "And I like who he is. I would not expect him to change. Not in most respects, anyway. Perhaps it would not harm him to eat slightly less."

Sam smiled, a warm and genuine smile. "I hear you."

They watched Dean bend over his car, fiddling with something under the hood.

"Do you mind if I ask why you're really doing this?" Sam asked hesitantly. When Castiel looked at him, he added, "Today. This 'experiencing humanity' thing."

Castiel looked at Dean again. "There are a number of reasons. What I told Dean was the truth - I wish to understand human beings better. I know a great deal about you, I have watched you for a long time, but there is a vast difference between watching from the outside and experiencing from within - between abstract knowledge and personal understanding."

Sam seemed to absorb that for a moment before he said, "I can't imagine Uriel choosing to do something like this."

Castiel felt the corner of his mouth quirk up at the thought of his brother trying to live as a human, even for a day. "No. We are not all alike, Sam, any more than you are. I know that there will be times in this war when human lives will be lost, when they may need to be sacrificed to save the lives of others. But I wish to truly understand what that means, as you and Dean do, so that decision is taken only when it's truly unavoidable."

Sam smiled at him, slow and real. "Thank you."

Castiel blinked, a little surprised. "It is not something requiring gratitude."

"I think it is," Sam said. "But even if not for that reason, I wanted to thank you for Dean's sake."

Castiel looked at him sharply: he hadn't thought that Dean had told Sam it had been his words which had led Castiel to consider this.

"This is good for him," Sam said. "He's been... finding things hard, lately. He won't give himself a moment to rest, he's been dragging us from one job straight on to the next. And I get why he's doing it, but he's running on fumes, you know? This, today, is the most time he's spent relaxing in... a long time."

Castiel watched Dean. He'd been aware of the difficulties Dean had been having, trying to deal with his memories and his guilt. He'd known how hard Dean had been pushing himself. But he hadn't fully realized how bad things must be, for Sam to be confiding in him.

Or perhaps Sam had come to trust him now. It was a nice thought.

"Things are hard for him," Castiel agreed. "But you are helping him a lot, Sam. I'll speak with him, though I do not know if he'll listen."

"When does he ever?" Sam said, but smiled. "I think he might listen to you, though."

Castiel smiled back at that thought.

"Hey, Cas," Dean called across the lot. "Come and see this."
Sam's eyebrows shot up, but when Castiel looked at him inquiringly, he simply waved a hand. And so Castiel left him to his reading and went to join Dean in front of his car.

"Don't suppose you have much to do with cars, what with the whole wing thing," Dean said.

"No," Castiel agreed. "You were driving once when I came to speak with you, but that is all."

Dean shook his head with something like despair. "Right. Well, you know how it works, right? There's an engine -"

Castiel listened attentively to Dean's increasingly heartfelt lecture, though he was more interested in the way Dean warmed to his topic and started getting sidetracked by his explanation about what was so special about his car in particular. The car was interesting, but mostly because it was so much a part of Dean: Castiel could see Dean's work and love in every part of it, knew he'd rebuilt it almost completely once. The car was perhaps the closest thing Dean had to a home, and for that reason Castiel was happy to let Dean talk about it, even when the mechanical details meant little to him.

"She's looking a bit rough at the moment, I haven't had time to wash her in a while," Dean said finally. "You feel like helping, maybe?"

Castiel thought of the way Sam's eyebrows had shot up, and how Dean's face softened when he touched the car. He felt like he should be honored, somehow.

"I'd like that," he said, and Dean grinned and threw him a sponge.

"I'm still not sure alcohol's such a good idea," Sam said dubiously as they walked into the bar.

"Alcohol is always a good idea," Dean said dismissively. "Well, almost always."

Castiel stayed out of their muttered debate and waited for them to reach a compromise, which seemed to be that they would be drinking nothing stronger than beer.

They settled at a table, and Dean clinked his bottle against Castiel's and Sam's. "This your first close encounter with alcohol?"

"Yes," Castiel said.

Dean's eyes narrowed. "What about your vessel? Did he drink?"

Castiel frowned. "I'm not certain, but I believe he had been teetotal for a number of years."

"Oh man," Sam muttered, pressing a hand against his forehead for a moment.

"So you've probably got no tolerance for alcohol at all," Dean concluded with an odd degree of satisfaction. "I guess starting with beer is a good plan, then."

Sam groaned and downed a sizeable gulp of his drink.

The bar was interesting. Castiel enjoyed watching all the different people, caught up in their own lives, but some coming together to take an interest in each other. Though as the evening wore on and he worked his way through the bottles of beer the Winchesters kept buying, he found himself more interested in watching the curve of Dean's throat as he tilted his head back to take a drink, and the way his hands curved around the bottle.

"Darts," Dean announced suddenly and with great conviction. "C'mon, Sammy, let's show Castiel
how it's done."

Sam groaned again, but allowed Dean to drag him to his feet.

Castiel watched their game, listening with interest to Dean's running commentary, which, while informative, frequently veered away from the subject of how to play to touch on bar etiquette and hustling strategies and the many ways in which Sam was supposedly cheating.

