Like Cats and Dogs

by sweetdean

Summary

Dean Winchester, Alpha, lead Hunter for the Pack, is in need of a mate. His wolf is out of control, he's on edge, and nothing seems to be doing the trick. Dean is convinced that he'll never find a mate, but when the Pack's Council forces him to figure it out before he ends up going rogue, Dean doesn't have much of a choice. Problem is, Dean isn't interested in what the members of his pack have to offer; and that means looking elsewhere.

Dean knew his mate would have to be different. He just didn't know what "different" would really mean, and how "different" would bring his whole world crashing down on top of him.
Chapter 1

I'm screwing around with the A/B/O stuff quite a bit here, so check out the end notes for some info about that. I have quite a bit of this written thus far, but I really want to hear the reaction it gets so. Here goes?

P.S. I have never written A/B/O before, so be nice. pls.

Edit: header by the wonderful and lovely mimibee, who was so so kind to make such a gorgeous piece to start this story off with. I loves you to bits.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Dean darts between the trees, reveling in the feeling of dirt beneath his paws, between his toes, the give of the ground beneath his nails. His tongue hangs out of his mouth, smells drifting into his nose. His wolf recognizes the smell of Sam somewhere to his left, Adam a tiny bit behind him. Jo is north of them, where she should be. Her smell is fainter, farther away.

A few more steps and Dean trots to a stop near a large, flat rock, waiting for Adam to catch up. Poor kid is panting, his chest heaving, the kind of strain that Dean knows he'll feel tomorrow.
It’s not really his fault, though. He’s smaller than Dean is, shorter legs, lighter hair. He’s still growing, and will probably be closer to Sam’s stature when he’s done. At the thought of his brother a long, lean, darker brown wolf trots into view, his tongue hanging out of his mouth and a wolfish grin on his face. Dean tilts his head in question, silently asking if Sam smelled anything off. His brother huffs and shakes his head. That’s good.

They’re on patrol now, will be for the next hour or so, but they have a few minutes to take a breather. This section of the territory is theirs to check, but his wolf is confident that everything is secure for now. Everything is usually secure. They do stumble upon the occasional human hunter, or hikers in the woods, but they’re harmless in such small numbers. And mostly they don’t bother. They know the Pack is strong.

It’s the new pack next door that has the council on edge. The smell of them is still unfamiliar in Dean’s nose, too clean and soft-smelling compared to what he’s used to. Pack smells like the hunt, like their rocky caves that they call home. The smell of the strangers is grating for his wolf, makes him agitated and edgy.

Luckily, the odd smell is only noticeable right at the edge of their territory. Mostly Dean isn’t bothered by it.

Dean sneezes and lays down, deciding that he might as well relax for a few minutes. The sun is out, and the rock is a nice place to lay down. He lays flat on his belly and rests his muzzle on his paws, assuming that Adam and Sam will follow his lead.

As far as dominance goes, Dean is at the top. He assumes a day will come when Sam will pass him by, but it hasn’t come yet. His brother, for now at least, seems happy to take a step down. Adam, being just a soldier in training, still has a while to go.

Dean naps for a few minutes before deciding that they should continue their patrol. He’s trying to be a good role model for Adam, after all. He stands up and heads off in the right direction, hearing Sam drag himself to his feet and head off on a parallel path. They make good patrol partners, him and Sam. He doesn’t have to snap his teeth or growl or otherwise tell him what to do. Not like when he’s with Garth, who can’t tell the smell of a cat from a caterpillar.

They reach the end of their patrol route about an hour later, finding Jo and Ash already there waiting for them. That’s good.Dean huffs and sniffs their fur, bumping their sides and coating himself in the scent of pack. It pleases his wolf, settles him, washes the wrong scent out of his nose. Sam does the same. Jo rumbles at him in her chest for nipping at her ear, but it’s familial and not confrontational. Ash just plops down on his hind legs, swishing his tail in the dirt.

Jo is even lighter than Adam is in color, even now when her fur is lightly coated in forest dust. She’s smaller, too, but Dean knows she makes up for it in speed and smarts. Ash isn’t a soldier or a Hunter, which means he was out here today with a different task in mind. Dean wonders absently what it was, but it doesn’t matter enough for him to linger on it for too long. His wolf doesn’t care about petty human things.

After a few more minutes they decide to call it, turning east towards the center of pack territory and heading in that direction. Dean sees a nice juicy burger in his future, a picture that his grumbling stomach seems to approve of.

***

The entrance of the pack den, the Bunker, is filled with the cracking of bones and joints as they shift, none of them making a noise at the familiar pain. It isn’t fun, shifting back and forth, but Dean would
rather have this than nothing. He feels his skin stretch and tear, feels his fur disappear in favor of vulnerable flesh. His neck cracks and he rolls his skull from side to side, waiting for the last of the change to reach his finger tips.

He blinks around, adjusting to his slightly lessened human vision, watching Sam do the same while the others continue to shift. It takes Adam the longest, but that’s understandable. He’s the youngest. He’ll get the hang of it.

“How were things today?” Jo asks as she pulls on her clothes, all of them unconcerned with their nudity.

“Quiet,” Dean sighs, “as always. Any sign of the neighbors?”

“Nah. Saw some delicious looking deer, though.”

“I think there’s a new herd migrating in,” Sam comments, just as he finishes with his shoes. “They smelled new.”

“Hmmph,” Dean grumbles, rubbing his palms. “Hafta let the council know.”

“That’s all you,” Jo laughs, touching her finger to her nose and wandering off with Ash. “We got data to report!”

Dean lets them go, shaking his head at the little blonde.

“You want me to tell them?” Sam asks, pausing on his way out the door. “If you’re busy.”

“It’s fine. Just gonna go spend some time with the pups. I got it.”

Sam nods and disappears out the door, probably on his way to see Jess.

“You did good today, kid,” Dean says, clapping Adam on the shoulder. The kid practically beams, his smile from ear to ear.

“Really? Thank you, sir. That means a lot, coming from you.”

Dean snorts. “I ain’t that special, kid. Now go make yourself useful.”

Adam skitters off, probably to tell the other juveniles about the patrol. It might be the literal least exciting job in the pack, but newbie soldiers seem to think there’s something cool or official about it. It’s bullshit, but whatever.

Dean finishes pulling on his shoes and heads off for the council room, trying to stretch his arms as he goes. Being out for patrol had felt good, but he’s still got some lingering tension in his muscles. His wolf wants to get back out for a run, to go where it wants instead of following some pre-determined path, but his pack needs him in here right now.

The cavernous tunnels of the pack’s home are mostly empty, and Dean thinks it must be lunch time. Instead of stopping for food he jogs right past the dining quarters and on to the council chambers at the opposite end of the mountain.

The council members don’t live down here, but this is where he’s most likely to find them and where he is expected to look. It’s silly, but it’s necessary to respect the pack structure. He is not above it, no matter who is parents are.

Luckily, when Dean arrives at the council chamber four of the five council members are there.
Bobby, Rufus, Ellen, and John. His dad. The council room is a big circular space, with a giant rectangular slab in the middle that serves as a table. There are five chairs along the far side, for the Council, and ten or so other chairs opposite them for anyone who might come to see them. Dean rarely sits in them, much preferring to stand, but they’re there. The four of them raise their heads at his arrival, pausing their conversation and looking up at him expectantly. His wolf automatically raises to its full height in the presence of so many alphas, and Dean straightens his spine and holds his shoulders back subconsciously.

“Son,” John says, his voice gruff. He gives Dean a tiny nod, keeping his face otherwise stoic. The other council members nod as well, a show of recognition.

“Dad. Some news from patrol.”

“Spit it out,” Ellen says, gesturing with her hands. “Any signs of our new neighbors?”

Dean shakes his head sharply. “Other than the smell? No. Just a new deer herd that’s moving in, probably from the west. They’re not shifters. Sam saw a few scattered in the northern southwest quadrant. Jo saw some in the southern northwest.”

“See? Ain’t nothin’ to worry about.” Bobby crosses his arms and leans back in his chair, shooting a look at John. “They said they’d respect the boundary. They’re respectin’ the boundary.”

John huffs and mimics Bobby’s position, glancing at each of the other council members. “Let us know if anything changes. You’re dismissed.”

“Sir,” Dean nods, clasping his hands behind his back and walking stiffly out of the room. His wolf hates it in there, hates the posturing.

Dean jogs away from the council chamber and up a set of wide, stone stairs towards the nursery instead of towards the dining quarters. His mom wasn’t in the council chamber, which means she is probably up here with the pups. Nothing else is on this level, except for the nursery. It keeps things quiet for the kids, and makes it easier to keep track of them. Dean’s wolf immediately calms, the scent of puppies and omega sifting into his nose.

The nursery isn’t anything special, just a small round room with a padded floor and stone walls. There are piles of blankets and a box of toys, both for toddlers and for pups, and a large screen that the Pack occasionally uses to let the pups watch cartoons. The pups spend a good amount of time in here, when they aren’t with their families, to get exposure to each other and the other pack members. Might as well have something for them to do.

As expected, he finds his mom sitting on the floor of the nursery with a book in her hands, in the middle of a pile of pups. There’s a blanket spread out underneath her, one that Dean remembers laying on when he was a pup. Two of the kids are shifted, their tiny muzzles stretching in tired yawns, and one is not. Mary smiles when Dean walks in, setting her book down and patting the floor next to her.

“Hello, sweetheart. How’s my little angel today?”

Dean’s wolf ruffles. He’d bite somebody’s head off for calling him that, if it was anyone except his mom.

“M’ good,” he mumbles, picking up one dark haired toddler and a puppy so he can sit down. He crosses his legs and sets the toddler in his lap along with the little wolf, watching as they shift around to get comfortable. The toddler, a two year old named Eddie, grins up at him and sticks two of
Dean’s fingers into his mouth. Dean lets him. Puppies like to chew, and sometimes it bleeds over into the person, too. Dean doesn’t mind.

Mary nods, reaching a hand out and stroking his cheek lovingly. Dean isn’t sure if it’s the touch of the pack healer that calms him, or the touch of his mother, but in any case his wolf settles, flopping down for a little nap.

“We just had lunch,” she says softly, gesturing at the pups. “Now we’re having a story and nap time. Do you have time to stay?”

“Course,” Dean says, ruffling Eddie’s hair. Mary smiles at him and continues her story.

Dean doesn’t really hear much of it, he’s more focused on the pups around him. They shift closer to him, resting their muzzles on his legs, and he knows it’s his alpha that they’re flocking to. He runs his fingers through soft puppy fur and lets Eddie chew on his fingers. He knows how important this is, to the stability of the pack. Pack is built on touch, on contact, on family bonds. It’s even more important for him. Hunters are the protectors of the pack, sure, but they’re also the glue that holds it together. The council keeps the pack in order, and the Hunters keep it healthy. Having their strongest, their most dominant wolves spend time with the pups, share skin privilege with them, is vital.

And the Hunters never pretend it isn’t good for them, too. It settles their wolves, like it’s doing to Dean’s wolf now. It keeps the beast in check. Though that is partially Mary’s job, too. The pack omega, the pack healer, she’s the one who keeps them all from going rogue. Keeps the beasts from taking over. Keeps them human.

It doesn’t take long for the pups to drop off, one by one, into a peaceful slumber. Dean smiles at the kids draped on his lap, the one curled up on Mary’s. God he loves these kids.

“How was patrol today?” Mary whispers, setting the book down on the ground.

Dean shrugs. “Quiet.”

“No signs of the new pack?”

Dean shakes his head. “The council seems worried about it.”

“They are. Having another predatory pack right on our doorstep…”

Dean gets it. Shifters aren’t that common, and predatory shifters are even less so. Now having two packs of predatory shifters living right on top of each other, that was asking for trouble.

“That’s not to mention, we don’t know much about their breed.”

And isn’t that the truth. Living next door to another pack of wolves, it would be tense but it would be easier. Wolves make sense, wolves follow the same rules. But these guys?

They aren’t wolves. They’re leopards. And if there’s one thing Dean doesn’t get, it’s cats.

“How are you?” Mary continues, sounding concerned. Dean bristles.

“Fine. Feel like I need to run.”

Mary nods. She’s doing a good job of hiding her concern, but Dean knows his mom better than that.

“I’m glad you came by,” she smiles, touching his cheek softly. “I never see you.”
She nods again, dropping her hand. Dean wants it back, wants the touch of his mom. With his wolf on edge so often these days, it feels nice to have some peace.

“Take care of yourself, sweetheart.”

There’s concern there, and not just for him. For the Pack. Because Dean is their top Hunter. And if he loses it…

Yeah. That wouldn’t be good.

Dean leaves the nursery a little while later, once the pups are waking up from their nap. He’s pleased to see Garth and Kevin arriving to help out, and decides they are all in good hands.

He ignores the dining quarters again, even though his stomach is grumbling. He was out in the forest all morning, but his wolf is still up and itching for a chance to run, to get the forest in his fur, to exhaust himself so he can sleep.

His muscles ache from the change, from shifting so many times in one day, but it feels good to get out of his human skin. He doesn’t have to think as much, doesn’t have to worry so much about his life. He can let his wolf take over, let it carry him through the familiar expanse of woods that he calls home. He doesn’t let the wolf have complete control, he just loosens his grip, let’s his body move on instinct. The air is fresh outside the caves of the Pack’s den, the sun shining bright above him. It’s a warm day, and Dean can already feel his muscles heating up as the sun beats down on his back.

Dean tears through the forest, his wolf pushing the limits of his body as far as they’ll go. He smells deer, somewhere south of him, he smells Benny and Andrea somewhere east. He avoids them. Mated pairs make it worse. Meg is on patrol to the north too, with a soldier-in-training named Krissy, so he runs southwest.

Already he’s feeling better. His wolf isn’t sitting at the surface anymore, and he feels more in control of himself. He growls happily and slows his run, satisfied that he can manage himself. And anybody who thinks he can’t can stuff it.

He’s almost back to the flat rock, the one he had stopped at earlier during patrol, when he catches a whiff of the scent. It’s like their neighbors, only stronger, and not as unpleasant. It smells like unfamiliar fur and bark on trees and other things he doesn’t recognize. His wolf immediately jumps to the surface, hackles raised and teeth bared. Something about this smell is getting right under his wolf’s skin in a not entirely unpleasant way. He slows his gait even more, steps quietly through the woods. If one of their neighbors are here, he certainly doesn’t want them to see him. His wolf grumbles that they are bigger, they are stronger than whoever this intruder is, but Dean shoves it away.

As he gets closer to the rock the smell gets stronger, and he perks his ears up to see if he can hear any movements, any voices, anything at all. He catches nothing. It’s when the flat rock finally comes into sight that he catches the flick of a black tail.

There’s a cat laying on his rock, in his territory. A cat.

A big cat, admittedly, but a cat.

Dean knows that their new neighbors are leopards. A pack of them, smaller than his own, but a substantial number. He knows this. But seeing a leopard, a black leopard stretched out in the sun is completely different than hearing about it.
And, at the end of the day, this is his territory. No cat is going to take it from him. His wolf growls in satisfaction. They will teach this cat a lesson.

He steps carefully through the trees, pulling his lips back in a snarl and growling at the cat as he goes. The black tail flicks again, but otherwise the cat doesn’t move. Dean stalks around to the other side of the rock, raising his hackles and standing to his full height. He’s a big wolf, he knows he is, and he’s intimidating. This cat should be afraid of him.

Instead, it cracks open one icy blue eye and stares at him, lazily flicking its tail and making absolutely no movements to change location.

Dean balks. Who does this cat think it is? Lounging around in his territory, treating him like some juvenile who hasn’t learned to bark?

So Dean growls again, lower and meaner sounding than the last one. The cat opens both eyes at that, looking mildly impressed with the sound, Dean’s wolf likes that. Now they’re getting somewhere. Dean growls a third time, and he swears he sees the cat roll its blue eyes before it stands up.

Good. Get lost ya stupid cat.

The cat turns in place, hopping off of the stone and slowly padding away from Dean’s home. It even stretches it’s back as it goes, arching downwards and sticking it’s butt up in the air. Dean keeps growling, stalking behind it as it goes.

And then with one last flick the cat swats Dean in the face with his tail, right before disappearing into a tree just on the other side of the territory line. Dean snarls and snaps his teeth, just barely resisting the urge to chase after it.

What. The. Fuck.

Chapter End Notes

World Notes!

Although this is ABO, the roles here are a little different. Alphas/Betas work more like dominants/submissives, and Omegas fall outside of these categories. Omegas are NOT like baby-making factories, and they tend to be exceedingly rare. In a pack, the Omega is the pack center. They function as "pack healer", in the sense that they soothe the agitation of the other pack members and ground their animals. Packs are likely to have just one omega, who is necessary for the health of the pack. This doesn't necessarily protect them from abuse in an unhealthy pack. Mating pairs are usually A/B (or A/O), either one being male/female. Same sex pairs aren't abnormal. A/A pairs and B/B pairs are abnormal.

The characters here are shifters, so they have what you might call an "inner animal". Characters will refer to this inner animal's thoughts/feelings/actions. Descriptions like "his wolf was pacing" aren't a literal description, more of a mental feeling. Dean's animal, his wolf, is the most present. When the wolf is speaking, it refers to itself and Dean using "us", "we", "they", "their", etc. This is unique to Dean. Sometimes the wolf and Dean get their words/thoughts/emotions mixed up. Shifting isn't like a magic "pop!" and tends to be pretty unpleasant. Speed of shift is related to age/dominance. Clothes
don't come along, so you'll see these guys are pretty unconcerned with nudity. *shrugs*

Dean calls the pack den the Bunker, but it isn't quite the same. Similar idea in being "underground" (kind of) but the den is more cave-like, less real ceilings and floors and walls. Let me spare you the details of how they have electricity/water/the technical stuff, and please forgive the omission for the sake of the story. That's not what's important. The leopards live in what you might imagine to be little log cabins in the woods, save for Cas, who basically has a little log cabin up in the trees. Again, forgive the omission of details.

Lots of shifter types exist in this verse, we are going to focus on two packs in particular. Packs, in general, don't intermix and don't get along. Humans and shifters are aware of each other, but not friendly by any means. I'm doing a lot a fair amount of world building here, so if you feel that anything isn't clear or could use more embellishment, please don't hesitate to let me know!
Chapter Summary

“So do something about it.”

Dean doesn’t go straight back to the den. He’d had his wolf under control before, but that stupid cat got him all riled up again. He’s exhausted, and hungry, but he can’t go back while agitated like this. It’ll just drive the others nuts. But what he needs, to be honest, is pack. Eventually this need takes over and he gives up, heading back to the den.

He doesn’t shift once he’s inside. He’s too on edge for that. He just trots down to Sam’s quarters, a few doors down from his own, hoping that his brother is there. More than a few people stare at him as he goes, and he can practically smell the agitation on himself, but he doesn’t care. This is what pack is for.

Jess is the one to answer the door, and to her credit she only looks mildly surprised to find him standing there. Dean knows he’s probably panting and covered in dirt, but the familiar flowery, beta scent of Jess with an underlying note of Sam takes the edge right off his mood.

“Oh. Dean. Hey,” she lowers her eyes instinctively, and Dean knows she can smell his frustration. He feels guilty for putting her wolf on edge too, but she’ll be fine.

Dean trots into the room, bumping Jess’ legs with his side and looking around for his brother. Sam is sitting at the foot of his bed, looking at Dean with a confused look on his face.

“Dean? Dude, what’s up?”

He doesn’t answer, just jumps up on their bed and rests his muzzle on Sam’s lap. His brother smells like happy alpha, and the whole room smells like mates. It’s grating, but it’s nice because it’s family. Dean wishes his room smelled like this.

“C’mon man, you’re disgusting,” Sam complains, tugging lightly on Dean’s ears. Dean growls at him and doesn’t move, feeling the bed shift as Jess sits behind behind him, scratching lightly at the back of his neck.

“It’s fine, Sam,” Jess says softly. “It needs washing anyway.”

Dean shuts his eyes, letting his wolf roll around in the smell of family. It’s not what he wants, but it’s something.

“What’s going on, Dean?” Sam says, his voice sounding worried. Dean huffs. He doesn’t feel like shifting so they can talk. It’s probably too soon, anyway. Sam gets it. “Dad and I talked about you,” Sam adds, getting a low warning growl from Dean. “Nothing bad. He’s worried, though. And not just about you.”

Dean knows. He’s putting a strain on his pack right now, and he needs to get his shit together and figure it out. If only it were that easy.

“Maybe you can just…try again. There was that blonde you liked, what was her name? Or,” Sam
snaps his fingers, like he’s trying to remember something, “that guy…remember him? Aaron? You guys sure got along. Maybe if you—”

Dean growls to cut him off. No. That girl was wrong. Aaron was wrong. For more than one reason.

“I know, man. Maybe neither of them are the one. But you need somebody, Dean. To keep you settled. Just—”

Dean snaps his jaws at his brother and jumps off the bed, pulling his lips back to bare his teeth. No. He’s past that. He’s not some horny juvenile anymore. His wolf doesn’t want some beta, some submissive that’ll bare their neck to him. He doesn’t want it. Sam knows he doesn’t want it. Sam knows that that’s the problem.

The door is closed, so Dean sits and waits for someone to open it. He could do it himself, but he’s giving his brother the respect of letting him leave. Sam does, a couple of seconds later.

Realistically, Dean knows his brother is trying to help. He knows that. It’s just not working.

Dean jogs a couple of doors down to his own room, wrinkling his nose at the smell. It reeks like unhappy alpha, like a lone wolf, like himself. No wonder people are staring.

The shift takes him longer this time, longer than it had that morning. He knows he shouldn’t shift back and forth like this so often, but the pain in his muscles distracts his wolf. His skin stretches and his fur falls away, and Dean is covered in a thin film of sweat by the time he’s finally done. It’s gross, and he’s dirty, and tired, but he can’t be in this room. He goes into the shower instead, letting the too-hot water beat down on his tired body. He rinses the grime off of his skin, tries to scrub away some of the smell. He knows its impossible, knows his body will just produce more, but he tries.

Once he’s clean he throws on torn jeans and a t-shirt, deciding to head down to IT. His wolf is grumpy but tired, and maybe he’ll get to ask Ash what he was up to this morning. He thinks briefly about going to the Council to tell them about his encounter with the leopard, but it doesn’t seem important. They’re already on edge, and the cat had moved along easily enough. He can deal with it.

IT is at the opposite side of the den, near the council room, so it takes Dean a while to walk down there. He’d normally jog, but his body protests the idea.

The IT room consists of several computers in a line, with different beeping monitors that Dean doesn’t even pretend to understand. They get their power by hijacking the nearest city’s power grid, another thing that Dean doesn’t pretend to understand. Charlie and Ash handle that stuff.

Dean ruffles Charlie’s hair as he walks in, getting a smile in return. Ash isn’t there, and Dean ends up feeling sort of relieved about that.