"You want a go?" Dean asked him, when the first game was over.

Castiel eyed the darts in Dean's hand consideringly, then nodded. Surely he would be able to hit the board; there shouldn't be any danger.

"Awesome," Dean said, and handed him one. "Okay, give it a go."

Castiel threw the dart at the board, frowning when it landed almost on the edge. He hadn't drawn on any of his angelic senses, hadn't even considered it - that was becoming easier and easier. Apparently this was a bit harder than it looked, however.

"Not bad for a first try," Dean said reassuringly, handing him another dart. "Try holding it - no, here, let me show you." He was suddenly warm against Castiel's side, carefully adjusting his grip on the dart.

"Okay," Dean said. "Now, it's not like throwing a knife, or whatever your angelic equivalent is. I mean, darts is still good for practicing your aim, but the way you throw it is completely different. Try -" He guided Castiel's arm slowly through the movement, then let go. "Okay, try again."

Castiel threw the second dart, trying to move his arm exactly as Dean had shown him, and was pleased when it landed closer to the center this time.

"Awesome!" Dean said, grinning at him. "One more."

The final dart was closer still, and Castiel couldn't help smiling.

"Great," Dean said. "Okay, do you remember the rules? Sam, you up for playing a game against Cas?"

Sam was watching them, eyes crinkled up like he was trying not to laugh, though Castiel wasn't sure why. "Actually, I think I'm going to head back to the motel, man, get some sleep."

Dean frowned at him, and Castiel really had to be improving at interpreting expressions, because he could see that the frown was one of concern and not annoyance. "You sure? It's not that late."

"Yeah, I'm good," Sam said, and grinned at them both. "It was nice having you around today, Castiel. I hope it was what you wanted."

"Thank you," Castiel said. "It has been most enlightening."

Sam grinned at him, then clapped Dean on the shoulder, leaning in to murmur something in his brother's ear. Castiel was almost certain he hadn't been intended to hear the warning not to 'do anything to make Castiel smite him', but the way Sam was smiling reassured him that it was meant as a joke. Mostly, at least.

Dean stared after his departing brother for a moment, then turned back to Castiel, grin in place again. "So, let's play."
There were several games, and several more drinks, far stronger than beer now Sam had left. Castiel was pleased to discover that the more he drank, the better he got at throwing the darts. He felt a little strange - warm and happy and relaxed. He was almost positive that he wasn't drunk, though.

He asked Dean, who laughed and said, "Maybe a bit, but you're not smashed or anything. Just enough to take the edge off." Which didn't make much sense, but then Dean often didn't. It was one of the things Castiel liked about him, and he told him so.

"Maybe you're more smashed than I thought," Dean said, laughing and looking away. "Let's go get some air."

"I like this," Castiel said, once they'd left the noise of the bar behind them. It was cold outside now, the air crisp against his skin. He thought for a moment of how it would feel to fly through the cold air, the chill against his feathers, then pushed the thought aside. The day he'd allocated for this would be over very soon: he ought to make the most of it while it lasted.

Besides, walking through the streets with Dean beside him, their arms brushing... he wouldn't turn that down, not even to fly.

He wondered for a moment whether Dean would like flying. Perhaps Dean could spend a day with him, at some point. He wasn't quite sure how to make that happen, but the thought made him smile.

"What?" Dean asked, nudging him with an elbow.

"What?" Castiel said in confusion.

"What does that smile mean?" Dean said, and nudged him again. "Don't keep the joke to yourself."

Castiel rather thought he ought to keep it to himself, at least for now, even though Dean's reaction would surely be entertaining. "I was thinking that the day is nearly over," he said. "It's a strange feeling."

Dean nodded slowly. "I guess you're looking forward to getting back to..." He gestured with one hand. "You know, all your angelic stuff."

Castiel smiled. "There are things I miss, yes." He thought of the way Dean's soul shone when he laughed, of the feeling of the wind ruffling his wings. "But it has been a good day. I have learned a lot. And it has been..." He paused, searching for the right word.

"Fun?" Dean offered, almost hopefully.

"Yes," Castiel said, considering. "It has been fun."

Dean grinned at him. "We should do it again sometime, maybe."

Castiel looked at him, the way Dean seemed almost relaxed, as close to being at peace as Castiel had seen him since raising him from perdition. Dean had wanted him to stop thinking of human beings as works of art, and Castiel had, but that didn't change the fact that Dean was the most beautiful thing he'd ever seen.

When he leaned forward to press his lips to Dean's, it wasn't out of curiosity or part of any experiment: it was simply as himself.

Dean gave a startled intake of breath, but didn't pull away, allowing the kiss to take shape. Castiel tried to put the words he knew Dean wasn't ready to hear into the kiss, and when Dean's hands came
to rest on his arms, he hoped he’d succeeded.

He finally pulled back. Dean's eyes were open, wider and darker than usual. Castiel waited.

"So," Dean said. The casualness of his tone underlined his wariness far more than any edge would have done, but he hadn't pulled away. "This part of your trying-out-being-human thing, or what?"

Castiel smiled and pressed a hand to Dean's cheek, fingertips grazing over his cheekbone. "You know me better than that, Dean."

"So you're not going to smite me in a few minutes when your angel mojo comes back online?" Dean asked.

"It was never gone," Castiel said. "I simply didn't use it. Who I am hasn't changed."

Dean shook his head slowly. "You told me you don't want to Fall."

"I don't," Castiel said. He hesitated for a moment before adding, "There is a difference between Falling and falling in love." It was as clear a statement as he'd risk for now, and he could only hope it was general enough for Dean to accept it.

Dean stared at him, and Castiel looked back, trying to let Dean see what he was looking for. Then Dean's lips were on his again, and Castiel let himself fall into the kiss.

Dean's skin was warm beneath his hands when he slid them underneath his clothes, tracing over his stomach and chest. Dean kissed like he fought, hard and unrelenting, and Castiel loved that about him.

One of Dean's hands tangled in his hair, and Castiel couldn't suppress a shiver, pressing closer against Dean and backing him against the nearest wall. He felt Dean smile against his mouth, whispering "C'mon, then", and let himself be pulled closer.

Castiel broke away from Dean's mouth to scatter kisses across his face and press his lips to Dean's neck. He could see a dim glow wherever he kissed, and knew his angelic senses were starting to take hold again, the light of Dean's soul shining through. And just as beautiful, the swirling colors of Dean's emotions, more filled with light and hope than he'd ever seen them.

Dean's hand slid under his coat and shirt to trail slowly up his back, mapping the line of his spine. It felt... Castiel heard himself moan, but mostly he was aware of the shadows of his wings which had rippled into near-physical existence in reaction.

Dean paused. "Dude, are those -"

"Yes," Castiel said, trying to bring them back under control and hide them again, but then Dean's other hand touched the feathers, stroking across them gently, and Castiel rested his forehead against Dean's, shuddering with sensation. No one but another angel had ever touched his wings before, and this was nothing like that. Dean's fingers felt alive against his feathers, vital, and it was suddenly hard to breathe.

"Hell yeah," Dean murmured, and "Cas," and then Castiel forced himself to concentrate enough to open their pants and take them both in hand, exultant when Dean choked back a moan.

It felt a little like flying.

It wasn't long after that when Dean's soul lit up to Castiel's eyes, warmth spilling over his hand, and
when Dean's fingers clenched in his feathers in reaction, Castiel bit his lip to keep from crying out as he came, knowing he wouldn't be able to avoid using his true voice.

He collapsed, shuddering, against Dean, whose hand was now rubbing soothingly against his back. When he'd recovered a little, he straightened enough to kiss Dean, then rested their foreheads together, leaving Dean no option but to meet his gaze.

"Will you tell me the rest now?" Castiel asked after a moment.

Dean frowned at him. "What?"

"I've spent nearly a day perceiving the world as a human," Castiel said. "Learning about what it means for humans to be human. But even now, if I were to tell you that I still find humanity beautiful, that to me you are all still works of art, in the best sense..."

He raised a hand to Dean's cheek to stop him from turning his head. Dean looked down, no longer meeting his eyes.

"...You still flinch," Castiel concluded softly. "What you told me was the truth, and you were right. But it wasn't the only reason it disturbs you. Will you tell me the rest now, Dean?"

"Way to kill the mood, man," Dean muttered.

Castiel shook his head, pressed even closer. "I am here. I am with you. I would like to understand." He turned his head to nuzzle against Dean's temple. "Please."

He knew when Dean's body slumped against him that he'd won.

"You know what I did in Hell," Dean said, a statement, not a question.

Castiel answered him anyway. "I know both what was done to you and what you did."

"I tortured them. I ripped their souls to shreds while they screamed and begged for mercy," Dean said. His voice sounded brittle, like he could shatter at any moment. "Alistair used to call them works of art. I was a true artist, he said."

Castiel did not close his eyes, did not look away. "When you talked about not seeing people as human, it was yourself you were angry with."

Dean swallowed. "I can still see them, Cas. I can still remember how it felt. Sometimes - sometimes, even now, I look at people and think..."

"I know," Castiel said softly. He didn't move away. "If I offer you some advice, will you listen?"

Dean snorted quietly. "I'll listen. No promises that I'll take it."

"Humans being human," Castiel said. "It applies to you too, Dean. Especially to you. You need to give yourself a chance to be human, if you are to relearn to see others that way. You need to eat pie, and look after your car, and joke with your brother. Pushing yourself too hard, ripping yourself up instead... it won't help."

Dean was silent for a long moment before he said hoarsely, "I'll try."

"Good," Castiel said, and kissed him again.

They stood in silence a while, then Dean sighed. "So," he said thoughtfully, "what you were just
saying - that was practically a Heavenly Order to short-sheet my brother's bed, wasn't it?"

Castiel was surprised into a laugh, and was rewarded by Dean grinning back at him, eyes bright.

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