“Woo, buddy, what’s up your butt today?”

Dean growls at her, a simple warning to watch her tone. She isn’t fazed by it.

“Don’t try that alpha stuff with me, Dean. What’s going on?”

She stands up and wraps her arms around his middle, laying her head on his chest. She’s much shorter than him, and Dean knows from experience that her reddish wolf is even smaller. His wolf settles down at the simple contact, breathes in her earthy beta scent. Charlie, like Jess, smells like family.

“Long day. Sam is on my ass now, too.”
“Sam too?” she sighs, sitting back down at her computer and turning towards the screen. On it is what looks like a map of their territory, with blinking red lights all around the perimeter.

“What’re those?” Dean asks, brushing off her implied question.

“Sensors. Ash finished setting them up this morning on patrol. I just got them live a few minutes ago.”

Dean nods. So that was what Ash had been up to.

“What do they do?”

“They let us know when someone comes in or out of our territory. With the leopards next door, the council wants to know if any of them overstep their boundaries.”

It makes sense. They don’t run patrols often enough to catch every tiny infraction. And though it might be overdoing it, Dean can understand the precaution. Does it really matter if a leopard took a couple of steps into their territory? No. What does matter, is establishing their power here. They can’t afford to look weak.

But Dean’s wolf doesn’t like it. It feels like a cage.

“This the Council’s idea?”

“Who else’s would it be?” Charlie snorts, turning to face him. “I don’t love it either. I mean, since when are we not allowed to leave our own territory when we feel like it?”

“I’ll talk to them,” Dean agrees, rubbing his hands over his face. “Who else knows about it?”

“You, me, Ash. The Council. Can’t imagine anyone else will find out until they try to leave and get in trouble for it.”

An involuntary growl leaves his chest. The Pack shouldn’t be trapped like this. It isn’t right. He can feel the wolf rising to the surface when Charlie’s hand touches his shoulder.

“Hey hey hey, it’s fine. Don’t freak out.”

“M’ not freaking out,” Dean snaps, baring his teeth. Charlie pulls back, the bitter smell of fear washing over him. Shit. Shit. “Sorry,” he breathes, forcing the wolf down with a deep breath. “Sorry. I’m on edge.”

“On edge?” Charlie laughs nervously, some of her fear washing away. “Yeah, right. Dude, you need to get laid.”

Dean growls again, but it’s grumpy this time and not threatening. He’s careful of that. “I can’t and you know that.”

“Come on. There’s got to be somebody. You’re the Pack’s most eligible bachelor, Dean. Any of the betas would kill for a shot with you. Even just like, a one time fling.”

Dean stares down at his hands. His wolf doesn’t want a beta. “You sound like Sam.”

“You know I love you,” Charlie says, a touch of authority in her voice. Dean’s wolf bristles, but he ignores it. “But you don’t have a choice here. And the Council isn’t going to get off your ass if you don’t take care of it. Stat.”
“Is it that bad?” Dean winces, because he knows it is. He smelled his room. He knows.

“It’s bad, dude. If my wolf didn’t know you were family, I’d be far as hell from you right now. You smell like you’re going to rip my throat out.”

“Feels like it too,” Dean sighs. He’s not used to his wolf being out of control. His wolf has always had a stronger presence, he knows that, but it’s never been out of control like this. Never been so close to the surface all the time. And he refuses to lose it. He’s a Hunter. He can handle his shit.

“So do something about it.”

Dean mumbles something grumpily. He’s tired of everybody getting in his damn face about it. First Sam, now Charlie, and he’s sure his dad is just biding his time before Dean gets a lecture from him. He’s frustrated, and he’s tired of nobody being on his side.

***

Dean lies awake in his bed that night. He can’t get away from the acrid, sour flavor of his own anger and frustration. He shouldn’t even be able to smell himself. And it sucks. His skin feels itchy and too tight, and his wolf is threatening to burst out at any second. He tosses and turns, tries every trick in the book to make himself sleep. None of it works.

When 4am hits, he gives up. He strips off his clothes and shifts, giving in to the wolf and whatever it wants. Maybe if he lets it go, it’ll chill out later. Maybe. He doesn’t have patrol today anyway, since they’re training up all the eligible juveniles. He might as well waste the morning.

Surprisingly, the wolf doesn’t take off running like Dean expects. It jogs through the forest, stopping and sniffing unfamiliar weeds and plants. It rolls around in the dirt, and when the sun finally comes up, cools itself in the stream. Dean sits back and lets the wolf control his limbs, watches as it marks each tree along the perimeter, careful never to cross the sensors. The wolf isn’t happy about that. The wolf even stops to nap on the warm flat rock. It smells kind of like cat. His wolf seems to like it.

Dean is napping on the rock when he hears someone approaching. His ears twitch and he sniffs lightly, catching Jo’s scent on the air. His wolf waits with his eyes closed while she sniffs around him, only raising his head when she licks at his muzzle. He glances at her expectantly, waiting for some kind of explanation for her interrupting his nap. Dean gently pulls the wolf back, pushing it down and taking back control of his body. Jo whines, staring northeast towards the den.

He isn’t sure exactly why she wants him back, but she clearly does. He obliges, jogging behind her until they reach the entrance of the den. His shift this morning is easier, though his joints still creak and protest.

“What’s up?” Dean sighs when his shift is finished, cracking his neck and pulling on the clothes he’d left there that morning.

“There’s somebody in your quarters,” Jo says, looking mildly concerned. “I didn’t recognize the smell. I thought about going in, but I thought you’d want to handle it.”

Dean nods. Somebody in his room? Somebody Jo didn’t recognize? It’s odd, to say the least. Not many people would invade the room of the lead Hunter without permission, especially not when that room reeks like pissed off alpha. Dean thanks Jo and heads towards his room, his wolf on high-alert.

He catches the scent before he even reaches the door. It’s soft and feminine, earthy like a beta. He doesn’t let that ease him into laziness. Dean knows plenty of tough beta girls. He opens the door with confidence, letting his displeasure soak into the air around him.
On his bed is a beautiful girl, dark skinned with curly brown hair. She’s wearing tight jeans and an even tighter shirt, her legs crossed and a pleased smile on her face. Dean doesn’t like it. She smells sweet, like apples, and sort of spicy. It’s wrong. He doesn’t want her smell in his room.

“Who are you?” he growls, trying not to bare his teeth. His wolf is annoyed. This beta thinks she can just stroll into their room? That she can just rub her scent all over their space?

“Uh oh, somebody is unhappy,” she teases, standing up and closing the space between them. Dean’s wolf likes that she doesn’t immediately back down, but she still smells wrong. She doesn’t smell like pack. “Can I help?”

“Name,” Dean rumbles, throwing all of his dominance into that word. “Now.”

“Cassie,” the girl says, lowering her eyes. Dean knows she can’t help it, knows its the alpha in him, but his wolf dismisses her because of it. It wants their mate to stand up to them.

“Why are you here?”

“Like I said. To help you,” she says sweetly, stepping even closer. “Do you want to put the wolf away so we can talk?”

Dean tilts his head. He doesn’t know what she’s talking about, the wolf is away. He can handle his wolf. Then he hears the rumble emanating from his chest.

Oh. Maybe not. Shit.

Dean takes a deep breath, swallows, forces the wolf away. He notices how his vision clears, and he knows that he’s managed it. Barely.

“Sorry,” he says, more gently this time, with no accompanying growl.

“It’s okay,” the girl says, touching his arm. Dean’s wolf protests. This girl does not have skin privileges with them. They did not give her skin privileges. Dean lets it go. “I didn’t realize it was this bad.”

Dean winces. She talks about him like he’s got some kind of disease, like he’s something to be pitied. He is neither.

“I’m fine. Who sent you here?”

“Your Council,” she says carefully, not removing her hand. “I’m from a pack to the south. They invited several beta females, ones who were available and interested.”

Dean sees red. His Council. His father. Of course they would do this.

“I’m gonna have to ask you to leave,” Dean says, barely managing to keep his voice even. “I’m not interested.”

Cassie shrugs. “You might change your mind. See you around,” she smiles, disappearing out his door.

It takes ten minutes for Dean to calm down enough to walk to the council room. He can’t have his anger floating around and affecting the mood of the den, but it isn’t easy. Thankfully, when he bursts through the door of the council room he finds all five of them there, including his mom. She immediately sweeps across the room, cupping his face in her hands.
“Dean, sweetheart, is everything okay?”

Dean breathes deep, letting the smell of mom and omega saturate his bones. His wolf settles, and its a peace that he knows will be temporary.

“No,” he sighs, thankful for the ability to speak clearly. “What the hell were you guys thinking, sending me some random beta like that?”

“You know why,” Ellen snaps, dominance melting into her voice. “This needs to be dealt with, and you aren’t dealing with it.”

“You guys think you know better, then? Think you can fucking fix it?”

Dean hears the growl in his voice, but is powerless to stop it. Mary drops her hands from his face, but doesn't step away from his side.

“We know we can, Dean,” John snaps, silencing Dean’s growl. “And you will watch your tone in this room. You’re out of control. You need a mate. We’re going to make that happen. End of story.”

“So, what? You order up a couple’a betas? Hope I like one of them? Like fucking mail-order brides?”

Dean can see his dad grinding his teeth, knows his wolf is close to the surface too.

“Don’t you sass us, pup,” Rufus growls, leaning forward against the table. “These girls came willingly, these girls are lookin’ for a mate too. You ain’t gonna sit there and accuse us of that kinda bullshit.”

Dean’s wolf is ripping at his restraints, tearing at the walls. It wants out. It wants to rip those alphas’ throats out. Who are they to call him pup? His wolf doesn’t care about the smell of omega or family. Not right now.

“Look at you, boy!” Bobby says, sounding concerned. Dean doesn’t hear it. “Your wolf is runnin’ you. And it ain’t your fault. Three of our five Hunters ain’t mated, all but one of the soldiers. The juveniles, they’re gettin’ old enough to ‘cause a racket and y’know they ain’t mated. We’re sorry that it’s comin’ to you. But you gotta do this, son. For the Pack.”

It takes a couple more seconds, but Dean gets a handle on his wolf. Bobby is right. This isn’t about him. It’s about the Pack.

Unmated dominants can’t hold a pack together, not for long. And if Dean’s supposed to be the glue—well, he’s gotta be better glue. Or try to be, at least.

“Fine. How many are there,” he grits out, staring at the floor. He’s submitting, to whatever they want from him. He doesn’t say that his wolf isn’t going to like any of the betas they’re going to send him.

“Five,” Rufus grunts, his arms crossed. “Five, and you give every one of ‘em a shot. Got it?”

“I don’t like the first one,” Dean grumbles. “She smells wrong.” He knows he’s being juvenile, but this whole matchmaker thing they’re playing with him isn’t sitting right in his gut. And at the very least, he has to like how his future-mate smells. They should understand that.

“’Course you don’t,” Ellen snorts, rolling her eyes.

“Dean, honey, give her a day. Okay? And if she isn’t the one, then you can meet someone else. Is
that fair?” Mary says in a calming tone, and it’s hard to think that anything she says isn’t completely fair.

“Yeah. Fine. Whatever.”

John is, apparently, still unimpressed with his tone because his face pinches and he stands up out of his seat. “Can I get a minute alone with my son?” he growls, his anger not directed towards the rest of the council. They all murmur their assent and filter out, all except Mary who just glares at her husband when he starts telling her to join them.

“He is my son too. I’m just as worried as you are.”

Dean snorts. Worried is probably the least of what his dad is feeling for him. John just sighs and shifts his attention away from Mary and towards Dean.

“The girl. Why don’t you like her.”

He thinks briefly about sticking with his story and saying that it’s her smell again, but his dad knows it’s more than that. And John would know in a second if he lied.

“She’s a beta.” Dean keeps his eyes on the floor while he speaks, but he can’t keep his hands from clenching into fists.

“I’m aware. That a problem?”

Dean tries to answer, but his mouth won’t work. He’s a fucking alpha. He should want a beta. His wolf should want a beta. Cassie was a beautiful beta, and if he really thinks about it she didn’t smell that bad. Kind of sweet, but whatever. He used to be able to get it up for kind of sweet and kind of submissive. That used to work for him.

It’s Mary who breaks the silence, and Dean shouldn’t be surprised. She’s more attuned to everyone, and even more attuned to him as his mom.

“Your wolf won’t accept a beta?”

Dean shrugs. “It might. Not her, though.” His words are clipped, but he’s careful with his tone. He needs his dad to listen right now, and too much attitude would just set him off. Although, from the stench of anger wafting towards him, it’s a little late for that.

“What the hell does that mean?” he growls. Dean is glad he isn’t looking at his face.

“I—”

“You know perfectly well what it means,” Mary snaps, before Dean can hardly even speak. Dean glances up just in time to see a meaningful glance pass between them, and for John’s eyes to soften, before fixing his gaze back on the floor.

“Fine. A dominant beta, then. Or an omega.”

Dean nods, even though he’s pretty damn sure his mate isn’t gonna be an omega, because his dad is right. Those two are his best shot. Dominant betas are rare though, especially in females, and the trait tends to depend mostly on the girl’s personality. Cassie seems to have a little bit of that confidence, but only a very little bit. Omegas are even more rare, and tend to be pretty passive, so his prospects aren’t good.
“Just try this, honey,” Mary says softly, touching his cheek again. “It might work out with one of them.”

“It will work out with one of them,” John says, and there is no softness to be found in his tone. “Understood?”

Dean’s lip curls, and he moves away from his mom’s soothing touch, but he nods.

“Understood.”

Dean turns to leave, not waiting to be dismissed, and ignores the other Council members waiting outside the door as he pushes past. He knows he’ll hear about that later, but he can’t deal with it now. He needs to run. He shifted barely an hour ago, and he knows his body is going to hate him, but he needs it. He practically tears the clothes off his body, taking off through the forest and letting the pleased growl of his wolf escape his jaws.
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

“You’re disturbing my nap. So can you shush?”

Chapter Notes

It’s past midnight here, so that means its Sunday. Right? So who wants to meet the cat?

At some point Dean realizes he’s hungry. He wants something between his teeth, something he can catch. Now that sounds like a good idea. He slows his run to sniff around on the ground, trying to pick up on some kind of trail.

A deer would be too big to take down on his own. A hare, though, now that he could handle.

Dean is a good hunter. It takes him barely any time at all to catch a hare, speedy little things that they are. The crunch between his teeth, the blood soaking his tongue, it’s more satisfying than he could’ve imagined. His wolf rumbles hungrily, already seeking out a quiet place to eat their meal. The flat rock, Dean thinks, is close by. That would certainly be a nice place to sit and eat. He jogs in that direction, his catch bouncing in his jowls as he goes.

When he finally gets close to the trees he smells that damn smell again. Cat.

And sure enough, as he sneaks closer, somebody is lying on his rock. It isn’t a black leopard this time, though. It’s a man, stretched out on the smooth surface looking like he’s wearing nothing at all. Like he’s fucking sunbathing in enemy territory. It’s hard to tell, but Dean thinks it’s the same leopard. He smells like bark, and if Dean really tries…like Christmas trees?

The scent is familiar, and irritatingly enough it calms his wolf.

Dean stalks closer like he did the other day, keeping his kill in his mouth. He knows he has blood on his muzzle, knows he probably looks and smells like a crazed alpha, but he doesn’t care. This cat needs to leave.

At the sound of his growl the guy cracks one eye open, icy blue, somehow managing to still look like a cat even in human form.

“Oh, you’re back,” he says lazily, smirking and closing his eye. So it’s definitely the same leopard. His voice is lower than Dean expected it to be, and his wolf likes that. This cat isn’t afraid of them, even when he should be. He has dark hair, not as dark as his leopard pelt. His skin is tanned and muscular, and the build of him is clearly feline. He’s lean, but toned, and Dean has no doubt that this man would hold his own in a fight. He’s kind of hot, and Dean hates that he thinks that. He tries to chalk it up to instinct, because his wolf likes him. That’s all. And that doesn’t mean he wants him hanging around in his territory.
Dean growls louder, hoping that this tactic will work the same as it did last time. He could shift, tell the guy to get lost, but he’s already shifted too many times today and isn’t eager to do it again. Especially when he has the advantage right now. The cat-guy just smiles, opens both eyes to stare sideways at Dean. His hackles are raised and his bloody muzzle is lowered, his lips pulled back to bare his teeth, his ears flat against his head.

“Very scary, puppy,” the guy hums, looking amused and gesturing at the mangled hare hanging from his jaws. “Did you bring that for me?”

Dean’s wolf thinks that sharing his kill with this cat wouldn’t be such a bad idea. Dean snarls. He is not a puppy.

“No?” he laughs, closing his eyes and rolling his face up towards the sky. “Okay then. You’re welcome to sit and eat. There’s plenty of room.”

The cat pats the expanse of rock next to him. Dean knows there’s plenty of room. He laid up there with Sam and Adam. Of course there’s room. But he is not going to cuddle up to a cat. A cat that shouldn’t even be in their territory, not without somebody knowing about it.

Dean stops growling at that. How did the cat get in here? He sniffs around the rock, careful not to cross the territory line, looking for the sensors. If the cat had damaged them, Charlie definitely would’ve known. But somehow, the cat had gotten past them.

“Looking for your sensors?” the cat asks, raising his eyebrows. Dean huffs and growls, waiting for an explanation. “There,” the cat points at the trees to the side of the rock, at the base of the trunks then up at the low hanging branches that hang across the territory line. “I just climbed up over them. Not hard, really.”

Dean raises his eyebrows. That’s a lot of work for a rock.

“Don’t look at me like that. I like this rock,” he sighs, settling back down.

Dean doesn’t like that it was so easy to get past their sensors. Dean’s wolf, on the other hand, is pleased. He thinks that their cat is very smart, and cunning. He likes their cat.

Not our cat, Dean growls, internally chastising his wolf. What the fuck. No.

“What are you growling about now,” he sighs, raising an annoyed eyebrow. “You’re disturbing my nap. So can you shush?”

Dean doesn’t like this cat. It stole his rock. He stops growling though, flicks his tail in annoyance and lays down far away from the rock, while still keeping the cat in sight. He wants to eat, but he has to keep an eye on that cat until it leaves. The cat seems to know it, too, chuckling and rolling his eyes again.

“You must be an alpha,” the cat says, keeping its eyes closed. “You’re way too bitey to be a beta. And you smell angry. I don’t think that’s directed at me. Though the annoyance, that I think is directed at me.”

Dean grumbles. He wishes this cat couldn’t smell him. But he’s right. Dean’s not angry at the cat, he just doesn’t like him.

“So tell me, bitey wolf,” he sighs, sitting up to face Dean and fix him with that blue gaze. “What are you so angry about?”
Dean sneezes and swishes his tail, ignoring the cat and his stupid questions in favor of chewing on his hare. He can’t answer anyway. The cat must know that.

“You must be big, as a human,” the cat says after a few minutes. “Because you’re gigantic as a wolf.”

The wolf preens. He is a fine specimen, and it’s good of their cat to notice. Dean rolls his eyes at his egotistical wolf.

“And judging by your fur color, I’d say you have light brown hair. Wolves tend to work that way.” He’s not wrong, but Dean doesn’t like that the cat can tell so much about him. “Pretty green eyes, too. That must be a human trait.”

Dean growls, and snaps his jaws, licking blood from his lips.

“So. Probably a fairly attractive human. And I suppose you would be considered attractive, as a wolf. Though I can’t say exactly what you wolves like. You’re clearly unmated. And,” the cat pauses, scenting the air and squinting his eyes, “you don’t smell like a you have a long-term partner. Interesting.”

That’s it. Dean leaps to his feet and bounds the several yards between them, pinning this stupid cat to the rock with his heavy front paws. He snaps his jaws in the cat’s face, but the cat doesn’t turn away, doesn’t lower its gaze. It stares right back, right into Dean’s eyes.

Their cat is brave too, Dean’s wolf thinks, not submissive. Their cat is not afraid of him.

“Sensitive spot, I see,” the cat says quietly, curiously. Dean flattens his ears and bares his teeth, snarling in the cat’s face. “Good job. Very scary. Will you let me up now?”

Dean’s wolf is obeying before Dean can even think to ignore what was obviously a command. He’d followed a command from a cat. What the fuck.

“That you.” The cat stares at him, his blue gaze piercing. There is curiosity on his face, and a quiet smile at the corner of his lips. “I’ll leave, now. Go home, try not to be so angry.”

The cat disappears up a tree before Dean can even think, reappearing on the other side of the territory line. Dean watches as he walks away through the forest, barefoot and naked, and never once looks back.

***

Dean finishes patrol the next morning, with Kevin this time, reports to the Council, then jogs back to his quarters to shower. They’d found some tattered ropes, what maybe used to be some kind of netting, on the northwest side of the territory. They didn’t smell right, but they were outside their boundary so there wasn’t much to do. Now that he’s back he’s feeling itchy and restless, but he actually slept last night and his wolf is relaxed today. He’s not sure how he managed that, but it’s working for him.

He almost goes to the council to tell them about the cat. Almost. But, well, it wasn’t really doing anything. And it definitely didn’t give off a threatening air. And Dean had gotten him to leave. So it’s fine. The council has bigger things to worry about. At least, that’s what he tells himself.

Instead, and in keeping with his promise to the Council, he’s agreed to spend the day with this Cassie girl. Maybe now that his wolf is calm he’ll be able to enjoy her presence instead of focusing on all the ways that her scent is wrong.
It isn’t hard to find her in the dining quarters, her spicy apple scent sticking out amongst the other smells of pack. She’s sitting towards the center, her head held high while she picks at a bowl of what looks like oatmeal. Dean’s wolf approves of her sitting at the middle of their pack. Dean rolls his eyes.

“Cassie?” he says, clearing his throat and sitting opposite her. “Hey.”

“Hi, Dean,” she says sweetly, smiling. “You seem more relaxed today,” she adds, raising her eyebrows. Dean knows what she’s thinking, and sighs.

“Got a good night’s sleep. How’s the Bunker treating you?”

“It’s a nice den. Different from the one I’m from. The set up is interesting. You call it the Bunker?”

Dean nods. He isn’t sure where she’s even from, let alone what her den would’ve been like. Dean doesn’t pay much attention to the other predatory packs of the world, they aren’t really his concern. This pack is his concern. Sam would know more about them than Dean would.

“Nickname. I could, show you around? There’s not much, but we have some stuff to see.”

“I would love that,” she says, smiling and reaching for his hand. Dean pulls it back out of her reach.

“You don’t have that privilege,” Dean says, his voice hard. “I was lenient, yesterday. Don’t push me.”

Cassie lowers her eyes immediately. “Of course. I apologize.”

Dean nods and stands up, waiting for her to follow. He feels a little guilty being this harsh with her, but he doesn’t give skin privileges lightly. He shares those with pack, and only some of the them at that. Skin privileges are for family, and for mates.

“Don’t worry about it.”

They walk out of the dining quarters together, and it doesn’t escape Dean’s notice that Cassie walks a careful two steps behind him. His wolf thinks that it’s good she is showing them the proper respect. Dean knows that isn’t a good sign.

He walks out of the dining quarters and takes a left, walks down a stretch of bare stone wall and takes another left down a long corridor.

“So these are the living quarters, as you know already. Uh, Hunters are back and on the left. Council is across from them. Everybody else is scattered.”

“Is that why you’re at the end?” Cassie asks, her voice curious.

“I guess. Lead Hunter, at your service.” He smiles at her, sees a bright smile on her face in return. “So, uh,” Dean backs up, turns back towards the dining hall. “If you go that way, you hit the council room and the nursery, plus the IT room.”

“Do you guys have many pups?”

“Three,” Dean smiles, because that’s more than they’ve had in a while. “So this way, this is the main exit to the forest,” Dean says, leading Cassie away from the living quarters. They pass a wide set of stairs, which Dean explains leads down to the garage where they keep the cars. There’s only a couple, and they don’t get used much. Just if Pack members need to get into the human city, or to
pick up supplies.

Cassie seems interested to see them so he takes her down there, showing her the different models. There’s two six seater jeeps, and a bigger flatbed truck that seats two, maybe three. She likes the truck the best, which Dean thinks is pretty funny since she can barely get in it by herself because it’s so high off the ground. They sit in there for a little while, letting the radio play. It feels weird for Dean to sit shotgun, especially when he’s usually the one driving, but he’s happy to let her have this.

“Where are you from anyway?” Dean asks, figuring he should make an attempt to get to know her. He knows she’s not his mate, his wolf decided that a long time ago, but he can try to be nice.

“About fifty miles south, a little bit east. A pack of wolves there. Our pack is much smaller than this one, and finding a mate is…not always easy. A lot of our eligible wolves end up migrating to larger packs, and they only sometimes come back.”

Dean nods. That’s normal, for wolves. He’s lucky to have a large pack, so that his family doesn’t have to get scattered.

“So that’s what you did?”

She shrugs. “Kind of. I’m ready to be mated, Dean. To start a family,” she says, looking at him expectantly. “Is that what you want?”

Dean shrugs. He’s never thought about pups of his own. He loves the Pack’s pups, but he’s never imagined any of his own. It’s hard, when he can’t imagine who he’d have those pups with.

“Doesn’t everybody?” he says noncommittally, but he knows she doesn’t buy it.

“But not with me.”

He sighs. Here’s the awkward part.

“Cassie…you’re a sweet girl. You are.”

She laughs. “Oh gosh, spare me. It’s fine, Dean. It really is. It was a stretch to think that this would work out.”

He glances sideways at her, but she’s not looking at him. She’s staring down at her hands, picking at her nails. She smells upset, and it agitates his wolf. Dean feels bad, and his wolf wants to comfort her like he wants to comfort pack. So he wraps an arm around her shoulders, tugs her in to lean against his chest.

“Will you stay?” he asks quietly.

“Would that be okay? Your pack is bigger, and maybe…”

“Yeah,” Dean sighs. “Of course.”

She sniffs and leans into him, and Dean knows she probably needed this. Leaving your pack is hard, entering a new pack is harder. Even the juveniles could pick her out of a crowd, and she probably hasn’t had much contact since she got here.

God Dean feels like a dick.

“I’m sorry.”
“It’s okay, Dean,” she laughs. “And thanks.”

“Wanna run?” Dean says, trying to sound excited. He thinks it’ll be good for her, to get to know her new territory. That, and his wolf is feeling restless. It’s been a few hours, and already the calm he’d been feeling when he woke up is wearing off.

“Sure,” she smiles, and they climb out of the truck together.

When they get to the main exit, a large room with small shelves and cubbies for pack members to leave their clothes and possessions when they go out, Dean looks at Cassie with a playful grin, pulling his clothes off and starting the shift. It doesn’t hurt any more than usual, and he’s done faster than she is. He waits patiently, sitting on his haunches and letting his tongue hang out of his mouth.

Cassie turns out to be a relatively small, dark brown wolf, darker than Sam. She has a few lighter streaks, which remind Dean of the blonde pieces in her curly hair. She shakes herself when she’s done shifting, and Dean recognizes the familiar movements and twitching of her nose as she adjusts to the further enhanced senses. They have stronger senses all the time, but being shifted helps sharpen them to a certain degree.

Dean uses his nose and paws to pull the iron door open, leading Cassie out into the forest.

He isn’t surprised when he has to slow his pace to let her keep up. She’s fast, and agile, but not in the same way that Jo is. His wolf automatically accommodates her, circling back to play with her and bump her sides as they jog along. Dean pays attention to her scent as they go, catching the wafts of happy beta and the familiar scent of pack clinging to her fur. It’s good, it means she’ll blend in faster. She gets forest dust under her fur, drinks from the stream, and Dean thinks she might be starting to think of this place as her home too.

They’re in the middle of what basically amounts to a game of tag when Dean catches an annoyingly familiar scent. He skids to a stop and his wolf immediately perks up, his eyes jumping around and his nose trying to figure out where that smell is coming from. It isn’t far away, not nearly far enough away for it to be the flat rock. They’re at the very southern border of the territory, so it might be coming from the other side of the line, but Dean somehow doubts that that’s the case.

Cassie jogs up to him and sits down, tilting her head in a question, as Dean scents at the air and looks all around him. She must not be able to smell it, and Dean chalks it up to her senses not being as attuned to the territory as his are. But he knows his forest, and that smell definitely doesn't belong here.

Where is that damn cat?

It’s then that he remembers the sensors. If the cat is here, and none of his pack knows about it, that means he’s in the trees. Dean looks up slowly, and almost immediately catches sight of a long black tail hanging out of a tree behind Cassie, swishing lazily.

He growls, and the tail disappears. Good. The cat knows he’s here. Now he just has to get rid of Cassie, so he can get rid of the cat.

She glances over her shoulder up where he’s looking, but doesn’t see anything. Dean huffs to get her attention, flicking his nose in the direction of the Bunker. She tilts her head again, but when he gives her a small nod she seems to understand.

He waits a few minutes for her to trot away, until he can't smell her anymore.

Then he goes to get that stupid cat.
He gets over to the tree and jumps up, placing his front paws on the wide trunk and growling up at the black leopard. He’s lounging on a thick branch, his chin resting against the bark of the tree, hidden by the thick covering of leaves at the ends of the branches. Dean isn’t sure that cats can smile, but he is sure that the cat is looking at him with amusement. He growls lower and bares his teeth, but it does nothing. The cat lets a paw hang down over the branch he’s on and swats at Dean’s muzzle, catching the tip of his nose with the soft pads of his foot.

Dean sneezes and pulls his nose back, out of the cat’s reach. He ignores his wolf, who is very pleased to see that their cat is playing with them. Dean snorts and growls, because he is not playing with this cat. He’s trying to get this cat out of his territory.

The cat just yawns at his growl, stretching and hopping down out of the tree. Dean thinks that this is a good thing, until he remembers that the cat has to go up the tree to get out of their territory. Dean tries to remind him of this, but the cat just stretches and lays out on the forest floor at the foot of the tree.

And then he rolls over, exposes his belly before shifting onto his side, and Dean gapes. He’s tempted to take it as a display of submission, but he knows that’s not what it is. His wolf knows that’s not what it is. Their cat just doesn’t care that he’s exposing his belly to them, that’s what his wolf thinks. Their cat isn’t threatened by them. His wolf approves.

Dean growls again and paces back and forth between the cat and the tree, hoping the damn thing will listen to him and go away. Instead he just watches him, traces Dean’s movements with his blue eyes. And every time Dean gets close to him the cat raises a paw lazily, tries to swat at his muzzle, and gets a growl in return.

It’s exhausting.

Eventually he just gives up, flops on the ground and glares at the cat. He can’t shift, because he’d be at a disadvantage. It’s frustrating, but it’s true. And his wolf is calm anyway, for some friggin’ reason, so he figures he might as well relax while he can.

The cat makes a low noise that sounds like…maybe a purr? He eyes the cat, but it doesn’t make any indication that the noise was abnormal. He’s just staring at Dean, those blue eyes completely unwavering. And it’s freaking Dean out. He huffs and buries his nose under his paws, fully aware of how he’s acting and trying not to think to much about it. His wolf, for once, is happy. His wolf wants to play with their cat, wants to see what their cat will do.

After a couple of seconds he feels a pressure on the top of his head, the sharp pinch of claws on his skin. He pulls back and snaps his jaws at the cat’s paw, glaring at him. The cat rolls again and reaches out his paw, this time with claws retracted. Dean lets the cat paw at his forehead, batting his ears and making that rumbling noise in his chest.

Dean really isn’t sure why he’s letting it happen. He should be chasing this cat up a tree right now, not laying in the dirt with him and giving him skin privileges. His wolf thinks that their cat deserves skin privileges, far more than Cassie did, but Dean can’t agree. He doesn’t even know the cat’s name. All he really knows is that his first instinct isn’t to attack or chase or to even get other Hunters to back him up and make sure this cat never comes back. And that’s freaking him out more than anything else.

At that thought the cat stands up and stretches, padding towards the tree and climbing up with ease. Dean watches silently as the cat disappears, and convinces himself that he did a good job chasing him away.
“You are all wolf right now, aren’t you?”

“Sammy!” Dean grins, tossing an arm around his brother’s shoulders in the dining quarters. He flinches a little bit, because the smell of happy Sam and Jess is a little dizzying. Had it been so strong before? Dean isn’t sure, but it feels particularly maddening right now. He ignores it though, because he wants to hang out with his brother. Jess pauses with a bite of food halfway to her mouth, both of them staring at him like he’s crazy.

“Oh, hey Dean,” Sam says, clearing his throat. “You seem…better.”

“M’ fine, little brother,” Dean sighs, taking a huge bite of the juicy burger he’s been dreaming about for days. “And no, I didn’t have sex.”

Sam chokes on his food, but Jess plows on. “See, Sam thought that’s what it was. I thought it was something else, but I can’t figure out what.”

Dean just shrugs and keeps eating, laughing at his prudish little brother.

“So?” Sam prods, clearly looking for a better answer. “What happened?”

“Nothing happened, Sam. I just got my shit under control, ran it out. Probably had too many hormones built up, or some shit like that.”

“Uh huh,” Sam nods, obviously skeptical. Then he leans forward and sniffs, and Dean rolls his eyes because if anybody except his little brother tried to scent him like that he’d give them a scar. “You smell…funny.”

“Funny?” Dean raises his eyebrows, taking another bite of burger and talking around it. “The hell does that mean?”

Jess leans across the table and scents him too, and Dean glares at her ineffectively.

“He does smell different. Well, no. There’s just something extra. Maybe it’s Cassie?” she says, looking at Sam while she speaks.

“No,” Sam says, chewing his lip and running a hand through his hair. “That’s not what she smells like. And anyway her smell wouldn’t cling to him like that, not through a shift.”

“I’m literally right here,” Dean growls, his wolf getting grumpy at the two of them trying to diagnose him. “Probably just rolled in something out in the forest. It’ll go away once I shower.”

“You’re probably right,” Sam sighs, leaning away.

They move on to other things while they finish eating, but Dean is distracted. He can’t smell himself enough to check and see what extra scent Sam and Jess are talking about, but he has a suspicion about what it is. And if he’s right, that means he’s gotta be a lot more careful. His wolf seems pleased
that they are carrying their cat’s scent, but Dean is just annoyed. He just can’t figure out why it didn’t fade.

After dinner he goes for a shower to wash away the grime of the day, and hopefully whatever mystery scent he’s wearing. Then he throws on some old sweats and pads down the tunnel to Jo’s room, hoping to find some Hunters there.

He is, of course, successful. Jo is sitting on her bed next to Ash, who is showing her some kind of tablet while Charlie sits with her back to the door and pseudo-braids her hair. Benny is sitting on the floor with Andrea on his lap, the smell of happy mates immediately catching in his nose. He tries not to show how much it agitates his wolf.

“Hey brother,” Benny grins when he walks in, barely looking away from Andrea to make eye contact. Ugh. New mates are so gross.

Dean just nods and sits at the head of Jo’s bed and stretches his legs across her lap, crossing his arms across his chest and sighing heavily.

“Gross, Dean, get your nasty feet off of me,” Jo grumbles, trying to shove his feet away. He ignores her and shuts his eyes.

“They’re clean, I just showered.”

She makes a grumpy noise, but stops trying to shove him away.

“So, Dean-o, how’d date number one go?” Charlie asks, her curiosity barely restrained behind her smile.

Dean scoffs. “Fine, I guess. Not gonna mate her anytime soon, but she’ll fit in here.”

“The tragic love story of Dean Winchester,” Jo sighs dramatically, fluttering her eyelashes at him. “If only I loved you back.”

“Shut up, punk,” he laughs, shoving her shoulder with the pad of his foot. “You’re unmated too, remember?”

“Yeah, but you’re like a grandpa compared to me,” she laughs. “I got time. And the council isn’t on my ass about it.”

She’s right, of course. Twenty-eight is a little old to be unmated, and it’s a lot old for a Hunter. Their life-spans may be longer, but that doesn’t set the expectation back. Jo is only 22, so she has plenty of time to find someone.

“Whatever,” he grumbles. “Four more to go, right?”

“You’ll find somebody,” Benny says, his tone probably intending to be reassuring. Dean is too distracted by his scent to notice. God it’s grating, way worse than usual. It’s stirring his wolf up, which is not something he wants after the relative peace of the day.

“Yeah,” he sighs, flexing his hands and ignoring his wolf. “Hope you’re right.”

***

Two days later and Dean is back to square one. His wolf is cagey, irritated, sitting right at the surface. He snapped a little too violently at Garth during patrol, and he doesn’t even trust himself
around the pups. His mom tried to calm him down, but it only barely took the edge off. And that’s
the most concerning of all, that their omega, the one pack member that should be able to center him,
is barely even helping. People are starting to avoid him again, and he knows he smells like unhappy
alpha. Sam is giving him that look, the one that says he needs to take care of his shit.

He knows he does. He just doesn’t know how. He’s not even really sure how he’d managed it the
first time, and running around in the woods sure as hell isn’t helping him this time.

John doesn’t know when the next girl is arriving, only that she’s on her way, and Dean can’t decide
if that’s a good thing or not. He definitely can’t handle another beta like Cassie right now, that’s for
sure. He just hopes he can get himself under control before she gets here.

It’s right around 2am when Dean gives up on sleeping again and decides to go for a run, despite his
instincts telling him that it won’t help. He’s exhausted, this being the third night in a row that he
hasn’t slept, so he thinks that maybe if he runs around enough his body will just give out. If he could
be so lucky. So he pulls on sweats and jogs down to the main exit, pushing his body through the shift
and slipping out the door. It hurts, to force the shift like that, but whatever. He needs to run.

He lets the wolf take over again this time, because he doesn’t really know what it wants and decides
to just let it go figure it out. He ends up running the entire boundary of the Pack’s territory, every
inch of it, until he’s back at a very familiar flat rock. Dean’s about to question why in the hell his
wolf brought him here in the middle of the night when he spots a familiar figure sprawled out on the
stone. He hasn’t moved, and Dean figures because of the direction of the wind that the cat probably
doesn’t know he’s here yet. This pleases his wolf.

Dean thinks briefly about trying to sneak up on the cat, when he feels his body start to shift.

What the fuck. What the fuck.

The wolf has never forced a shift before. Ever. Dean hands the reigns over to his wolf more often
than he cares to admit, and his wolf has never caused a shift. Dean scrambles to stop it, to get control
of his body again, but his wolf isn’t interested. It’s too on edge, too riled up to listen to him. The wolf
wants to talk to their cat. Now.

Dean’s bones pop and crack, his joints screaming in protest. It hurts like a bitch, worse than a shift
has hurt in a while, but he’s powerless to stop it. And then he’s standing on two feet, staring at the
cat through human eyes that aren’t really his own. The wolf stalks closer, but doesn’t bother trying to
sneak. He wants their cat to know they’re here. And Dean can’t do a damn thing about it.

And he knows indeed. Dean is only a few feet away when the cat raises his head, staring at them
with squinted eyes and wide pupils that look distinctly feline.

“Puppy? Is that you?” he says, sounding amused as ever.

Dean growls, low and angry, because the wolf doesn’t like words unless it needs them. This seems
to get their cat’s attention. He stands up and walks towards them, never breaking eye contact. The wolf is pleased.

“Not puppy,” their cat chuckles, tilting his head. “You are all wolf right now, aren’t you?” he muses,
standing a bare few inches away from Dean. He doesn’t seem concerned by it though, more
interested than anything else. “Why are you so bitey, little wolf?”

Dean snaps his teeth in their cat’s face, curling his lips back to show their teeth. If their cat wants to
call them bitey, he will be bitey.
“Very nice teeth,” their cat nods, sounding impressed. The wolf preens. “Now use that mouth of yours and tell me why you are so angry.”

The wolf obeys, because this is what their cat wants.

“Did you scent mark us?” he asks, his voice low and with a rumbling underneath.

“Why do you ask?” he says with raised eyebrows.

“Our brother smelled you on us.”

Their cat looks pleased. “Apologies, little wolf. It was not purposeful.”

The wolf rumbles. “Why are you in our territory, cat?”

“Am I not welcome here?”

The wolf growls at that. Their cat should know that he is welcome in their territory, by its standards. Their cat should also know that Dean doesn’t like it, and neither does the Pack. Though their cat seems amused by the lack of answer, the wolf presses on.

“Why are you here?”

“That isn’t for you to worry about, little wolf,” their cat smiles, a small turn of his lips. “Now may I speak with the puppy?”

“His name is not puppy,” the wolf snaps, baring his teeth again. Their cat doesn’t even flinch.

“Apologies, I have not had the chance to learn what it actually is. Why don’t you let me talk to him, and I’ll ask him his name myself?”

Dean blinks as the wolf stalks away, regaining control of his body. He stares at the cat in awe, not sure how that whole thing just happened. He’s had his wolf talk for him before, but not like that. His wolf is…different. Stronger. Everyone has their animal side, Dean’s animal side just has a little more substance. And this cat, he had talked to Dean’s wolf like it was it’s own person. He had talked the wolf down, talked him into letting Dean have control back.

Dean hates going full wolf. He feels out of control, which he 100% is, and he hates it. At least when the wolf is riding close to the surface he can push it back down, but not when it’s out like that. And Dean has never been able to pull it back once it has full control over his body. The most he’s managed is guiding the wolf away from the Pack where he might hurt somebody who said or did something wrong. And somehow, this fucking cat had just handled it.

“How the fuck, did you do that?” Dean manages, just barely. This cat is starting to freak him out.

“Your wolf is very vibrant,” he says, stepping back a couple of inches so they aren’t right in each other’s faces. “I’ve never seen an animal speak like that before.”

“Glad I’m interesting to you,” Dean snaps, a growl emanating from his chest. “Now can we back up? How’d you know to do that?”

“I didn’t. But your wolf clearly wanted to speak with me. So I let it.”

Dean gapes. What the fuck. And now his wolf, that was raging around not three hours ago, is curled up and content to let him run the show. How.
“Who are you?”

“An excellent question, I would ask you the same. My name is Castiel.”

“Dean,” he answers skeptically. What kind of name is that?

“It’s nice to officially meet you. As you probably knew, I’m from the new pack that just migrated in.”

“Uh huh. And you’re, what? A black leopard?”

Castiel smiles. “A panther, if you like. A black leopard if you don’t.”

“And you’re hangin’ out in our territory because?”

“I told you. I like this rock.”

Dean snorts. Yeah, right. Because climbing up onto the trees and into someone else’s territory, risking getting caught and jeopardizing the peace between two packs is totally worth the pleasure of a friggin’ rock.

“Yeah. Gonna have to do better than that. You tellin’ me there aren’t any rocks over in leopard country over there?”

Castiel looks amused, his blue eyes bright. “Not any rocks with anywhere near this level of good company.”

“And how’ve you not gotten caught yet?”

Castiel actually snorts at this, like it’s the funniest thing he’s ever heard. “You’re joking, right? Your patrol schedule is beyond predictable. I’m not here when the patrol goes by, which is every six hours precisely, and your soldiers happily trot by without even knowing. No one notices. Except you.”

Dean’s wolf rumbles happily. Their cat is impressed by him. This is good. Dean rolls his eyes.

“How do you know I won’t turn you in?”

“I don’t.”

He stares at Dean while he says it, his blue eyes unwavering. His wolf is distracted thinking about how their cat trusts them when Dean processes the fact that Castiel has yet to lower his eyes. Even Jo and Sam, other alphas, have lowered their eyes at him in certain moments. And Dean knows that all of his dominance was just out to play when the wolf was running the show. And Castiel had never once looked down.

“You’re an alpha,” Dean says, leaning forward to scent the cat. He doesn’t protest.

“Far from it, actually,” Cas laughs, a brief smile lighting up his face. “Try again.”

Dean bristles. The leopards smell different from the wolves. He can tell if a wolf is an alpha immediately, but his nose isn’t as sharp when it comes to these guys. Castiel is, really, the only one he knows. How is he supposed to know what an alpha or not alpha smells like? But then if Castiel isn’t an alpha…

“An omega.”
Cas’ smile is weaker this time, more bitter, and Dean wants to know why that is, what's shameful about it.

“He finally gets it.”

“You didn’t know I was an alpha right away,” Dean protests, glaring at Castiel.

“True. I was right about everything else, though. Other than the freckles. I didn’t guess those,” he says with a twitch of his lips, effectively brushing the topic away and reaching two fingers up and touching a few of the scattered freckles across Dean’s nose. Dean snarls and swats his hand away.

“Don’t. Touch.”

“So that’s only allowed when I’m a panther?” Castiel says, looking a little annoyed.

“It’s not allowed ever. That was a mistake, and you scent marked me.”

Castiel scoffs and walks away, pacing back and forth by the rock. Dean feels a brief flash of guilt, smells the familiar sour scent of frustration. And it’s not coming from him, so it must be coming from Castiel. His wolf is angry, because he’s upset their cat. Their cat shouldn’t be frustrated.

“Dude, Cas, I—”

“I know, Dean,” he snaps, and it sounds so annoyed that Dean can’t even enjoy the shape of his name on the cat’s lips. “I’m going.”

Then he’s up in the trees, and Dean doesn’t even watch as he disappears on the other side of the territory line.

***

Castiel stalks through the forest back to his treehouse, itching to shift but knowing he’ll just hate himself for it. The panther is frustrated, and it’s making his skin crawl.

His mate is infuriating. Castiel wants to pin him down and make the stubborn wolf listen, but he knows he wouldn’t like that. More likely, Dean doesn't even know that they’re mates, hasn’t noticed. Castiel tries not to let this bother him. He noticed right away, recognized the scent of mate even buried underneath that disgusting wet dog smell. Before he even saw Dean as a human. His wolf is beautiful, in either form, feral and strong and fierce. Castiel knows he’s loyal, too, watches Dean fight with himself every time he finds Castiel in the Pack’s territory. He sees the war happen between the man and the wolf in Dean’s eyes, the desire to protect his pack and to protect Castiel.

Because that is what his mate is doing, even if he hasn’t realized it yet. Dean’s wolf is protecting its mate, and that is the reason Castiel is able to shake off his frustrations each day and keep going back.

It’s not easy. It’s about as far from easy as he can get. When Dean had wandered south the other day, chasing that female and reeking of her scent, Castiel had almost lost it. His mate is his to play with, not hers. Not some beta who can’t even keep up with him. The wolf deserves a real challenge.

Castiel had been on the verge of stalking away, of giving up for the day, when Dean had scented him. And that was certainly a surprise. The female hadn’t noticed, and Castiel was hidden well enough that he hadn’t expected Dean to notice, either. But Dean had found him, and then he had sent the other wolf away.
The panther had never been happier.

Dean had kept up the growling, like he always did, but with less force this time. And he smelled worried, not angry. He had even let Castiel swat at his sandy muzzle and ears, which was far more than Castiel had expected so soon. Dean had snapped when Castiel flexed his claws against his skin, but he couldn’t help himself from using the scent glands in his paws. He wants to coat Dean in his scent, instead of leaving tiny traces on his forehead, but it would have to do for now. And, Castiel has to admit to himself that he is pleased to know that that little bit had been enough to stick.

That had felt like progress. Today feels like a step back.

Castiel hadn’t expected his wolf to show up at the stone in the middle of the night. He’d only been there because it smelled faintly of Dean, and was comforting to his restless panther who hadn’t felt like sleeping in the tree that night. Then Dean had stalked out of the woods, smelling smokey and tense. And, as it turned out, it wasn’t Dean at all.

The wolf is a whole different creature than his mate. Dean is close to his animal side, Castiel has that figured out, but this was more than that. This wolf was all animal, and it had responded to Castiel. The wolf confronted him with sharp teeth and snarling growls, the wolf called him cat. Castiel had wondered how much of that had been what Dean really wanted to say. The wolf even seemed pleased that Castiel stood up to it, not frustrated, which was certainly a first for Castiel in his lifetime. He's never exactly been the best at being the quiet little omega his pack wants him to be.

It was, however, short-lived. As soon as Dean was back he'd pulled away, all of those nice pheromones that the wolf had been dispelling disappearing into the forest air. Castiel wanted to whine in frustration. Dean had even revoked his skin privileges, which had just pissed off the panther. Maybe he hasn’t earned them quite yet, but the panther doesn’t care. It wants its mate.

Now, as Castiel arrives back at his treehouse just as the sun is rising, he feels a hundred times worse than he’d felt the night before when he’d crept out to the rock. And, to make things worse, there’s another scent inside his treehouse. He climbs up the trunk and through the trap door, paying the other scent no mind. Instead he pulls on sweats and a hoodie to cover himself up, leaving the front unzipped and his bare chest exposed. The panther wants comfort, but his body is already too warm.

“Hello, Balthazar,” he sighs, wandering into his small pantry in search of breakfast, ignoring the blonde on his couch. He finds a can of mandarin oranges and decides it'll have to do, until he can get to Anna’s to pick up more supplies.

“Cassie. How is your dog this morning?”

Castiel growls at him in warning. “I am not in the mood.”

“Not good then?”

He doesn’t answer. There are days when he is willing to put up with Balthazar, and there are days when he wishes the other leopard wasn't an alpha so he could shut him up.

“What are you doing here?”

“Can’t a man visit his brother in arms with no ulterior motive?” Balthazar grins, holding his arms open. Castiel glares and sits at the opposite end of the couch with his can of fruit and a fork. Balthazar does visit for fun, but never like this. Never unannounced.

“Spit it out.”
Balthazar hesitates. “The Arch is displeased, Castiel.”

He sighs. Go figure. The Arch is always displeased.

“Is that my problem? And since when do you care what the Arch thinks?”

“I don’t care at all. They are displeased at you, so you should care.”

Castiel knows that it was only a matter of time. Their truce with the wolves is an uneasy one, and their position in this forest is precarious. The humans are eyeing them, in a way they don’t eye the wolves, and it makes the Arch nervous. Their numbers are fewer than they once were. Castiel knows he isn’t helping, but he didn’t choose this.

“The Arch knows they cannot interfere, and they know I am being careful. What issue do they take, then?”

“He’s a wolf, Castiel, and you are entering their territory repeatedly to see him. You cannot expect them to be unfazed.”

“I won’t get caught.”

“And if he sells you out?”

“He won’t.”

“How can you possibly know that?”

“Because,” Castiel growls, rapidly growing tired of this conversation. “He is my mate, Balthazar. I did not choose him, but I refuse to ignore it. And he will not sell me out.”

Castiel doesn’t realize he’s on his feet until Balthazar stands up to meet him. His eyes are hard and frustrated, but not angry. Castiel knows that his brother only wants to help him, so he tries to soften his gaze.

“I would not ask you to abandon your mate, once you found them. Do not ask the same of me.”

Balthazar growls and drags his hands over his face, but Castiel thinks it’s acceptance that he sees. “Fine, Cassie. But don’t expect a burial when you get yourself killed.”
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

“It wasn’t like this, Dean.”

Chapter Notes

Warning here for some implied past abuse. Nothing specific.

Dean’s wolf is up and raging again before the day is even over. It’s agitated about the spat with Castiel, Dean knows that, but he also knows it’s ridiculous. Castiel is a stupid cat, and Dean’s wolf needs to get over it. Which all sounds well and good, until he’s laying awake in his bed thinking about fucking Christmas trees at 4am.

Dean wants to scream. He wishes he could get a handle on his wolf just so that he could strangle him. Dean wants sleep, and all his wolf wants is to go find their cat. The one thing Dean refuses to do.

He knows he looks haggard when he finally drags himself out of bed at 6am, he doesn’t even need to look in the mirror to know that. Instead he forces himself to shift and report for patrol, keeping his wolf on a tight leash. He has a job to do, god dammit.

When he gets back a couple of hours later he goes straight for the shower, feeling stickier and more exhausted than ever. All he wants is to curl up with a warm body that smells like pack and fall asleep. He’s just thinking that he could probably convince Charlie to humor him as he steps out of the shower, when he smells something unfamiliar in his room.

It smells like omega, but it also doesn’t smell like Mom. Which means…there’s another omega in his room.

He creeps out of the bathroom, still kind of wet with his towel wrapped around his waist, and spots a beautiful, soft-looking blonde standing at the foot of his bed. She doesn’t sit and make herself comfortable like Cassie did, but her smell is strong enough to infiltrate his space anyway. His wolf immediately calms, quieter than it’s been in days. Not counting the time he spent out in the forest with Castiel, but whatever. Not important. Her scent seems to be helping in a way that his mom’s scent hasn’t been, and Dean accepts it. It’s a temporary fix, like a band-aid on a bullet wound, but it’s something.

When he clears his throat she looks up at him, a careful smile pulling at her lips.

“Hello, Dean. How are you?”

He blinks. Pretty damn terrible, actually, but she can see that—can smell that. “Uh, fine? Mind me asking who you are?”
He’s impressed at how calm his voice sounds. She smells fresh, like saltwater, like soft sand. Dean thinks she actually smells pretty good, better than the betas in his pack. Although, again, that’s probably mostly due to her being an omega. Built to be appealing.

“I’m Layla. I’m from your sister pack, north of here.”

The sister pack. The pack his mom came from, where her parents still live. He’s never met them, he just knows that him and Sam were named after them.

“You’re an omega. Like my mom.”

She smiles, a soft, beautiful thing. Just like the rest of her. “Yes. Our pack is lucky to have so many omegas.”

Dean wouldn’t know what that’s like, to have more than one. He’s always thought his mom was enough. But maybe things would be easier on her, if they had another. Maybe she wouldn’t have to work so hard. Maybe none of them would.

“What is that like?”

“I wouldn’t know,” she laughs, a light, tinkling sound. “It’s all I’ve ever known. If I figure it out, I will let you know.”

Dean nods. He has no idea what to do with this girl. His wolf is suspiciously quiet, and he feels like he has to tip-toe around her. Which is odd, because he’s never felt like that around his mom. Omegas are the heart of the pack, but he just feels timid around her. Like she might break, if he even speaks too loud. His wolf wants to protect her to an extreme degree, but it doesn’t feel right. Dean’s not sure what exactly it should feel like, when you find your mate or whatever, but he’s pretty sure it isn’t this. He said he’d play nice though, and Layla doesn’t deserve his attitude; he’s saving that for the Council.

“Maybe I should get dressed, then we can go find something to eat?”

“Okay,” she says softly, smiling again.

It takes him a few minutes to pull on jeans and a t-shirt, then he leads her down the hallway to the dining quarters. It’s just the end of breakfast, so Dean piles up his plate with eggs and bacon and four pancakes. Layla laughs at him as he goes, building herself a fruit parfait that actually doesn’t look that bad. Better than the ones that Sam makes. They find seats towards the center of the room, and Dean purposefully picks a table with no other Hunters at it. Layla is getting enough looks just by standing in this room, he figures she could use a minute to adjust without some other alphas in her face.

“So,” he says, taking a bite of bacon. “North, huh?”

She nods, getting a piece of cantaloupe with her fork and chewing carefully. “Around a hundred miles. We live right along the lake.”

Dean nods. He wonders if that’s why she smells like saltwater.

“We don’t have so many trees around our den.”

That’s normal, a lot of packs prefer open plains to dense forests. It isn’t Dean’s preference, but it’s normal.
“Tell me about you, Dean. What’s going on with you?”

Dean starts, surprised. He’s not used to talking about himself, but Layla asks so innocently and candidly that he can’t not answer her.

“I dunno. The Pack seems to think I need a mate.”

“What an outrageous idea,” she hums with carefully raised eyebrows and pursed lips, and it takes Dean a second to get that she’s joking.

“Yeah, well,” he laughs. “I’m pretty sure I’m destined to be alone.”

He thinks about regretting those words for a second, because he definitely could’ve been less blunt about it. But Layla seems to get it. They aren’t mates, she knows that as well as he does. Her scent is soothing to him, and he has no clue what he smells like to her, but that’s about it. Still, like Cassie, he’s not gonna be a dick about it.

“Have faith, Dean,” she says, her smile genuine. “Your mate is out there. You’ll find them.”

“What makes you so sure?”

“Because you are good. And you deserve someone who makes you happy.”

Dean tries valiantly not to blush in the face of her sincere words. He just doesn’t think of himself like that, and she doesn’t even know him. Layla is probably good, she probably deserves someone to make her happy. But Dean? He isn’t…anything. He’s a Hunter. He protects his pack. He manages his wolf. That’s what he’s made for. Having a mate just…never seemed like something he deserves.

“Well, uh, thanks,” he says, clearing his throat. “Would you want to, maybe go meet some of the Pack?” he suggests, feeling kind of cagey. Dean isn’t quite sure what they’ll do, but if he learned anything from Cassie it’s that this girl should get to know his pack. For however long she’s here.

“Sure.”

Dean leads her out of the dining hall and towards the living quarters, knocking on his brother’s door and getting an answer after a handful of knocks. Sam is pulling on a shirt when the door opens, a tired frown on his face like he hasn’t slept all night.

“Hiya, Sammy, am I interrupting?”

His brother rolls his eyes. “No, Dean. Jess just…isn’t feeling well. What’s up?”

Dean’s instinct is to ask further about Jess, but he knows Sam would let him know if it was something serious.

“Uh, so this is Layla.” Sam nods at her and she smiles back, and Dean sees his brother’s pupils shrink and dilate as he scents her. “Was hopin’ to introduce her to the gang. You know where everybody is?”

Sam yawns and stretches, mussing his hair and thinking for a moment. “The nursery, I think. Mom was going to set up a movie for the pups, so Jo dragged Ruby and a bunch of the soldiers up there for bonding time.”

Dean thinks for a moment, deciding that that actually doesn’t sound too bad. Especially with Layla.

“Got it. Thanks Sammy.”
The door closes and Dean turns to Layla, raising his eyebrows and looking for permission. She doesn’t raise any objections so he leads her out of the living quarters tunnel and down the main walk towards the nursery.

It’s packed when they get up there, all three of the pups shifted this time. Two of them are chasing around a lean black wolf, Kevin, and the third is playing tug-o-war with a sock puppet with Garth. Ruby is leaning up against the stone wall to the side, Meg’s head in her lap. Mary is sitting at the center of the room with several of the other soldiers sprawled out around her, with Jo, Adam, and Krissy among them.

“My family,” Dean laughs, not missing the bright, beaming smile on Layla’s face.

“It’s wonderful,” she says, reaching up to cup his cheek with a small hand. His wolf practically purrs. Somehow, Dean feels like this isn’t what she’s used to.

Layla blends in to the group like a natural. She takes up a spot next to Mary, the beta soldiers shifting out of her way without being asked. Dean is proud. Mary smiles and touches the younger girl’s cheek, telling the soldiers to be careful with her.

“You do not have skin privilege with Layla,” she reminds them gently. “Let her be comfortable here.”

“It’s alright,” she laughs. “I would happily give you the privilege,” she says, slowly touching the hands, faces, and hair of the soldiers scattered around her. Jo is watching her carefully, with interest. “I do not have the honor of being pack healer at home, but if you would let me act as one, here…” She trails off, clearly nervous, but Mary soothes her. “Of course, baby.”

The soldiers around her shift again, a pile of happy wolves around their omegas. Dean smiles and sits next to Jo, laughing when one of the pups gives up their chase and piles onto his lap. Kevin grabs the other by the scruff of its neck and curls up on the floor with it as Ash finishes setting up the movie, and Garth does the same. Krissy is within arms reach, sprawled on her stomach, so Dean reaches out and ruffles her dark hair; she gives him a hard punch in the arm in return.

It ends up being a Disney movie, The Aristocats, and watching the pups turns out to be much more entertaining than the movie itself. They keep barking at the screen, whining when the butler is causing trouble. One of them, the smallest girl, growls at him instead, and Dean knows she’ll grow up to be dominant for sure. He can’t help but chuckle at her. Dean’s wolf is curled up and relaxed the whole time, and it feels good to be so calm.

When the movie ends two hours later, the pups are squeaking and yawning. Mary ushers the soldiers out, tells them all that the pups need their rest. As Dean is walking towards the door Layla stops him, with a gentle hand on his arm.

“Dean?”

“Mmm?” he hums, feeling sleepy.

“I might…stay here. With Mary, and the pups.”

Dean is surprised, but not that surprised. Whatever Layla’s pack is like, whatever their sister pack is like…it makes his wolf uneasy. Things must have changed since his mom left.

“Layla, what was your pack like?” he asks, keeping his voice low. He knows that Mary can still hear them, but he knows she won’t listen in. Or, at least, she won’t be obvious about it. Layla lowers her
eyes, which surprises the hell out of Dean. Omegas don’t need to submit, they don’t feel the urge like alphas or betas do. So for Layla to do that automatically, when he isn’t being threatening, means that someone taught it to her. “Did they…?”

“It wasn’t like this, Dean.”

Her smile is carefully crafted, slipping perfectly into place. Dean wants to push, but he doesn’t. If he were her, he wouldn’t want to bring that memory into a new pack. So he doesn’t ask again, instead he wraps his arms around her and exhales into her hair, covering her in the scent of his pack, his alpha. He wants her to know that she is safe here, from whatever she wasn’t safe from in her old pack.

“Stay here,” he says. “Mom will take care of you.”

He lets go of her then, letting her go scoop up a sleeping pup in her arms. She looks happy, like that. Mary comes over and gives him a tight hug before he goes, and the wetness of her eyes says everything that she didn’t say out loud.

It’s still early in the afternoon, and after seeking out a meal Dean finds himself calm and happy and itching for a nap. For once, it feels like his wolf might let him sleep. He thinks about going back to his quarters to sleep, but that’s not what his wolf wants. His wolf wants to rest with the sun on their fur, the air of the forest in their nose. And, Dean has to admit, it doesn’t sound that bad. Unfortunately he’s stopped on the way, by a shaggy haired, excited looking Sam.

“Dean! Hey, uh, meeting now. In the council room.”

Dean eyes his brother, suspicious of his behavior. He’d just seen his brother a couple of hours ago, and between then and now his mood has changed drastically. Sam is practically bouncing on his feet, and he’s obviously trying not to smile. Which is odd, because who gets this excited about meetings with the Council?

“For what?”

“The Hunters. C’mon.”

Without another word Sam dashes off down the hallway, practically dragging Dean the distance to the council room. John and Ellen are the only two in there, and Dean spares a moment to wonder where Bobby and Rufus are and why they aren’t being involved. Dean takes a seat and looks around, taking in the faces of Sam, Jo, Benny, and Ruby all around him.

“Thank you for coming on such short notice,” John huffs, sighing and crossing his arms. “As you may know, Jessica has been serving as our human relations liaison for some time now. She will no longer be filling this position. In the interest of the Pack, we are deciding upon a suitable soldier to take over her position, as well as the position of Pack liaison with our new neighbors.”

Dean processes all this information, looking at Sam for some kind of hint about what’s going on. Their HR liaison is one of the most important members of the Pack, being one of the few things standing between them and a full out bloodbath with the humans. Once upon a time that’s how things were. Shifters hunted humans for sport, because they were the weaker species or some shit, and humans hunted shifters for their fur, or for fun, or for a challenge. Because what kind of hunter doesn’t want that kind of bragging right?

They only coexist peacefully now because they have to, because shifter packs are running out of places to go as the world shrinks and shrinks, because the humans know they’re vulnerable to teeth
and claws, but that doesn’t mean anybody’s happy about it. In truth, if it weren’t for their reputation and size, the humans would’ve tried more than once to take them out. They would be far from the first pack to be exterminated.

But Jess is good at her job, good at keeping the humans happy and out of their territory, so why is she stepping down? Is she sick? Sicker than Dean had thought?

“Why’s Jess not doing it anymore?” Jo asks, the first to snap under the curiosity.

“Jess is expecting pups,” Ellen smiles, her tone even like this isn’t the most exciting news in the world. “Twins.”

Dean practically leaps out of his chair, wrapping his little brother up in his arms and practically lifting him up off the floor. “What the hell, Sammy!”

Sam is laughing, and then they’re all hugging him—even Ruby, though she still has that sour grape look on her face.

“I didn’t even know, not until about an hour ago,” he says, happy alpha scent flooding the room. “Jess has been nauseous, but we never even thought it’d be this.”

“Mom know yet?” Dean asks, raising his eyebrows. Their mom is gonna freak.

“Not yet,” Sam sighs, that puppy grin of his spread wide across his face. “Gonna go tell her when we’re done here.”

“Let’s get done then,” Dean says, ruffling his hair.

“Alright alright settle down,” John grumbles, but there’s laughter in his tone. New pups are just too exciting not to be happy about it, and Dean knows that John has never been prouder of his son. Not that he shows it, but Dean knows. “We’re all excited. Now let’s hear some ideas.”

“I think Kevin would be good,” Dean suggests, slapping Sam on the back one more time before sitting back down. “He knows his stuff, and the humans like him. He’s harmless looking.”

“Second,” Jo says, raising two fingers. “He’s getting too big for his job, too. He needs more responsibility in the pack.”

Ellen looks to the other three soldiers for approval, before nodding sharply. “That’s settled then. Sam, you let the kid know. And keep this under wraps as long as you’d like, but the pack’ll notice soon.”

Dean wonders if Sam can smell the pups yet, smell the new scents along with Jess’. He wonders if that’s how Sam knew.

“Yes ma’am,” Sam nods, standing and leaving the room with the other Hunters in tow. Dean stands to follow him out when his dad clears his throat.

“Dean. Stay for a minute,” Ellen says, hiding the command behind a softer tone. Dean takes a deep breath and turns around, waiting for the sound of the council room door closing behind him.

“Yeah?”

His dad is eyeing him, from top to bottom, is even scenting the air around them. Dean lowers his eyes and waits for the verdict.
“You smell like the omega girl.”

“Layla,” Dean corrects. “And not for the reason you think. We just spent some time in the nursery, with Mom. She’s up there now.”

John raises his eyebrows. “You don’t like her?”

“She’s an asset to the Pack. She’ll be well-liked. She’s not my mate.”

John nods, but he looks frustrated.

“There are three more. You’re doin’ good, kid,” Ellen nods, looking a hell of a lot less frustrated than his dad. “These girls’ll fit in here, even if it ain’t with you. You’ve done good for your pack.”

“Thank you,” Dean nods, actually feeling sincere.

“How’s your wolf?” John asks, because he has to be a dick and bring it up.

“Fine,” Dean says, straightening his shoulders and raising his chin. “Everything is under control.”

“See that it stays that way,” he says, the threat implied in his voice. John has taken care of rogues before, and he’ll take care of Dean if he goes rogue.

“Yes sir,” Dean grits out, trying not to grind his teeth.

“Dismissed.”

Dean feels significantly less relaxed by the time he leaves the council room, but his wolf is still calm. He decides to take that nap anyway, just in case his wolf decides not to sleep tonight.

He stops by the main exit and strips off his clothes, actually enjoying the pop and stretch of his muscles. It doesn’t hurt any less, but it feels good to wear his fur. He jogs through the forest, stopping and sniffing and taking his time deciding on the best place to take a nap. And really, he shouldn’t be surprised when he ends up at the rock.

He tells himself it has nothing to do with the cat. The rock is just a nice place to lay down, where he won’t get his fur dirty. His wolf, however, seems more than a little disappointed to find the rock empty, no sign of their cat nearby.

Dean walks in tight circles on the rock before curling up, wrapping his tail around his body and resting his muzzle on his paws. The rock just smells like a rock, not like bark or like Christmas trees. The wolf whines, but Dean doesn’t let it escape his throat.

He’s better than that.
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

"I mean, dude. You’re a cat."

Castiel wakes up in a pool of sweat.

_Shit._

His heat wasn’t supposed to hit for another four days, but here it is. He curses and rolls onto his back, feeling a throb in his groin. Some of the pressure is alleviated by his palm, but it’s not nearly enough. The panther wants to find its mate. The panther _needs_ its mate. The panther is tired of spending its heats alone.

Castiel groans and moves his hand faster, knowing the relief of his orgasm won’t last long. With the scent of his mate still fresh in his memory, Castiel can’t imagine this is going to be an easy heat to get through. But if he gets everything he wants, if everything works out, it _will_ be the last heat that he spends alone.

That thought doesn’t really help him now, though. He spends the next _five days_—the longest heat he’s ever had—in a cycle of napping, drinking juice, trying to get some protein in his system, jerking himself off, and repeating. His uses his fingers, too, but it isn’t satisfying. He has toys—silly, neon colored things that he’s gotten as gag gifts from his pack—but he doesn’t use them. He hates the synthetic feel of them, hates the cheap mockery of real flesh. His mate will feel a million times better than any toy, he knows that. And until then, he’s willing to keep waiting it out.

When he wakes up on the sixth day, feeling achy and exhausted and sore to the bone, but not horny, he’s more than a little relieved. It feels like waking up out of a bad fever dream. His treehouse reeks, he’s sure, but it’ll fade. All he wants now is a bath, and his wolf. Some part of Castiel thinks that maybe he should wait, before he goes looking. No matter how hard he scrubs at his skin the smell of his heat is going to stick around, at least until tomorrow. And today it’ll be even stronger. But then, some other part of him thinks its might be fun to rile his wolf up. See if he sticks to that ridiculous “no skin privileges” thing now.

Dean has to figure out that they’re mates somehow.

Castiel decides to stay human this time, honestly because his body is too tired and sore from his five day heat-from-hell to have any desire to tear itself apart in the shift. So he pulls on black sweats and nothing else, climbing down out of his treehouse bare-chested and barefooted and shuffling towards his wolf. It’s just getting to be around 2 o’clock, so Castiel doesn’t have to worry about the patrols. He’s not even sure that Dean will be at the flat-rock, but it’s his best bet. And he’s willing to wait. It’s the least he can do, after leaving Dean hanging for almost a week. It wasn’t intentional, the timing of his heat, but he can’t help but feel a little bitterly pleased.

There is still about a half a mile between Castiel and the rock when he realizes he won’t have to wait at all. The stench of distressed and pissed off alpha is permeating the air, making Castiel shiver. It’s underlaid by Dean’s oak and chestnut scent, tugging right on every one of Castiel’s base instincts to soothe his mate. The panther is pacing and growling, impatient now that it knows that its mate is
waiting. Castiel, on the other hand, has enough presence of mind to know that he has no idea how long Dean has been waiting. He’d known it would be bad, but Castiel isn’t prepared for it to be this bad. Dean is, apparently, farther gone than Castiel thought.

A small miscalculation on his part, but he can handle it.

Castiel approaches cautiously, on the ground, staying on his side of the territory line. He knows that Dean won’t hurt him, but he’s definitely the more vulnerable of the two right now. He’s a 5’11” human, Dean is a 250 pound wolf. He doesn’t really want to tangle with that.

Dean is already growling at him when he approaches, his ears flat and his lips pulled up in a snarl. There’s blood on his muzzle again, which Castiel takes to mean he’s been hunting. It’s not a good sign. Castiel hunts too, when his panther is feeling its strongest, but it is one of the baser animal instincts they have. To give in to it often, purposefully or not, never leads to anything good.

It’s at that exact second that Castiel realizes that it was a very, very bad idea to come here with his heat still clinging to his skin. But he’s not going to show it.

“Hello, puppy,” he says carefully, not even entirely sure that he’s talking to Dean instead of the wolf. It might be better, actually, if it’s the wolf. The wolf would be expected to act this way, but Dean is expected to hold himself together.

The tangy scent of alpha arousal hits the air, and Castiel knows that Dean has smelled his heat on him. The growling increases, gets lower, and shit Castiel knows he’s in trouble. He’s going to have to run, and hope he can get up a tree. Unless, of course, Dean is too wary of the sensors to cross them. He doesn’t mind running, of course, and the panther thinks a little chase with its mate would be fun. But Dean needs to make the first move, because Castiel refuses to be his prey.

“What’re feeling a little grumpy today, are we?” Castiel says with a smile, careful to maintain eye contact. The second he looks away is the second that Dean will lunge at him. “I’m judging from your attitude that you missed me these last couple of days, hmm?”

Dean snarls and snaps his jaws. Castiel takes that as a yes.

“Sorry, puppy, biology called. Had to take care of it.”

Castiel knows that Dean can smell the heat on him, Castiel knows that Dean knows that’s where he’s been the last couple of days. And yet something about those two sentences, those few words, sets him off. Dean lunges across the territory line and Castiel doesn’t even think; he turns and sprints, as fast as he can, leaning on his instincts.

He has a tiny advantage here, a tiny one, in that he knows where he’s going. Dean doesn’t know when he’s going to cut or turn, and Castiel is fast enough on foot to use it. He manages to get a tiny bit of a lead and cuts behind a tree, listening for his wolf’s heavy footfalls to follow behind him. Except…he doesn’t hear them. His wolf doesn’t want to be heard. He twists his head over both shoulders and sniffs, trying to figure out which direction Dean is coming from. Castiel can smell him, he just can’t quite catch…

He catches Dean scent a tiny bit stronger on his left and takes off to his right a split second before Dean lunges at him. Castiel smiles, the panther feeling triumphant. His wolf is going to have to try a little bit harder than that.

And try harder he does. The wolf is faster, sharper, keeps up with Castiel’s turns. Try as he might Castiel can’t get a lead on him, and his treehouse is still several hundred feet away. He’s just thinking
that he can probably get there through the trees when heavy paws on his back send him sprawling to
the ground. He catches himself as best he can and rolls to the side, attempting to throw the wolf off
before he gets him in an even more compromising position. It doesn’t work. His wolf has size and
weight on him, and easily pins him down by his chest. Castiel struggles for a brief second, then
Dean’s jaws are around his neck, sharp teeth pressing ever so slightly against the vulnerable flesh.

Castiel smiles. His wolf is impressive. “Hello, Dean.”

***

Dean’s vision doesn’t clear until he has the cat pinned down, has his jaws around his pretty little
neck. Dean is growling, too, a constant rumble in his chest that the cat seems unfazed by. He can practically taste the smell of heat in the air, and it’s throwing him into a complete frenzy.

“Hello, Dean,” he says, a smile on his face. Dean has his teeth on his jugular and the damn cat is smiling. Dean’s wolf snarls happily. Their cat is unafraid, their cat is fierce.

Dean makes no moves to let him go, just breathes and growls, and Castiel doesn’t struggle. He lays prone in the dirt, Dean standing half on top of him, with his head tilted back and to the side. Dean’s wolf is happy to know that their cat did not bare his neck to them, not even when they had him pinned.

A few minutes pass like this and Castiel doesn’t speak. Dean is thankful for that. He doesn’t want to think about this, about why all this just happened. Then he feels fingers in his fur and—Castiel is petting him. Dean growls, annoyed that his wolf is so happy about it.

“Yes, I know, you are very tough,” Castiel says, raising both hands to Dean’s muzzle. “Let me go now.”

His fingers wrap around Dean’s jaws, one on the top and one on the bottom, careless of his teeth,
and pull his mouth open. Dean could snap his jaws closed right now and take off every single one of this cat’s fingers. He could do it easily, and Castiel knows it. The level of trust baffles him. And Dean even lets him pull his jaws open, instead of holding them in place like Dean knows he could.

That’s when Dean tastes blood on his tongue. Castiel’s blood. He opens his mouth and jumps back immediately, putting several feet of distance between them. Dean doesn’t know what the fuck he’s doing right now. The wolf isn’t even running the show. This was all him. He doesn’t know why he just chased this stupid cat all over the woods, he doesn’t know why the smell of his heat is driving him so fucking batty. He doesn’t know why his wolf flinched so badly at the taste of the cat’s blood. He just knows he can’t hurt this cat, and fuck he’s losing his goddamn mind.

“Hey hey hey,” Castiel says, sticking his middle finger in his mouth and sucking before holding up bare hands. “See? Nothing. You didn’t hurt me.”

Dean walks forward slowly, one single step at a time. Castiel watches him, doesn’t move, stays sitting on the ground with his hands held up for Dean to see. Dean stalks around him, sniffing as he goes, finding no traces of any other smells except for Castiel’s scent and the sweet, intoxicating scent of his heat. Dean’s wolf thinks its good that their cat does not carry the scents of any others that he might have passed his heat with, because then they would have to find these lovers and tear their throats out for touching their cat.

Dean winces at that thought. This is bad. Really bad. For his wolf to claim this cat like that…

Shit.
Still, Dean circles him and sniffs all around, sneezing when he sticks his nose in Castiel’s hair only for the cat to laugh and lean away from him.

“A little invasive, don’t you think?” Castiel says, pushing Dean’s muzzle away with his palm. “Keep your wet nose away from me.”

Dean ignores him and sticks his nose back in Castiel’s hair. His scent is strong there. When Dean is satisfied he trots around and sits in front of Castiel, sinking back onto his haunches and letting his tongue hang out of his mouth.

“Are you satisfied now?”

Apparently his wolf is satisfied, because he’s finally chilled the fuck out. Dean huffs and lays down, resting his head in the cat’s lap. He shouldn’t be acting like this, that’s for fucking sure, but his wolf hasn’t been calm in days. He’s pretty sure he’s running on hour hundred or hundred and five with no sleep. So sue him, for being fucking exhausted, and taking advantage of the perfect smelling man sitting in front of him. Because apparently fucking Christmas is the only thing that’ll let him relax these days. Awesome.

Castiel seems surprised for a moment, but his hands soon settle onto Dean’s head, stroking his ears. “What’s going on with you, puppy?”

Dean has no clue. He thinks he’s going crazy. One minute, he’s fine. The next, he’s on the verge of going rogue. His wolf is riding closer to the surface than ever, and that’s at all times. Sometimes Dean thinks he should just leave, that his pack would be better off without him, without all this stupid drama. And then he lays here, with his cat, and he thinks that maybe life doesn’t have to be like that. Maybe with his mate—

His thoughts screech to a halt. Mate. Mate?!

He whips his head up and stares at Castiel, his eyes wide. Castiel stares right back, opening and closing his mouth a few times before he speaks.

“Ah, yes. I gather that you’ve figured it out. Hold on one moment, please.”

Castiel stands up and jogs away, disappearing amongst the trees. Dean tilts his head and waits. Is he supposed to just wait here? Should he follow? He’s about to stand up when Castiel jogs back into view, a pair of grey sweatpants in hand.

“Here. Now do me a favor and shift back? It’s awfully hard to talk to you when you can’t talk back.”

Dean sighs and rolls his eyes, standing up and pushing his body to shift. It’s surprisingly easy, despite the pain, and Dean is reminded—not so pleasantly—that he hasn’t actually been human since yesterday.

He thinks it was the new girl that made him snap. He’d been on edge for a few days, hadn’t been sleeping, and his wolf had been ripping at the seems again. Then this girl—a beta named Carmen from somewhere farther north than Layla—had showed up in his room and she just smelled wrong. It wasn’t her fault. She was probably a sweet girl, but Dean’s control was too precarious to have it tested. So he’d gotten the hell out of there, told Sammy he’d be back when he could. Sam didn’t look happy about it, but at least he’d know that Dean was somewhere in their territory because of the sensors. And—

Shit. He ran through the sensors.
Castiel sits patiently while the shift finishes, handing Dean the sweats in his hands once he's done.

“I went through the sensors, didn’t I?” he asks, first thing.

“Afraid so,” Castiel sighs. “So your pack will know you’re gone.”

Dean is torn. He needs to get back, needs to let them know that he didn’t lose it and take off into the forest, but…

“Are we…?” he trails off, not willing to say it out loud, like saying it will make it real.

“Mates?” Castiel says, a cross between amused and exhasperated. “Yes.”

“How’s that even possible? I mean, dude. You’re a cat.”

Castiel glares at him. “I’m a panther. And you would do well to watch your tone, puppy.”

“You call me puppy, I’m gonna call you cat. Fair’s fair.”

A rumble emanates from Castiel’s chest, higher pitched than what Dean manages but no less threatening. His wolf is amused.

“With that growl, I might just have to start calling you kitten.”

Castiel doesn’t look pleased, but the wolf thinks they should tease their cat more often. Their cat smells good when he’s grumpy.

“Back to the point. You’re a panther, I’m a wolf. How in the hell are we mates?”

“I have never known the mating bond to respect species,” Castiel says, his tone a little sharp. “Have you ever seen a fellow pack member mate with a human?”

Dean has to think about that. Maybe not anyone he knows personally, but he’s definitely known it to happen. “I guess, yeah.”

“We are clearly no different,” Castiel shrugs. “I see no issue with it.”

“It’s fucking weird, Cas,” Dean says, catching the way Castiel rolls his eyes in annoyance. “The whole thing is just weird.”

“Sorry that I am so displeasing to you,” he spits, shifting closer to anger.

Dean sighs and rubs his hands over his face. Awesome.

“C’mon. You can’t tell me this isn’t weird.” Dean refuses to backtrack, even if it’s clear that he’s offended the guy.

“I can tell you that you are my mate, and I am not concerned with petty things like what species of animal you happen to shift into.”

The weight of that word in Castiel’s low, rumbly voice feels like a slap across his face.

“Are you concerned with petty things like the fact that our packs hate each other?” Dean growls back, defensive. Dean’s kind of being a dick here, yeah, but this isn’t simple. This isn’t as easy as we’re mates, end of story. And, in his defense, all this shit just got basically thrown at him. All of a sudden he’s supposed to just be cool with the fact that he not only has a mate, but a mate who’s a
He doesn’t even mention the omega thing. As sure as Dean had been that his mate wouldn’t be a beta, a submissive, he’d been even more sure that his mate wouldn’t be an omega. Omegas aren’t submissive, sure, but they’re soft. Gentle, pliable, whatever. They don’t have fires in their bellies, not like Dean wants. The ones Dean has met, at least, are like Layla. Kind, good, all of these things. But Dean’s wolf puts them in the category “to protect” and not “to mate.” Layla had been a prime example of that.

Imagine Dean’s fucking surprise when he finds this omega, who is fiery and fierce and strong like an alpha; who is not only not submissive, but the complete opposite. Dean doesn’t want to admit that he finds the cat appealing, but…

“Apologies, Dean,” Cas hisses back, pushing to his feet and glaring down at him, breaking Dean’s train of thought. “I made the false assumption that you would be willing to stand up to your pack and their baseless prejudice for your mate. Obviously, I was wrong.”

Castiel starts to stalk away, and Dean sees red. His wolf is pissed at him. He’s upset their cat, their mate, and now he needs to fix it. It feels like the wolf is boiling under his skin, and as much as he wants to respond, to ask Cas to stay so they can figure this shit out, he’s too busy controlling his breaths to speak. He can’t do this, not right now. No. He cannot let the wolf out right now. Not with Cas smelling like sex on a stick and not smelling like Dean.

Shit those aren’t his thoughts. Shit. Shit shit shit.

“Dean,” he hears through the haze, through the blood rushing in his ears. It’s a command, not a question. Then Cas’ hands are on his face, and it feels like a rush of cold water.

“Don’t walk away right now,” Dean manages, and it’s more growl than words. He knows he’s sinking all of his dominance into his words, every ounce of alpha in him, but he also knows it won’t matter. Cas doesn’t obey him. “Just don’t.”

“Okay,” he says, and not because he has to. “Your wolf is hard on you, isn’t he?”

Dean nods, because he isn’t sure that he can speak. Castiel doesn’t say anything more, he just stands in Dean’s space with his palms on Dean’s face. Slowly his wolf settles, slowly the smell of his cat seeps into his bones.

“Sorry,” Dean sighs after more than a few minutes. He hates this, and he’s sick and fucking tired of feeling out of control.

“You have nothing to be sorry for,” Castiel says, lowering his hands but not stepping out of Dean’s space. “The bond would help, Dean. Your wolf needs it.”

“I don’t even know you, Cas.”

He nods. Neither of them really wants the bond quite yet, and just because his wolf knows that Cas is his mate doesn’t mean that Dean is ready to accept it.

“I know. Which is why I propose that we change that.”

Dean huffs. “You make it sound so easy.”

“We already know that it’s easy for me to get into your territory,” Cas says with a sneaky smile. “And if you were a bit more careful, you could get out unnoticed too. Or, you know, you could tell
your pack.”

Dean was afraid he’d ask that.

“Cas, I can’t do that. Things are too tense right now. I’d be pushing it to even leave our territory. I’m gonna get my ass handed to me when I get back. I don’t know…”

*I don’t even know you,* he wants to say. *I don’t even know if I want to be your mate. I don’t know anything about you. You don’t know anything about me. You don’t know if you want me to be your mate. I don’t know if I can be. I don’t know.*

Castiel sniffs and nods his head. He doesn’t look happy, but he doesn’t smell annoyed either.

“We’ll sneak, then. For now.”

Dean hesitates. This is a bad idea. This is a really bad idea. But as the last couple of days have showed, the Council is right. He’s out of control. And if this will help…

“Yeah. Sure. For now.”
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

"I wouldn’t fucking blink."

Chapter Notes

You guys literally make me want to post a new chapter every day. I swear. A bunch of bad influences y’all are!

Cas doesn’t follow him back to the territory line. Dean already smells like him, but he doesn’t need to make it worse by bringing the source of the smell along. He walks back, too, not feeling up for a shift yet. His wolf is irritated that they are leaving their mate, and Dean knows he’ll have less control if he shifts. When he gets back to the rock, the spot he crossed over, it’s to find Sam already there waiting for him.

Sam smells distressed, and it puts his wolf right on edge. It’s too soon to be feeling like that, he knows, and he thinks he might have another problem sooner rather than later. Still he crosses over into their territory, takes the punch that Sam throws against his shoulder and lets his brother pull him in for a hug.

“What the fuck, Dean,” he growls, half worried and half pissed off. “You don’t come back all day, then you just run off? Where in the hell do you get off disappearing like that?”

“I know, Sammy, I—”

“We thought you were gone, Dean. Dad was about to send out a fucking search party, and not the friendly kind. You knew about the sensors, Dean.”

“Fuck, Sam, I know. And—”

“And another thing. What the hell would’ve happened if one of the leopards caught you in their territory? Do you even know what that could do to this agreement? To our Pack?”

“Uh,” Dean stutters, “Sammy, about that—”

“Then you just stroll back in here? Like you’re fine now? Because I don’t buy it, Dean. So whatever you’re doing, don’t think you’re getting it past me. If you’re tranq-ing your wolf then—”

“Jesus,” Dean growls, shoving his brother away and interrupting his tirade. “Let me get a fuckin’ word in, Sam. I’m not tranq-ing my wolf.”

Just the thought sends a shiver down Dean’s spine. His wolf may be, well, vibrant, as Cas had said, but Dean would never tranq it. Drugs like that are for assholes who don’t deserve the privilege of shifting in the first place.
“How are you doing it then?” Sam snaps, crossing his long arms. “Because I know it’s not any of the girls they’re bringing in. Hell, you practically ripped that last girl’s head off for being in your room. But you’ve got some kind of temporary fix, so what the hell is it?”

Dean sighs and waits. He knows he’s carrying Cas’ scent. His brother will figure it out. A few more seconds of angry breaths and Sam’s whole demeanor changes, his entire body language shifting to something much softer, much less threatening. Dean stuffs his hands in his pockets and tries not to stare at the ground.

“Um, Dean? Who is that smell?”

It’s telling that his brother jumps straight to who, and not what. Dean thinks about lying, but he needs somebody on his side here. Sam is better than anybody else.

“A cat named Cas. Er, a panther, actually.” Dean corrects himself automatically. Sam takes a full minute to process this, his eyes scanning Dean’s face.

“Why do you reek like a leopard?”

Dean rubs his hands over his face and sighs. This is a blast.

“I do not reek. He just kept friggin’…touching me man. I dunno.”

Sam raises his eyebrows, disbelief painted all over his face. “Lemme get this straight. You made a little kitty friend. And he was…petting you? To calm you down? And you let him?”

“No,” Dean growls, even though yeah, that’s totally right. “Shut up.”

His brother laughs and crosses his arms. “C’mon, dude. No way you expect me to believe that.”

“Yeah, well, it’s true. And he may or may not be my mate,” Dean spits out, before he can change his mind about lying. Sam freezes immediately, his eyebrows raised and his jaw dropped.

“May or may not? What the hell does that mean?”

“It means that the wolf has decided that he is. I just, haven’t reached the same conclusion.”

Sam stares. Dean is pretty sure by the shock on Sam’s face that he’s feeling how Dean was feeling an hour ago.

“Is that even…possible?” Sam asks, his eyebrows raised.

“Apparently. Cas thinks its like when one of us mates with a human. Mating bonds apparently don’t give a shit.”

“Wow,” Sam says, and Dean can practically see his gigantic brain ticking away. “Okay. What are you gonna do about it?”

Dean laughs. He wishes he had any idea. He’s not about to tell his pack, that’s for sure. Not until he knows this thing is for real. Problem is, that requires sneaking around and trying to get to know the guy. His wolf thinks it’s a great idea, but Dean isn’t so sure. Especially since his body is determined to carry around the cat’s damn scent and there’s no way he gets away with that for long before somebody notices.

“Not tellin’ anybody yet, that’s what.”
“That’s one of the worst ideas you’ve ever had,” Sam snorts, ignoring Dean’s glare.

“Don’t you think I know that?” Dean sighs. “But can you just help me for now? I need to get rid of this damn smell before somebody else notices.”

Sam growls low in his chest, but agrees. It isn’t easy, and it takes some rolling around in the stream and in the muddy bank to take care of it, but eventually Sam says he smells like normal. And hey, who wouldn’t expect him to be a kinda dirty after his little freakout?

The Bunker is buzzing with activity when they get back, and Dean is all too aware that it’s all his fault. The whole pack smells nervous, on edge, and it agitates Dean’s wolf. He wonders how many others are feeling like he is because of his blunder. The dominants set the tone of the pack, and Dean’s being doing a hell of a job of it lately.

Dean tries not to be too hard on himself, he really does. If Cas really is his mate, then no one would blame him for freaking out like he did. Well. Maybe some people would blame him. But if they could smell how amazing Cas had smelled then—and no, scratch that. No one else should smell their mate’s heat, it is theirs and—

Fuck. Dean wants to tear his hair out. Getting his wolf’s thoughts mixed up with his own like that is ripping his sanity to shreds.

Everyone stares as Dean makes his way through the den. He’s muddy, and sweaty, and he probably smells like unhappy alpha, but they’re staring for more reasons than that. Here’s Dean, the Hunter that almost went rogue. Like a fucking zoo animal for everybody to ogle.

Awesome.

Sam leaves him at the doors to the council room. Dean knows it’s not possible, but part of him wishes his brother could come in, too. He’d friggin’ love some back-up here. And, of course, all five council seats are filled. Dean can’t even look at his mom.

“You’re back,” his dad growls, his alpha out to play. Dean forces his gaze to the ground, as much as his wolf hates it.

“Yes sir.”

“What in the hell happened to you, boy?” Bobby asks, and he sounds more concerned than pissed. That’s Bobby, though.

Dean clears his throat. “I let my wolf get the better of me. I was hunting in the woods, hoping to burn it off, when the animal ran past the sensors. I didn’t notice I’d crossed them.”

It’s all a huge, phony lie. Dean can practically smell it on the air. Luckily, it’s not entirely unbelievable. The sensors are new, after all, and the Pack is used to being able to wander past their boundaries. He wants to say it’s fucked that they are keeping tabs on him like this, he wants to say they can’t put him in a cage. He wants to, but he doesn’t.

“Don’t you lie to us, pup,” Rufus growls. “We weren’t born yesterday.”

Dean flinches. “M’ not lying.”

“And yesterday?” Ellen asks, crossing her arms. “Nobody saw you inside the den all day and night. You out in the woods?”
“Yes.” Dean grits his teeth. He’d been shifted all day. Pacing along the border. He’s not eager to admit why, to himself or to the Council.

“Why didn’t you come home?” his mom asks, so hesitant and soft. Almost like she doesn’t even want him to answer.

“I couldn’t.”

The Council room is silent. Dean’s words are hanging in the air, stinking up the space. In truth, the admission sounds worse than it was. Dean had, for the most part, been in control of himself. Right until Cas had showed up. Had he been on the edge of losing it? Sure. Whatever. But he’d been mostly okay for most of the day. He just hadn’t been able to shift. Whatever it was, and whatever instinct in his body allowed him to change forms had just turned off for the day. He’d shifted the previous morning and just…got stuck. His wolf probably had something to do with it. Little shit that he is, but Dean doesn’t know. Maybe it was just lack of sleep. He just knows he hadn’t been able to change back, and he knows exactly what that looks like to his Council.

“I wasn’t out of control. But I wasn’t gonna risk it. So I handled it.”

“You don’t handle it on your own, ya idjit,” Bobby snaps, sounding tired and annoyed. “We got a pack for a reason. You come home, you let yer family help ya.”

Dean nods, keeps staring at the floor. “I made a mistake, and it won’t happen again.”

“You’re damn right it won’t,” John growls, standing up out of his chair and stalking around the table until he’s right in Dean’s face. Dean hears his mom protest, but he knows this isn’t her place to interfere. “You need me to remind you what’s goin’ on in this pack right now?”

Asshole.

“We got fucking leopards up our asses, we got juveniles maturing every day, we got three pups and two more on the way. We need our dominants right now, and where the fuck are you?”

Dean grinds his teeth. His dad is right. He wants him to be wrong. But he’s not.

“Do you know what happens when a wolf goes rogue?”

Of course he knows. But Dean doesn’t answer, isn’t sure he even can. John doesn’t care. He grabs a handful of hair at the crown of Dean’s head and uses it to shove his chest up against the rough stone wall, pulls his head roughly to the side, forcefully baring his neck. Dean forces the growl back down his throat. His wolf needs to cool it, unless it wants to bleed all over the Council room.

“You answer me when I speak to you. I said do you know, what happens, when a wolf goes rogue?”

Nobody else speaks up, and Dean doesn’t expect them to. John is the most dominant one in this room, and Dean’s dad, and it’s a shit draw but he can handle it.

“Yes sir,” Dean grits out, grinding his molars.

“Let me explain it to you again, because I don’t think you are taking it seriously,” he rumbles. The rest of the Council grows quieter, if possible, his dad’s anger vibrating in the room. “Your animal takes over, completely. You get trapped in your own body, watching as the beast hunts without remorse. Humans, friends, pack, even the damn pups.” Dean shivers. “Because a rogue isn’t an animal. It’s a monster, a creature that is too smart for it’s own damn good. And I would put you
down, Dean, if you ever became that. I wouldn’t fucking *blink.***”

Dean inhales sharply, his neck aching at the harsh angle.

“This was strike number three. Don’t let it happen again.” His dad shoves away from him and stomps back to his seat. Dean doesn’t turn and look at the Council, knows he can’t do it without melting down. He just stands and faces the wall, waits to be dismissed.

“Go, kid,” Ellen says, her voice tired. “Clean yourself up.”

Dean is gone before the last syllable is out of her mouth.

He goes straight back to his room, ignoring every person he sees on the walk there. He can’t handle them right now. He can’t do it.

The hot water of his shower feels heavenly against his dirty skin, his exhausted muscles, the steam clearing his foggy brain. His wolf is pissed that he let their dad handle them like that, thinks that they should have fought back against him. The overconfident son of a bitch thinks they could take John no problem. His wolf also thinks they never should have left the forest of their cat, but Dean doesn’t focus on that one.

Once out of the shower he dresses and flops down on his bed, hoping that his wolf will let him sleep. He’s so far past exhausted, it isn’t even funny. He should’ve stayed and napped with Cas today, while his wolf was calm, but he was too freaked out by the whole *mate* thing to think about something as insignificant as sleep. But if he’s counting right—and he probably isn’t, his brain is fucking *wasted*—then it’s been like, five days since he’s had any sleep. And now that the adrenaline from the day is finally wearing off…fuck.

His door opens and closes softly, and his smells his mom before he feels her weight on his bed. He automatically shifts into her warmth, resting his cheek on her thigh and closing his eyes at her nails on his back.

“How’s my angel?” she says gently, her scent soothing him.

“Terrible,” he mumbles.

“When was the last time you slept?”

“Dunno.”

She sighs. Yeah, he definitely knows how she feels.

“The next girl isn’t arriving until sometime next week,” she says, and a flood of relief washes over him. “And the Council is taking you off patrol, for the time being. We just want you to take care of yourself, sweetheart.”

Part of him is pissed off at that, and part of him thinks its a good idea. He’s lead Hunter, after all, and should be setting an example, but it’ll be easier to sneak out this way. He hates himself for thinking that, especially after what his dad said.

His mom sits with him for a long time, stroking his hair and humming, letting him soak up the calming scent of omega. He’s lulled into a kind of hazy dream-state, but he’s not asleep. He knows he isn’t going to fall asleep.

“How can I help you?” she says sadly, and Dean feels terrible that he’s making her feel like that.
“I don’t think you can.”

She pauses her movements and stares down at him, her eyebrows slightly furrowed. “You know something that can?”

He thinks about lying, but she knows him too well. And he really, really wants to sleep, no matter how much of a colossal fucking failure he feels like.

“Maybe.”

She smiles at him, soft and beautiful just like Layla. Dean wonders if it’s an omega thing. “Go, sweetheart. And watch the sensors this time.”

She doesn't ask how or what or where or who and Dean is eternally grateful.

"Thanks," he mumbles, hoping that at least some of his gratitude comes across.

Dean wanders out to the exit after his mom is gone, barefoot and shirtless and uncaring. He thinks about shifting, but he knows he’s going to need thumbs to get out unnoticed.

Climbing the tree near the flat-rock takes longer than Dean cares to admit. The cat had made it look so easy. He climbs up extra high, too, because he’s not sure exactly where the sensors are and he’s not willing to risk triggering them. But eventually he manages, dropping down on the other side of the ring of sensors. From there it takes some wandering, trying to retrace his hazy steps in the dark. The forest is quiet, and Dean thinks it’s strange that even the bugs are sleeping right now.

At some point he picks up Cas’ scent, and from there it’s easier to find where he’s going. He breathes deep and long to soak the scent into his lungs, and tries not to think too much about it. Because all of this—it’s instincts. His body, his wolf, it needs to be near its mate. But Cas the person doesn’t mean comfort to Dean, not yet anyway, and Dean can tell the difference. But right now he needs to listen to his wolf and what it needs. At least temporarily.

Dean is more than surprised to find the source of Cas’ scent nestled up in the trees. It’s a huge treehouse, with what looks like two floors. It’s built out of mismatched pieces of wood, and Dean isn’t completely sure how the hell he’s supposed to get up there. He walks around the trunk of the tree, looking for any sign of an entrance. A ladder, a secret staircase, something.

There’s nothing, except for what looks like a small trap door on the base of the thing. Dean thinks that maybe he should let Cas know he’s coming, but he’s pretty sure the cat already knows he’s there. So he uses the few low-hanging branches to haul himself up, does his best to scale the tree with grace. The strength in his fingers is almost completely gone, and he’s getting dizzier with each second. It’s exhaustion, he knows, so he grits his teeth and ignores it. At least if he falls out of the damn tree it’ll probably knock him unconscious. He’s almost sweating by the time he is dragging himself through the trap door, and all he can think is wolves were most definitely not made for trees.

Castiel smelled his wolf about ten minutes ago, heard him shuffling around the base of his tree. He thought about going out to help, but he thinks he’d rather wait and see if his mate can figure it out. So Castiel sits on his makeshift couch and watches with a quiet smile on his face as Dean hauls himself through the trapdoor. It isn’t graceful, or elegant in any way, but Castiel’s panther is pleased.

“Hello, puppy,” Castiel hums, standing up to greet him. Dean fixes him with that hypnotic green gaze for five long seconds, and Castiel wonders if Dean is going to growl and snap at him for the nickname again. Then his wolf, his strong, powerful, vicious wolf, actually whimpers and stumbles
into his arms.

Castiel just reacts, the smile slipping from his face as he wraps his arms around his mate. He’s wanted this, decidedly this, ever since he caught the first whiff of Dean’s scent, but not in this way. Not with Dean’s nose pressed desperately against his pulse, not with Dean shivering in his arms.

“You are going to tell me what is going on in that pack of yours,” Castiel growls, curling protectively around his mate. He is going to find out who is making Dean smell like this, who is making his mate reek like bitter fear and frustration and distress. He is going to find out, so he can tear their throats out nice and slow with his teeth.

“Tired,” Dean responds quietly, his lips brushing the skin of Castiel’s neck because of his proximity.

“When was the last time you slept?”

“Couple days.”

Castiel curses. He’d noticed the bags under his eyes the day before, but he’d never thought it was that bad.

Without another word he leads Dean up the stairs to his nest, which takes up the entirety of the second floor. It’s a pile of pillows and blankets and other soft things, so deep that it feels like a cloud. He’s sure it still stinks like heat, but if Dean notices he doesn’t react. Instead he flops down in the center of the space, nestling into the pillows and taking slow, deep breaths. The panther loves how his mate makes himself at home in the nest, thinks that his mate should never leave. Castiel tends to agree.

“C’mere,” Dean mumbles after a few seconds, when Castiel doesn’t immediately lie down with him. He doesn’t open his eyes, but he makes some kind of vague gesture with his hand.

Castiel is tempted to throw back some kind of retort, but he feels like Dean has had enough for today. Instead he sinks down and pulls Dean close, smiling when he buries his nose in the crook of Castiel’s neck and pulls about five blankets on top of them. In a matter of seconds Dean is breathing deeply and evenly, but Castiel continues to stroke his hair anyway.

God he’s happy. Not happy that Dean came to him like this, not happy that he has to put his mate back together, but happy. This is where his mate belongs, in his arms. This is how his nest should smell, like Dean and Castiel.
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

“You want to, or your wolf wants to?”

Chapter Notes

A very special and a very emphatic thank you to wingofcastiel for the absolutely gorgeous fanart! I am super super obsessed.

If I could wax poetic up here for hours about how much I love you guys, I would. But alas, I imagine you'd rather I spend that time actually writing this fic so that I can post it, eh? But for real, I absolutely adore sitting and reading and responding to all of your comments. And believe me when I say that I definitely 100% go back and reread them for fun. I'm not kidding when I say I adore you. So without further ado, here is the next installment. We got some real, honest to goodness communication happening here. Who knew that was possible?

The wolf only wakes up because the wonderful warmth in their arms has moved away. They whine automatically, grasping for their mate and trying to pull him back.

“Shh shh shh,” he says in a teasing tone, warm and amused. “Two seconds.”

The wolf counts to two. The warmth isn’t back. They whine again, louder this time, but their cat isn’t back. They hear his voice, low and vibrating, and an unfamiliar scent.
"I can't, not right now...Since when?...Fine, later. He'll show up somewhere."

The wolf growls, low and hostile.

Their mate tells them to hold on, but the wolf ignores him. Instead they stand up and meet him at the window, where their cat is standing and talking to someone standing on the ground. An alpha standing on the ground. The wolf growls louder and bares their teeth, wrapping an arm around their mate and tugging him away from the window and away from that alpha.

“Honestly?”

The alpha on the ground says something, but the wolf ignores him.

“Okay, okay. Relax. Breathe,” their cat says when the wolf keeps growling.

They breathe in tree bark and pine trees. Their favorites. They wrap themselves around their mate and growl possessively. Their mate chuckles.

“I know, little wolf. Now go back to sleep.”

The wolf obeys.

***

Dean has no idea how much time has passed when he finally wakes up, but it feels like days. The sun is rising slowly, which Dean can only tell from the tiny sliver of light filtering through a small skylight. He hadn’t noticed that before, but he hadn’t noticed a lot of things.

He’s curled around his cat, legs tangled, bare chest pressed to his bare back, his nose behind his ear. God it smells good. It smells faintly like Cas’ heat, which is distracting, but more importantly it smells like mate. Cas’ fingers are twined around his own, and there’s a low, almost inaudible rumble emanating from his chest that Dean is sure is purring.

Fuck his mate is purring in his arms and fuck it makes him happy. Fucking. Shit.

“Cas?” he says softly, kind of hoping that the purring doesn’t stop.

“Good morning, Dean,” he says with a gravelly voice that’s stupidly appealing. The purring doesn’t stop.

And because Dean’s a stupid fuck who can’t handle good things, he points it out.

“You’re purring.”

Cas hums, and Dean can hear his smile. He doesn’t seem bothered by it. “I do that. My panther is happy.”

Dean’s chest constricts. Shit. Cas is so candid about it, so unapologetic, and Dean has no clue how to handle it. No fucking clue.

“How long was I out for?”

“A day. Give or take.”

Shit that was a long time. He wonders briefly if the Pack is worried about him, but he’s finding it hard to focus on much outside of Cas right now. He’s warm and not exhausted for the first time in
what feels like weeks, and he’s absolutely buried in Cas’ scent, and really Dean can’t even blame himself.

“Sorry for keeping you here. I didn’t think—”

Cas sighs and rolls over in his arms, grabbing his face with both hands. They’re so close, their breath mingling, and it’s a miracle Dean hears any words at all.

“Dean. What in the world makes you think that I have anywhere else I’d prefer to be, rather than right here with you?”

Dean can’t respond, he’s too distracted by Cas’ blue eyes, by the tiny frown on his pink lips, by the wrinkle between his eyebrows. Dean hasn’t really taken the time to actually look at the guy, there’s been so much else going on. But he does now. He studies his face, every line, the curve of his eyebrows, the shape of his lips, the squint of his eyes, the dark stubble on his cheeks and jaw.

Dean is, quite frankly, blown away by him. This cat, who teases and fights with him, who held him for close to 26 hours while he slept despite not knowing a damn thing about him, who speaks so sincerely and takes the words right out of Dean’s mouth, says everything Dean doesn’t even know he needs to hear. This cat, who he is so sure is his mate that not even the denial coursing through his veins can convince him otherwise. And not just a mate, his mate.

"We really are mates, aren't we?" Dean says cautiously, kind of afraid of his response and also sort of not.

"I'm fairly certain we are, yes," Castiel says calmly, a slight warmth in his eyes.

“Shit,” Dean says quietly, after what feels like an eternity of silence between them. He raises his hand, slowly traces his thumb over the bow of Castiel’s bottom lip. “Hi.”

Castiel smiles, a quiet little thing. It’s soft and beautiful, like his mom and Layla, and infinitely more satisfying. “Hello.”

“I think I want to kiss you.”

Dean isn’t sure why he’s saying it, instead of just doing it, but he and Cas feel like they’re on even footing, and he wants to hold on to that. Everything feels so damn fragile right now, like they’re on a razors edge and it’s all about to crumble. Dean just isn’t sure what side it’s going to crumble on. Cas responds with a challenging spark in his eyes, shifting fractionally closer to Dean.

"You think?"

"Pretty sure." Honestly, he has no clue what he's feeling. But this churning in his gut feels a whole lot like want.

“How about we talk, first?”

Cas is probably right. Dean has a feeling that his focus is only going to get worse if he lets himself go there.

“How about what?”

“Well. You hunted me down in the middle of the night. Maybe we can start there.”

“It’s not like you weren’t up,” Dean scoffs, scrunching his nose. “Why were you up, anyway?”
“The panther is nocturnal,” Cas yawns, arching his back just a tiny bit and puffing up his chest before letting out a long breath. “I stay up late.”

Dean hums and tightens his arms around Cas’ waist, buries his nose against his throat. His wolf hasn’t gotten enough of their cat’s smell yet. Cas, on the other hand, seems tired of waiting.

“So?”

“So, I dunno.”

Cas sighs and pulls Dean away from his chest so they are looking into each other’s eyes again. Everything starts to crumble.

“Dean. Speak.”

“Cas. Quit orderin’ me around.”

Cas glares at him. “I am not your personal scratch and sniff. Don’t treat me like one.”

Dean bristles, and glares right back.

“And I’m not some beta that’s gonna do what you want. Just ‘cause I’m being the girl right now doesn’t mean I’m not actually an alpha, cat.”

He tries not to spit the last word, but it comes out a little harsher than he intended it to. Cas smells annoyed, and he looks like it too. Dean sits up and pulls away, trying to get a little space from the intensity of Cas’ presence. He didn’t come here to get interrogated, and he’s not gonna let some cat push him around. Cas sits up too, huffing and running his hand through his hair.

“It was nicer when you were asleep.”

“Too friggin’ bad.”

They stare at each other, a tiny standoff in the small space between them. Neither of them seems willing to break first, and Dean knows he could sit here and stare at Cas all day. Then the tension in Cas’ forehead melts away and a tiny smile spreads across his lips. Dean has no clue what he has to be smiling about, but Cas is amused by something.

“Quit smiling at me.”

“Is this our first fight?” Cas asks, angling his body and pushing a hand through Dean’s short hair.

Dean snorts and shoves his hand away. His cat is not allowed to pet him right now, not when he’s trying to be pissed. “Really, dude? And you can’t really call it the first one.”

“Do you mean that whole, chasing me through the woods thing?”

Dean wants to blush. He doesn’t. “That, and putting my teeth on you like some fuckin’ nut job.”

He knows that wasn’t okay. They haven’t talked about it, because they haven’t really talked about anything, but he knows. You don’t put your teeth on another shifter. You just don’t.

“Hmm,” Cas hums, studying Dean’s face. “Yes. That. I wouldn’t call it a fight.”

“What would you call it then?”
“Fun.”

Dean gapes. “Fun? You call almost having your throat torn open fun?”

“You weren’t going to hurt me. So I provoked you and ran. For fun.”

Dean growls and rolls his eyes. “That’s stupid, Cas. You have no idea what I could do. I don’t even know what I could do.”

“I have personally spoken with your wolf on more than one occasion, Dean,” Cas sighs. Dean can’t help but wonder when the other times might have been. “I think I have a fairly good idea. I think you forget that I’ve dealt with quite a few raging alphas. I know what dangerous looks like, and you weren’t dangerous.”

Dean’s sure he hasn’t forgotten for one second that Cas is an omega, that he’s probably seen this kind of thing all the time. The way his blue eyes never falter is kinda hard to miss. Still, Dean doesn’t like the idea of out of control alphas around his cat.

“That supposed to make me feel better?”

“Yes.”

Dean snorts. Yeah fucking right.

“Dean. Listen to me.” His voice is growly and low, and the tiny part of Dean that isn’t feeling embarrassed and frustrated and guilty likes it. Dean meets his blue eyes and listens, tries not to audibly grind his teeth. He can’t stop the growling though, and Cas glares at him and swats his nose. “Shush. Stop feeling guilty, stop feeling sorry for me. I am an omega, and I am a shifter, too. I know you’re feeling like you need to sink your teeth into something, like your animal is riding you so hard that you can’t even think. I know. So I am going to push you when I feel like pushing you, because that’s what I do, and that’s what you need. And you will not feel guilty about it, because this is my choice and I can handle myself. I can handle you.”

Dean stares at him. Cas just handed him his ass on a plate, and he can’t even come up with a response. His wolf is ecstatic. Their mate is everything, their mate is everything he needs. Their mate is perfect.

“Fine,” Dean says with a deep breath. He wants to fight it, his brain is telling him that there’s no way that Cas really means it, but he shuts that down. He has to start listening at some point. Right?

Cas sighs heavily and flops back down into the blankets, taking a couple of breaths before eyeing Dean impatiently.

“If I be the ‘girl’ this time, so to speak, will you come back down here?” he says, running his fingertips carefully along Dean’s forearm.

“No,” Dean grumbles, falling onto his back and curling into Cas’ chest. He’ll never admit it, but he’s quickly falling in love with this. Here, he doesn’t have to be the alpha at every second, but he doesn’t lose it either. He can let Cas hold him, can nuzzle into his chest, and not feel like less of an alpha for it.

Cas chuckles and strokes his hair, breathes against the crown of his head. Dean shivers at the fresh onslaught of bark and pine trees. God it smells good.

“So you like being the girl. The truth comes out.”
“Do not,” Dean grumbles, sniffing and growling. To illustrate his point he nips at Cas’ collarbone, catching the skin lightly between his teeth.

“So bitey,” Cas sighs back, but he smells content. They’re quiet for a few minutes, and Dean knows that Cas is waiting for him to speak. He doesn’t try to make him though, which is progress.

“So. How do you want to do this? Twenty questions?”

“If I get to start.”

“Fine,” Dean huffs, sighing. “Go for it.”

“What happened the other night?”

Right to the point then. Awesome.

“Not the night. Just…the whole day. Like I told you, I got my ass kicked for setting off the sensors. The Council thought I’d gone rogue. Hell, the Pack thought I’d gone rogue. So I got a hell of a warning.”

“You were barely gone two hours. Why would your Council assume the worst?”

Dean flinches. He wishes he didn’t have to spill all this shit, how out of control he’s been, but Cas kinda needs to understand the situation. Unfortunately.

“Oh. What were you doing?”

“Wandering around the woods, I guess,” Dean sighs. _Looking for you_, he thinks, but doesn’t say out loud. “The Council wasn’t happy about it. I was neglecting my duties.”

“I’m shocked,” Cas says, his voice deadpan. Dean is pretty sure he’s joking. Pretty sure. “Why is your wolf so on edge?”

“I’m unmated. My wolf is unbalanced. Well. Our pack is unbalanced, and its falling on me. I’m the oldest unmated alpha, so. Double whammy.” Cas hums, and Dean thinks he gets it.

“Your wolves, they require mates?”

“Not _required_, exactly, but it gives the wolf a kind of stability that translates to the rest of the pack. Especially dominant ones. Long-term bed buddies serve the same purpose. That doesn’t happen to you guys?”

“No,” Cas sighs. “I think, because of the nature of our beasts. Wolves are pack animals, they rely more on the bonds thereof. Leopards are solitary. The human part of us makes us crave the companionship, but it isn’t…necessary.”

“Huh. Never thought about it like that.”

Dean’s never really known other shifters, at least any non-wolf ones. He just kind of always assumed they’d be like him. And Cas isn’t.

“You said you were neglecting your duties. What are they?”
“I’m a Hunter. Basically, warriors. Protectors. Whatever. You guys have those?”

“We do. Although, in our pack they are called Seraphs.”

“You a Seraph?” Dean asks, stifling a yawn. He’s getting sleepy again, which is just nuts considering how long he just slept for.

“I do believe these are my twenty questions, Dean, not yours.”

Dean pulls back and looks into his blue eyes, catching the playful spark there.

“Smart-ass.”

Cas’ lips twitch, but he moves on. Dean keeps looking at him, because maybe he like’s Cas’ eyes. Maybe.

“What is the Pack’s protocol to handle rogue wolves?”

Dean furrows his eyebrows. “Uh, there isn’t really one? A couple of the Council members lead a search and destroy. That’s about it.”

It’s Cas’ turn to furrow his eyebrows, a confused look on his face. “Search and destroy?”

“Yeah. Find the rogue, put it down. Be done with it.”

Cas stiffens immediately, his scent completely changing from content to pissed. “Your Council, they would kill you? *Put you down* like you were nothing but a dog?”

“Um,” Dean hesitates, flattening his hands protectively against Cas’ back and trying to soothe him. “Not just me. Anybody. That’s just…how we deal with rogues. You guys got a better idea?”

“We do not kill members of our pack,” Cas growls. “We fix them.”

“Fix?” Dean asks, not really sure what the hell that could mean. “That doesn’t sound like a good thing.”

“Retrain them, to control their animals. It isn’t a pleasant process, but it is effective.”

Dean shivers. “Like a reset button.”

“Similar,” Cas sighs, still smelling agitated. He runs his hand over Dean’s cheek, touches his lips. “So all of this happened with your Council, why did you come here?”

Dean somehow, miraculously, manages to maintain eye contact while he speaks.

“I hadn’t slept in days, my wolf was pissed off and raging, and it wanted to see you. I thought it might let me sleep if I let it have you. Seems like it worked.”

Cas nods, and Dean wishes he could read the expression that flits across Cas’ face before disappearing.

“So you just came here because of your wolf?”

“Yeah. I guess so.”

It’s the truth, but he feels bad saying it out loud. He knows Cas won’t blame him for it, at least he’s
pretty sure, but it sounds bad coming out of his mouth.

“I’m glad I could help, then.”

Silence falls between them, and Dean knows what he needs to say. He just has to work up the nerve to say it.

“That isn’t why I’m still here, though.” Cas blinks, furrows his eyebrows. Dean keeps talking before his steam runs out. “I—this wasn’t supposed to happen like this. I was supposed to figure you out first, then deal with the mate thing. But—I dunno. I know you’re—yeah. So. The wolf knows it, I know it.”

Cas’ eyes practically sparkle, and Dean loves watching the smile spread across his face.

“I have to say, I’m glad to hear it.”

“I got no idea what to do about it, Cas.” He can’t tell Dad, or the Council, not right now anyway. He knows his dad, and he’s not going to be relieved that Dean has a mate, he’s going to be pissed that his mate is a cat. “My brother, he’s the only one who knows. My mom suspects something, but…”

“You told your brother?” Cas asks, tilting his head. He sounds hopeful about it, and Dean knows that he’s handing out false hope.

“I needed to have somebody, plus I couldn’t have Sam thinking I was tranq-ing my wolf. So.”

Cas furrows his eyebrows, chewing his lip for a second before speaking again. “What does that mean? Tranq-ing your wolf?”

“You guys don’t have that?” Dean asks, surprised. The differences between them keep piling up. “It’s a—well. I guess it was kinda like medicine at first. Now it’s a drug. Pop a pill, put the animal to sleep. I think at first it was for rogues, but it didn’t work out so well.” Cas still looks confused, so Dean keeps going. “When the drug wore off, one of two things happened. Either the animal’d come back with a friggin’ vengeance, or it never woke back up at all.”

Cas’ face changed from confused to horrified. “And people used it? Willingly?”

“At first, no. Like I said, it was for rogues. They stopped using it pretty quick, when they found out. In some packs, though, it still exists. Wolf packs, at least. People found out that if you lowered the dosage, usually the side effects weren’t bad.”

“So why don’t they do that? Isn’t the small risk worth it, when your other option is killing members of your pack?” Cas asks.

“S’not so easy. The dosage is so low, it won’t put down a rogue. The animal is too wild. Anybody who uses it now uses it for fun.”

Cas gapes.

“Fun? How is that fun?”

Dean shrugs. To be honest, it all sounds pretty fucked to him. He has more problems with his wolf than most, and he’s never even considered it.

“Dunno. Some people don’t want to be like this, I guess. Maybe it’d be easier if they were human, somethin’ like that. Who knows, man. You guys really never heard of it?”
Cas hums, a mildly disturbed look on his face. “No, but I’m not overly surprised. Our pack is not generally welcoming to strangers, or strange things.”

Dean snorts, because that’s hilarious. If Cas thinks his pack is unwelcoming to strangers, he should meet Dean’s dad.

“Yeah, well, your pack isn’t the problem.”

Cas watches him for a moment, and Dean thinks he can catch the ghost of a smile in Cas’ eyes.

“Trust me, they would object if they could. It is our pack law that the Arch may not stand between a leopard and their mate, unless the life or death safety of the pack is at risk. They have, apparently, not deemed you dangerous enough.” A tiny smile tugs at Cas’ lips as he speaks, and Dean gets the distinct impression that he’s being made fun of.

“I’m plenty tough, cat,” he growls, while his wolf puffs up its chest.

“Mmm, of course,” Cas smiles again, his eyes crinkling at the corners. “I assume your pack has no such rule.”

“Nope.” Dean sighs. “Don’t think it’s ever been necessary, ’til now. Most wolves just mate with other wolves, somebody who smells good and who gets along with your animal side. A lot of people don’t find their mate. Y’know. The one. Capital ‘m’ and all that.”

“I suppose we’re lucky then,” Cas says quietly, laying his palm on Dean’s cheek. Dean stutters, opening and closing his mouth a few times.

“I, uh, s-sure. Yeah. Real lucky.” Guilt washes over him as he speaks, because he knows he’s being dishonest right now. Not with Cas, but with everybody else. And it feels like he’s staining what they have with his lie. “But, Cas, the Pack…”

Cas smiles quietly. “I know. Nothing has to change, Dean. We’ll take it slow. We don’t have to accept the bond until you want to, or at all.”

Dean blinks. “You’d do that? You’d wait?”

Cas sighs and rolls his eyes, pushes a hand through Dean’s hair. Dean lets him, this time.

“I will say this as many times as you need me to. You are the important thing to me, not the mating bond. If the bond is not something that you want, I will never force it. We will figure out other ways to manage your wolf, if you are still having problems.”

Dean finds it hard to imagine his wolf being as agitated as it had been the last couple of days when he’s here with his mate in his arms, but he knows that it won’t last. As soon as he leaves this treehouse, his wolf is going to react. But Cas’ sincerity is getting to him, and damn if he doesn’t actually believe that they can figure this out.

“Okay. Hey, Cas?”

“Yes, Dean?”

“I still want to kiss you.”

Cas eyes him, hesitates for a moment. Dean can see the indecision in his eyes before he speaks again.
“You want to, or your wolf wants to?”

Dean gets it. He’d come here on instincts, had let down his guard and let Cas in on instincts. But this is somehow bigger, more important, and Dean is pretty sure that Cas doesn’t want it to be about instincts. Dean doesn’t either. And honestly, he knows this stopped being about the wolf sometime in the last 26 hours of him sleeping in Cas’ little tree nest—or maybe in the last hour of them talking and staring at each other. He’s not totally sure. Dean has definitely gotten the comfort he came here for, and not just for his wolf.

“All my wolf wants is to roll around in here until we smell like you and you smell like us,” Dean says with a laugh. His wolf his ridiculous. “I want to kiss you. Don’t think the wolf is gonna mind, though.”

“Okay then,” Cas laughs, stroking his hair. “But I still have ten questions.”

“Huh?” Dean freezes, furrows his eyebrows.

“You said twenty questions. I’ve only used ten.”


“Regardless,” Cas hums. “Those don’t count. Dean, do you have family?”

“Young,” he sighs and rolls his eyes, trying to decide which pieces of information to hand out. He should hand over everything, but that’s not super appealing to him at the moment. “Mom, Dad, brother, brother’s mate. About to add some pups to the equation.”

Cas tilts his head. “Your brother’s?”

“Yeah. Just found out, actually. Jess is gonna have twins.”

Cas licks his lips slowly, his eyes squinting like he’s considering something. Dean waits for whatever the thought is to process all the way.

“Do you want pups?”

Dean’s breath stops. He should’ve known that Cas would ask that. Not just because they’re mates, but because Cas is an omega. In theory, pups are something that could potentially be in their future. And Dean hasn’t decided how he feels about what that means for them.

“I dunno, man. A little soon to be thinkin’ about pups, isn’t it?”

He tries to make it sound light and joking, but he’s not sure he pulled it off. Cas just makes a face at him.

“I think I should tell you that getting knocked up isn’t high on my priority list, if on the list at all.”

Dean laughs nervously. “Jesus, Cas. I’m not even thinking that far ahead right now.”

“This is important,” Cas says, sounding frustrated. “And if that is something that is important to you, then perhaps we should reconsider now rather than later.”

Dean just stares. Does Cas really think he’s going to jump ship just because Cas probably doesn’t want to have pups? Pups Dean isn’t even sure he wants, and that he’s definitely not ready for? That might not even be scientifically possible, given the fact that they’re basically two different species?
He scrambles to put together an explanation, but it all sounds so…ugh. Cheesy. Like his teeth are going to rot if he even says any of it out loud. Instead he strokes the stubble on Cas’ cheek, let’s his knuckles run over his skin.

“We're good.”

He hopes that it’s enough. And if the tension melting out of Cas’ body is anything to go by, then it definitely is. He doesn’t smile or say anything about it, but Dean can’t sense any uneasiness in his scent so. It’s something.
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

“So, I guess I’ll see you?”

Chapter Notes

“Last tidbit, take a peek at that rating up there. It'll start to matter here pretty soon.

Now, onward!

“I think I’m finished asking questions,” Cas sighs, rubbing his face against his pillow and nestling further into the pile of cushions and blankets.

“That was only three. You got seven more.”

“When I think of some, I’ll ask you.”

Dean watches him, the crease between his eyebrows and the slight purse of his lips. He doesn’t look upset, really, more…pensive. Not exactly the mood Dean wants to set.

“I’ll take them. I got seven questions.”

Cas raises his eyebrows and his lips twitch as his amusement spreads across his face. “Is that so?”

“Yeah. So. Cas. Where are we, exactly?”

Cas gives him a look and then glances around the room, his eyes jumping around. Dean isn’t really sure what he’s looking at, but there’s a concentrated frown on his face so Dean just waits.

“My treehouse,” he finally answers, like it’s an obvious response to all of Dean’s questions.

“Okay, yeah. We’re in a tree, I got that,” Dean rolls his eyes. “I mean, you live here? Where’s your pack?”

“Yes I live here. Like I said, leopards are solitary. The pack is spread out in the forest here, we each have our own range that we claim as home.”

Dean finds that hard to understand, quite honestly. His pack is so based around spending time together, bonding, all of that, he can’t imagine living alone in the forest.

“Does everybody have a treehouse?”

“No,” Cas laughs, low and throaty. “Everyone else lives on the ground. I just prefer it up here. Makes it harder to get to me, wouldn’t you agree?”

He says it with a knowing spark in his eyes, and Dean knows he’s talking about his labored attempts
to climb up here when he first arrived. Dean growls at him.

“Uh, yeah, dude. I know. How the hell am I supposed to do that all the time?”

Cas smiles at that, and Dean knows it’s because he basically just promised that he’d be here in this friggin’ treehouse all the time. Although, he has to admit, it is nice.

“You plan on spending a lot of time here?”

“I mean, if i decide to even come back. Or, ya know, swing by. Or somethin’.”

“There’s a rope ladder,” Cas sighs, petting Dean’s hair with a smile. “I just have it pulled up.”

“Dude. You have a rope ladder and you didn’t think to toss it down so I could use it?”

There’s a growl layered underneath his voice, but Cas seems to like it.

“Yes.”

“Not cool, cat.”

Cas sticks his lip out in a fake pout, scrunching up his eyebrows.

“So sorry, puppy, was I too hard on you?”

Dean growls. That’s it. He’s taken enough attitude from his cat. He lurches forward and tackles him as best he can, considering how close they are laying together already. It turns quickly into them both scrambling and grabbing at each other, both of them trying to pin the other down. Dean is thankful that the floor appears to be entirely made of pillows, so they don’t have to worry about rolling off the edge. Dean laughs and growls, baring his teeth and letting a little bit of the wolf out to play. His wolf thinks this is how they should play with their cat all the time, they should wrestle and show their mate how strong they are. And Dean does, at least, try. He’s got some weight on Cas, mostly because of height, and a stockier build, but not much. Cas is scrappy, strong, and impossible to get a good grip on. He’s not an alpha, but damn the guy is practically made of bony elbows.

After a few minutes it’s Dean that’s pinned down with Cas on his hips, and not the other way around. He’s panting, and aching to get his hands on his fucking cat. Instead, Cas is holding him down by his wrists, staring down at him with a feral look in his eyes that is more animal than Dean has seen thus far.

“Good job, kitty. You got me.”

Cas growls.

“Are we done talking now?” Dean asks, grinning up at Cas.

“I think so.”

“Can I kiss you now?”

“Please,” Cas rumbles, releasing Dean’s wrists and sitting back across his hips.

Dean sits up, studiously ignoring the fact that the residual smell of Cas’ heat is all around him while Cas straddles his lap. That’s way too much to think about right now. But Cas makes no moves forward, even as Dean settles one hand on his hip while the other pushes through his messy dark hair. Cas purrs quietly, and Dean can’t help but smile. He’s glad that Cas is yielding to him here,
letting him have control. With his palm cupping Cas’ jaw Dean closes the space between them slowly, so slowly. Because he only gets one first kiss with his mate, and this is it. Their lips slot together like they were made for it, and Dean’s entire body lights up from the inside out. He knows immediately that this is, without a doubt, the best thing he has ever felt. Cas’ lips are warm and rough, full against his own, and just their simple touch makes his heart race. Dean feels Cas respond in kind, feels how he tenses and inhales sharply, presses harder against Dean’s mouth when a low growl escapes his throat. Their cat is responsive, his wolf thinks, their cat knows what they want. It’s a little messy and desperate, imperfect, and everything Dean wants.

That’s when he smells a fresh wave of slick, sweet and tempting, and oh god he’s not going to make it.

Dean tightens his arm around Cas’ waist, pins him against his body, which Cas seems pretty happy about if the deep purr in his chest is anything to go by. He slides their tongues together, he sucks Castiel’s puffy bottom lip into his mouth. And he just kisses him, every way he knows how, for minutes, for hours, he has no idea. He memorizes the noises he makes in his throat, the scraping of his nails on Dean’s back, the taste of his mate’s lips. He tries very hard not to think about whether or not Cas’ slick would taste as sweet as it smells, or as incredible as his lips.

And Cas gives as good as he gets the whole time. He arches his back into Dean, bends his neck to chase his lips if Dean ever goes too far away. They roll their hips together, too, but that’s not what this is about. Not right now.

It takes Dean a really long time to form words again, but when he manages it he has a lot to say. Or, well, a lot he wants to say. None of it comes out. The only thing that he manages to fumble out is--

“How’d you know it was me?”

Cas tilts his head and thinks for a few seconds before responding.

“I was wandering along the border of your territory, feeling out the edges. Then I caught your scent, on that rock. I had no idea who you were, but I couldn’t stay away. There was just...something about it. Like gravity, pulling me in. You smelled like home,” he says, stroking a hand down Dean’s cheek and kissing him softly. With Cas’ scent all over him, Dean kind of thinks he knows what he means.

“Then you showed up, in the flesh. And my god you were beautiful.”

“Cas…” Dean tries, but Cas just keeps talking.

“The little whiffs of your scent that I had smelled didn’t do you justice. And you were so angry, all I wanted was to make it all go away. I’ve never been a fan of alphas, with their domineering personalities and overbearing possessiveness. But you weren’t smothering,” he says with a smile. “And I wanted you. I needed you. With every fiber of my being.”

Dean opens his mouth, but no words come out. Fucking. Shit. He wants to squirm away from Cas’ words and he wants to wrap himself up in them. And he really can’t decide which. But Cas is staring at him with such unadulterated affection that’s it’s hard not to fall right into it.

“Does that answer your question?”


Cas kisses him again, and Dean tilts his head back and lets his mate claim him. It would be so easy to
fall back into his touches, to stay here all day and night, but something is tugging at the back of his mind. He regrets the next words that come out of his mouth before he even says them.

“I really need to get home.”

The smile melts off Cas’ face, and his lips pull down in a tiny frown. Dean’s wolf is raging. Why did he say that? They don’t need to get home. They are home. They are with their mate. They don’t need to leave. Why would they leave?

“Of course,” is all Cas says, shifting off of Dean’s lap.

Dean backtracks, tries to explain. *Shit* he can’t speak today. He’s not even really sure why he’s saying that he has to leave, other than the fact that he feels like he should really go home before he gets himself into another shitty position. It’s probably already too late for that, but still.

“I just…dude I’ve been gone a while. And I already reek like you. Plus the smell in here…”

Cas smiles at that, a small rumble in his chest. He runs his nose up the side of Dean’s neck, inhales at his pulse. Dean let’s him scent him, and the wolf puffs up happily.

“This is how you should smell all the time.”

Dean rolls his eyes. His cat would think that.

“Well, it’s gonna be kinda hard to explain to my pack why I smell like this when they don’t know about you.”

Cas pauses and blinks at him, tilts his head like he’s considering something.

“We aren’t mated. You don’t smell mated. The scent is…superficial.” He definitely doesn’t sound happy about it.

“I know,” Dean sighs, gripping the back of his mate’s neck. He presses a kiss to his chapped lips, feels Cas’ fingers wrap around the bones of his wrist. He doesn’t say that his wolf is unhappy about it too, that he wants to wear their mate’s scent so everyone knows. “Fucking roller coaster couple of days, huh?”

Cas nods and rubs his eyes. “I’m inclined to agree.”

They stare at each other for another couple of seconds, and Dean knows he needs to get up and go but his brain sure isn’t listening.

“So, I guess I’ll see you?”

“I hope so,” Cas smiles, and Dean can smell the disappointment in the air.

***

Dean knows something is wrong as soon as he gets back to the den. The hallways are quiet, and everyone seems to be locked away in their rooms. He wants to go straight to the Council room, but he knows he needs to wash some of this scent off first. It takes some scrubbing, and his skin feels red and raw by the time he’s done, but he’s pretty sure the scent of Cas is weak enough that he can play it off like something he picked up in the forest.

After that he throws on some clothes and goes down to the Council. Somehow, he isn’t surprised to find all five Council members, all five Hunters, and 6 of the soldiers all stuffed into the room.
His wolf automatically bares his teeth at the overwhelming scent of alpha aggression all pent up in that room. Everyone falls silent as he enters, all of their gazes swinging to fixate on him.

Bobby is the first to speak.

“Where the hell’ve you been, boy?”

Dean raises his chin and clears his throat. “Sabbatical. Something happen?”

“Yeah, somethin’ happened,” Rufus growls, crossing his long arms. “While you were too busy prancin’ in the woods.”

Dean resists the urge to growl back. How was he supposed to know that something had happened? The Council had told him to take a break, after all.

“Somebody wanna explain?”

“Yeah,” says a quieter voice, but still firm. Dean glances at Kevin, who’s sitting at the end of the table. “Humans wandered into our territory. They—”

“Wandered,” Ruby snorts, tossing her hair over her shoulder. “You mean they played dumb when they got caught.”

Kevin lowers his eyes, but the look on his face speaks to his frustrations. “Humans were in our territory. Along the edge between us and the leopards. We don’t know what they were doing, but they weren’t there on accident.”

Dean furrows his eyebrows. Why the hell would humans come into their territory now, of all times? The Pack had never had problems with the humans, not during Dean’s lifetime. So why now?

“Did you talk to them?” Dean asks Kevin, who’s still staring down at his hands.

“No,” he says, his eyes flitting over to Ruby and Meg, then Jo. Dean assumes they chased them off before Kevin could talk to them. He gets it, but he’s annoyed. All of this would’ve been easier if they could’ve just talked to the humans right away, instead of dealing with all the fucking politics afterwards.

“So. What’re they after?”

“That’s what HR here is tryin’ to figure out,” Ellen answers. “The human embassy is…neglecting to respond to us. In the meantime, we’re altering defensive strategies. Upping patrols, since we got the soldiers to cover it. Sensors are live, and Hunters are the only ones authorized to leave the territory, and only when necessary.”

Ah. Everything clicks into place. That’s why everybody is so pissed. They’re letting the humans get away with this, letting them just ignore the Pack for some damn reason.

“Why aren’t we going after them? Instead of cowering in our mountain like a bunch of fucking pups?” Dean growls, hearing the other Hunters and soldiers make sounds of agreement.

“What in the hell makes you think you can talk to us, your Council, with that attitude?”

Dean clamps his mouth shut and stares at his dad, at the rage clearly painted across his face. It’s the first time he’s spoken since Dean arrived, and his voice commands attention. Everyone else is silent.

“You don’t tell us what to do. You listen, and you obey orders. Is that clear?”
Dean holds his gaze, refuses to back down.

“All due respect, sir, but this isn’t good for the Pack. I get the idea, but—”

“Far as I know, we didn’t ask your opinion,” John snaps, pounding a fist on the hard stone table. He glares around at the rest of the pack members in the room, waiting until they all drop their eyes. “Any of your opinions. This is our final decision. Now get. Out.”

The soldiers are the first to filter out. Dean can’t blame them. His dad’s dominance is seeping into the room, and with most of the soldiers being betas…yeah. He can’t blame them. The Hunters give in after that. Jo is the last to go, and that’s only after a spectacular glare from Ellen. Dean waits, holds his dad’s gaze.

Once they are all gone he finally speaks.

“Something’s going on here that you’re not telling us.”

A muscle in John’s jaw twitches, but it’s Mary that speaks.

“We don’t know anything, sweetheart. Whatever they were doing, we don’t think the humans have any intentions towards us. Some of us,” she says, glancing at John, “think it’s a good time to look for allies.”

John growls quietly, scrubbing his hands through his hair. “Dammit, Mary. We aren’t talking to those damn cats. Over my dead body.”

“You ain’t got a goddamn reason to think like that,” Bobby sighs. “Care to share with the class?”

“I don’t trust them,” John snaps back. “We don’t know a thing about them and y’all want to treat them like pack. No goddamn way. Not while I’m still breathing. This is our pack and cats don’t belong.”

“Would you rather have enemies on both sides or on just one?” Mary says calmly, when they all know that she is anything but. Dean can hear his dad grinding his teeth.

“I’d rather have them both out where I can see them, instead of one in my bed.”

Rufus and Ellen nod their assent, while Bobby and Mary continue to look skeptical. Bobby isn’t the trusting type, though, so Dean knows which way he’s leaning. And isn’t this just exactly what Dean needs to hear following his chat with Castiel. Awesome.

“So you don’t know what they were doing,” Dean says, his voice deadpan. It’s not a question, but he wants to redirect their focus.

“No,” John growls. “We don’t.”

Well. That’s fucking great. Dean’s wolf doesn’t like it.

“I’m getting back on patrol.”

“No,” Bobby snaps. “You ain’t.”

“What the hell are you talking about? I—”

“You’re out of control,” John says, matter-of-fact. “Get a handle on yourself, and let us do our jobs.”
Dean wants to fucking scream. He had it. He was under control. And then he left that goddamn treehouse and he came back here to this fucking Council room and now he’s losing it again. His wolf is rippling under his skin, scratching to get out, to get out of the den, to get back to where it really wants to be.

But Dean can’t leave yet. He has shit to figure out.

“This is my job. To protect the Pack. Let me do it.”

"You're right, it is. Being a Hunter is your job. Which is the only goddamn reason I'm not kicking your ass from here to Sunday for disappearing." Dean snaps his jaw shut. Shit.

"John..." Mary says, but he raises a hand to silence her. She looks like she wants to fire something back, but she looks at Dean first, a question in her eyes. He offers her a tiny shake of his head. Now's not the time.

"No idea what you were doin’, but I swear to God, Dean, my patience is running fucking thin.”

Dean grits his teeth and nods. He isn't eager to get another scolding like a ten-year-old. "Yes sir.” John eyes him for a moment, exchanging glances with the other Council members. “Two days. Then you can get back on patrol. You handle it, we’ll talk.”

Dean nods and exits as calmly as he can, heading straight for IT. He’s hoping to find Charlie, and hoping she’ll have some more information. And he does find her, with Ash and Jo, all three of them huddled around a computer.

Jo is the first one to notice when he enters. She stomps over and immediately socks him in the arm, then wraps her arms around his neck and hugs him.

“What the fuck, Dean,” she growls, sounding pissed and upset at the same time.

“Hey kid,” he mumbles, inhaling her scent. She smells angry and distressed, but still like Jo. Charlie joins them a second later, wrapping her arms around Dean and Jo both.

“You gotta stop pulling this disappearing act before I kill you,” Jo growls at him, punching his shoulder. Dean just nods.

“Got it. Charlie, tell me you know what’s going on.”

Charlie sighs and sits back down at the computer, but it’s Ash that answers him.

“These humans, man, they’re up to something. We don’t know what, yet, but we’ll figure it out.”

Dean nods, looks over his shoulder at the computer. It’s displaying the same screen Dean had seen before, the one showing all of the sensors around their territory.

“They were here,” Charlie points at the map, a spot on the east side of the territory, then at a spot closer to the south. “And here. Two groups, probably working together.”

Both of the spots are far from the den, and on the east side of the territory that they share with the leopards. Which is odd, since the nearest human cities are both to the west of them.

“What were they doing?”

“We’re not sure,” Jo says. “By the time we got out there, they were making their way out. We saw
some of their stuff, though.”

Dean furrows his eyebrows. “Their stuff?”

“Some cable wire. A couple of cameras. One of those big, paper maps with some scribbles on it. They said they were hikers, but, I don’t know. They didn’t look like hikers. At least the ones I saw. I didn’t see the other group.”

Dean’s brain is churning, trying to run all of this information through his head. He can’t figure out what a group of humans would want out there, or why they’d even try.

“Did they come from the city?”

“Not sure. We didn’t exactly have a friendly chat.”

He nods. None of this makes any sense, and all it’s doing is putting his wolf even more on edge. But, for the time being, there’s nothing to be done. He knows all he can know, and he might as well let it sit. For now.

“Gonna go grab some food. Anybody hungry?”

They all shake their heads and decide to stay in there, so Dean wanders over to the dining quarters by himself. He makes himself a sandwich that is way too big, then glances around for some place to sit. He sees Layla in the corner with a couple of juveniles piled up around her, all of them staring at her dreamily, and it makes him happy to see her fitting in. Then he spots Cassie, sitting awfully close to an alpha that he thinks works in construction. Keeping the den in shape, that kind of thing. He wanders over and sits on the opposite side of the table, smiling at her and getting one in response.

“Hey, Cassie.”

“Hi Dean,” she says sweetly, laying a hand on the alpha’s arm when he glares at Dean. “It’s good to see you.”

“You too. How’re things?”

Her eyes flit to the guy next to her and then her smile widens, and Dean knows exactly what she means.

“Good. Really good, actually. I really like it here.”

Dean smiles at her. She still smells like spicy apples, but there’s something else there, too. Like… grass and bark-chips. It’s rubbed into her skin, clinging to her in a certain way, and Dean knows what she means by “really good”. He raises his eyebrows and smirks at her, getting an eye roll in return.

“Really good, huh?”

“Shut up.”

They chat for a little while more, while Dean finishes his sandwich, just about trivial things. The den, what her role will be here, how her and this alpha met. When he’s done Dean says his goodbyes and wanders off in search of his brother. Because he really needs to talk about Cas, and the way his wolf is riding him makes him think he might need to get out of here sooner rather than later.

He finds Sam and Jess, a little surprisingly, up in the nursery. None of the pups are there, and Dean
assumes they’re with their parents, but here’s his brother. They’re curled up on the floor watching a movie, Jess’ back leaning up against Sam’s broad chest, their feet stretched out in front of them, and Sam’s hand resting protectively on Jess’ belly. Dean can smell Sam’s worry in the air, just this side of distressed. They don’t smell like happy mates, like they usually do, and Dean knows this quiet moment he’s seeing has everything to do with the events of the day.

Because pups aren’t just kind of rare, they’re exceedingly rare. Part of why their numbers are dropping, aside from conflicts with humans. Wolves, at least, aren’t exceedingly fertile. For Jess to even be pregnant is kind of a miracle, and the fact that she made it this far with no trouble with twins is an even bigger one. Dean can just barely tell the difference in her smell, can sense the extras along with Jess’ own scent, which means she must be about two months along. She’s probably in the clear now, but Dean can understand why the whole thing with the humans freaked his brother out so much.

Dean, on the other hand, isn’t much different. He keeps thinking about the spots where the humans were found, and how damn close they were to the flat rock where he met Cas. But Cas can take care of himself, and there’s no evidence to suggest that the humans are even up to anything suspicious in the first place.

“Heya, Sammy,” Dean says quietly, sitting down next to his brother. Sam smiles at him, and so does Jess. Although hers is a little sleepier.

“Wondered if you’d disappear again. Were you…”

Sam’s voice trails off and his gaze flicks down to Jess, and Dean knows he’s asking if he can talk about this in front of her. Dean can’t say no, can’t make his brother lie to his mate like that.

“Yeah. I was with him.”

“With who?” Jess asks, looking confused.

Dean sighs. “My mate. He’s one of the leopards.”

To Jess’ credit, she manages to control the surprise on her face after only a second or two, humming thoughtfully. “Huh. Okay. Good to know.”

And Dean has to appreciate the ease with which she accepted that news. He knows she isn’t letting on how surprised she really is, but he appreciates it. If only the rest of the pack were so easy. But then, this is part of why he loves Jess so much.

“So he’s your mate now? Not, maybe or maybe not your mate?” Sam asks, his lips pressed into a line.

“Dad,” Dean grumbles, rubbing his eyes. “Don’t think he’s gonna react very well.”

Sam nods, a small frown tugging at his lips. “So you haven’t told anybody else?”

“Nope. Not yet.”

“You might have to,” Jess says quietly. “You’re starting to smell a little edgy.”
Not surprising. He *feels* like shit.

“And if you were with him all that time, why is your wolf all jacked up again?” Sam adds.

“To be honest?” Dean laughs. “I think because I left. My wolf wants to go back.” *I want to go back.*

And Sam gets the biggest, *I told you so* grin on his face at that, Dean can barely look at him. Of course Sam was right, about getting somebody to settle him. He’s always right.

“Go back then.”

“Sam, if something happens—”

“Take a radio. I’ll let you know if anything happens. You got a few more days before you’re back on patrol. Use them.”

That… actually sounds like a great idea. Then Dean doesn’t have to feel guilty for not being around, or worry about things happening in his absence. He can go, get to know his mate, and hopefully cook up some way to tell his dad and the rest of the Council so that they don’t freak out. It all sounds pretty perfect. Like a mini-vacation for the two days before he has to get back on patrol and worry about what the hell he’s gonna do when that next girl gets here.

So that’s what Dean does. He gathers up a couple of t-shirts and a pair of sweatpants, tossing them into a bag that he can carry once he’s shifted. He makes a quick trip to IT to let Charlie know that he’s going to be crossing the sensors, and to grab a radio to take with him. At least they can’t get pissed at him for leaving this time. When that’s done he shifts, reveling in the cracking of bones and stretching of his skin. God it feels like he hasn’t done this in forever. And then he takes off, out the exit of the Bunker and out into the forest.

When he finally arrives at Cas’ treehouse, his wolf flops down in relief. It smells like mate and home and the wolf could stay here forever. Except there is, unfortunately, one problem. When Dean stands at the base of the tree, barking and whining, no one answers. In fact, he’s pretty sure Cas isn’t even *up there.* The smell isn’t fresh enough, or intense enough, to be coming straight from the source. So his mate isn’t even here.

Dean isn’t about to turn back though, because Cas has to come home at some point. Right?

So he curls up at the base of the tree, wraps his tail around his body and rests his muzzle on his paws. He can wait. Cas will come back.
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

“A poor example of one.”

Chapter Notes

I seem to have given several of you minor heart attacks with the ending of the last chapter. I can't say that I'm terribly sorry, because it was rather fun to hear your theories and get yelled at for making bad things happen. Have I mentioned I love you guys?

Thank you again to wingofcastiel for the beautiful fanart! Look how cute Cas' little cabin is :))

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It’s starting to get dark and Castiel is still a panther when he returns home, padding quietly through the forest. He’s kind of cranky, has been all day, and dealing with the Arch and the other Seraphs just now didn’t put him in a better mood. Too many alphas, too many pissed off scents, not enough of the alpha he really wanted. He tries to shake off the meeting as he walks, because none of that
belongs in his treehouse. It’s his sanctuary, and he refuses to bring that baggage with him.

He is, though, genuinely surprised to arrive home only to find his wolf curled up with a small bag laying next to him and sleeping at the base of his tree. His panther practically leaps for joy. His mate came back. Less than 24 hours and his mate came back.

Castiel wanders over to the base of the tree and curls up on the ground as well, wrapping himself around Dean as best he can and resting his chin on the arch of Dean’s spine. His wolf stirs, at this, but doesn’t shake him off.

What he really wants to do is take his mate upstairs, to feed him, to curl up with him and kiss those wonderful lips again. It’s all he’s really thought about doing all day. Just him and his freckled wolf. Dean is, apparently, tired of laying on the ground, because after a few minutes he stands up and shifts back. When he’s done he pulls a pair of sweats out of his bag and puts them on, then sits back on the ground next to Castiel.

“Hey kitty cat,” he sighs, scratching underneath Castiel’s chin. “Nice of you to show up.”

Castiel sniffs and rubs his nose on Dean’s fingers, purring quietly. His wolf smells kind of agitated, kind of twitchy, and Castiel thinks that maybe he’s feeling kind of cranky, too.

“Can we go up now? The ground is making my ass sore.”

Castiel grunts and stands up, easily climbing up the tree and through the trap door. Dean doesn’t move, so he assumes that he’s waiting for the rope ladder. How lazy. But Castiel obliges anyway, because he wants his mate up here and more importantly in his bed. So Castiel shifts a little too quickly, hisses at the ache in his bones, and drops the ladder down for Dean after grabbing some pants.

It takes him a minute to climb up, so Castiel lounges on the cushions that make up his couch while he waits anxiously. And he is not disappointed. When Dean pulls himself up into the treehouse he has a hungry smile on his face, and he doesn’t waste any time in closing the space between them. Dean growls and kisses him forcefully, licking into his mouth and imprinting his smell all over Castiel. He knows that he smelled like Dean when his wolf had left that morning, but he’s bathed since then and by now the smell has faded. He just smells like himself, and he probably smells a fair amount like the other Seraphs. Which, he has to admit, probably isn’t doing much for Dean’s self-control.

He doesn’t mind, though. He likes how Dean’s wolf wants to claim him, wants to cover him in their scent. He likes how Dean is dominant here, in this, that he pins Castiel down without so much as a thought. It’s interesting that his wolf is submissive in the gentler things, like sleeping and cozying up in the quiet hours of the morning. But when it comes to getting physical, Dean doesn’t hesitate to let his alpha out.

“Hello to you too,” Castiel manages, hearing a growl escape Dean’s throat. “You know, there are a lot of comfortable surfaces in this tree. And this is the smallest of them all.”

Dean mouths at his throat while he talks, carefully not using teeth, and Castiel resists the urge to tilt his head and bare his neck for better access. He doesn’t want Dean to think he’s agreeing to this ridiculous plan to make out on his tiny couch.

“Moving requires me letting you up,” Dean says, his voice low and going straight to Castiel’s panther. Let him up? Oh hell no.

“Puppy,” he purrs, nipping at Dean’s lower lip and petting his short hair. “It’s adorable that you think
you’re holding me here.”

The challenge flashes across Dean’s face, a determined smile on his lips.

“Adorable, huh?” His lips move to Castiel’s ear. “I think you’re forgetting which one of us is the alpha. Why don’t you try getting up?”

He stifles the laugh in his throat. Yeah, Dean is a big tough alpha, but Castiel can still hold his own. He waits a beat, then with one quick push shoves Dean off of him and onto the floor. Dean lands with a hard thud and a curse, and Castiel leaps over the couch and dashes up the stairs to his bedroom. He doesn’t make it quite as far as he’d hoped, and halfway up Dean’s arms are wrapped around his waist, his lips pressed against the skin behind his ear.

“Nice tr—”

Castiel cuts him off, spinning in his arms and kissing him hard and deep. Dean growls, a happy, satisfied sound that Castiel would very much like to hear again. And when his grip loosens, Castiel pries himself out of Dean’s grasp and sprints up the stairs. He can feel the adrenaline racing through his veins, can feel the panther right under the surface of his skin in the most delightful way. And then Dean catches him again, this time right as he reaches the cushions, and tackles him onto the floor. And the whole thing devolves into both of them rolling around and squirming and each one trying to get a grip on the other until somehow Dean has Castiel pinned and they are kissing now and not wrestling and Castiel doesn’t even care that there’s an alpha pinning him down and holding both his wrists in one hand because it’s his alpha and he smells like oak and chestnuts and mate.

“You’re a fucking cheater, cat,” Dean snarls, pulling roughly on Castiel’s hair. Castiel bares his teeth at him, runs his claws down Dean’s back.

“I’m not a cat,” he says, grabbing Dean by the back of his neck and pulling their lips together again.

“No, you’re a panther,” Dean says teasingly, his voice suspiciously amused. He pulls back out of Castiel’s reach, and pulls back even further when Castiel tries to lean up and capture his lips. “A big, tough panther, pinned down my little old me.”

He punctuates the sentence with a roll of his hips and by tracing his nose up the side of Castiel’s neck, inhaling deeply. It’s a blatant show of dominance, and Castiel can’t help the blood that shoots down to his crotch or the rush of slick between his legs.

His mate is driving him crazy.

“Get down here, Dean,” Castiel growls, hoping beyond hope that Dean listens to him. Which, of course, is way too much to ask.

“Oh so now you use my name. Convenient.”

Castiel growls, ignoring the haziness of his vision. He knows his panther is riding close, knows that he has less control here than he’d like to have, but there’s something intoxicating about the smell of his mate all riled up and fiery, and he has no desire to control it. Dean, on the other hand, seems strangely in control of his wolf for once.

“You are going to pay for this,” Castiel threatens, bucking his hips and squirming to get his wrists free. If Dean weren’t so strong he could do it, but they’re too evenly matched and Dean obviously has the advantage at the moment.

“Countin’ on it,” Dean growls back, placing wet, open-mouthed kisses all along Castiel’s jawline
and along his neck. Castiel whines and squirms, but not with the intention to escape. He just wants his hands back so he can touch his mate and damn Dean is strong. “Would you keep your hands up here if I let go?” Dean says right into his ear.

_Hilarious._

“No.”

***

Dean has, quite literally, _never_ been this turned on in his _life_. Cas had the guts to fucking run from him and even now when he’s _clearly_ pinned, Cas hasn’t submitted. Dean thought for about three seconds about giving up, but he can smell the lingering stress of the day clinging to Cas’ skin, can smell the cloying scent of other alphas all over him, can smell how pleased his cat is right now to have someone to grapple with.

His cat wants this, and the wolf is going to give it to him.

Cas’ breathing heavy, his chest heaving, the sweet scent of his arousal spreading through the room. God Dean _loves_ it. And Cas says no to Dean’s little game, like he knew he would, and Dean loves it even more.

“Didn’t think so,” Dean chuckles, pushing more. “Just think how much _fun_ we could have if you’d stop being so squirmy.”

Cas pauses at that, his blue eyes darkening, his tongue flicking out to wet his lips. He arches his back and tilts his chin up, clearly trying to make himself a temptation.

“I would, but you _like_ it. So come on, wolf, do your worst.”

And, really, it’s entirely unfair that Cas can cause such a reaction in him just with that little nickname, but it does the trick. Dean crashes their lips together, releasing Cas’ hands because yeah, having both his hands to touch his cat is more important right now. Cas immediately fists one hand in the hair at the nape of Dean’s neck and shifts his head exactly how he wants it, and Dean would be a fool to think that Cas was giving him any power here just because he’s the one pinning Cas to the floor with his weight.

But Dean isn’t ready to give up control that easy, no matter how good Cas tastes or how good his tongue feels in Dean’s mouth. Dean slides one hand up to cup the side of Cas’ neck, then tears his lips away from his mouth to bring them down to the other side of his throat. Cas groans and tilts his head back and to the side, carefully baring his neck to his mate. Dean tenses and growls, tightens his hand on Cas’ neck and absolutely covers his neck in wet kisses. It’s like lapping at a pool of ambrosia, Cas’ scent mixed with his arousal so strong here that Dean can’t even _think_, can’t form a single fucking thought. His wolf is going _nuts_, screaming at him to bite and mark and _mate mate mate_. Their cat didn’t bare his neck to them in submission, he did it as permission and the wolf can appreciate an opportunity when given one.

As much as Dean wants to leave little bite marks all over his mate’s neck, as much as he wants to claim him as his own, he doesn’t. He is careful to keep his teeth away from Cas’ skin, because he already put his teeth on Cas once when he wasn’t thinking and he doesn’t intend to do it again. Instead he sucks on the skin of his neck, pulls the blood to the surface, and has to be satisfied with that.

Cas even lets him do it, for a little bit, but he gets tired of humoring him far too soon, and uses his
grip on Dean’s hair to drag his lips away from his neck. Cas growls like he’s annoyed, but he’s panting and Dean can feel how hard he is, so when he growls “up here, now,” Dean just grins and kisses his delicious pink mouth. His mate is a bossy little thing.

It takes every bit of willpower that Dean has not to rip his mate’s clothes off at the seams but…shit he wants to do this right. And both of their animals are way too riled up for this to be anywhere close to right considering how new all of this is. He can feel how close Cas’ panther is, but he has no clue what that’s like for him, how much Cas can really control himself. And Dean doesn’t want the panther’s consent, he wants Cas’ consent. So Dean presses his body down, pins Cas harder with his weight, and does his very best to fucking control his mouth. His wolf is pissed about it, but Dean can’t be bothered to give a shit.

Slowly he feels his heart rate slow, feels the wolf snap it’s teeth and stalk away to sulk. Cas seems pretty annoyed about it, too, but Dean just strokes his fingers through his cat’s hair and listens to the ever-subsiding rumbling in his chest. It’s not easy, and his alpha brain is fighting him on it, but he’s not some knothead who just takes. He can wait.

“Relax.”

“I hate you,” Cas grumbles, snatching Dean’s bottom lip between his teeth and then kissing the redness away. Dean resists his mate’s attempt to get him riled up again. He can still smell the stress and anger on Cas’ skin.

“Yeah?” Dean chuckles, bracing his elbows on either side of Cas’ head to prop himself up, while still petting his hair.

“Yes.”

Cas turns his head and snaps at Dean’s hand in his hair with his teeth, but Dean doesn’t pull his hand away. He’s pretty sure Cas won’t bite him. And he doesn’t, instead rolling his head up to stare into Dean’s eyes.

“How was your day, baby?” Dean says, nudging Cas’ cheek with his nose and kissing the corner of his jaw.

Cas glares at him and tightens his arms around Dean's waist, sighing heavily. “Uneventful.”

“Uh huh. You know I can smell you, right?”

“I’m aware.”

“And you smell pissed. Plus the stench of a bunch of other pissed off cats.”

Dean tries to keep the snarl out of his voice, he really does, but he doesn’t exactly succeed. Cas raises an eyebrow and tilts his head, a tiny smile pulling on his lips.

“Do I? I hadn’t noticed.”

It’s Dean’s turn to glare this time, because Cas sure as hell knows what he smells like.

“So, what happened?” he asks, ignoring Cas’ sarcasm.

“Nothing. The Arch called all of the Seraphs together, and a meeting like that has yet to go off without a hitch.”
“Does that mean you are actually a Seraph?”

“Yes,” Cas sighs dramatically. “I am.”

“And an omega?” Dean furrows his eyebrows, feeling kind of confused. He’s not one to make assumptions based on gender but…well. He’d be surprised if one of the Pack’s Hunters was an omega. But then again, Cas isn’t like any of the omegas he’s met.

“Mmm,” Cas hums, seemingly unperturbed. “A poor example of one.”

“What does that mean?”

Cas blinks at him, a wrinkle forming between his brows. A tiny frown forms on his lips, one that Dean has the urge to kiss away.

“Do you not think I am abnormal? For an omega?”

Dean frowns, opening his mouth to speak and then closing it again. Is Cas abnormal? Hell yes. But it’s definitely not a bad thing, and by the tone of his voice Dean is pretty sure that’s what Cas meant.

“I dunno, man. Never met that many omegas. You’re weird, for sure, but I like you.”

“Good to know,” Cas says, rolling his eyes. “Unfortunately, the others in my pack are not of the same opinion.”

Dean just shrugs. “Tell them to fuck themselves.”

Cas laughs out loud at that, a surprised sort of sound that lights up his face. “I’ll pass along the message.” He takes Dean’s face in his hands and kisses him, and it feels a whole lot like gratitude.

“So you’re not pack healer then?” Dean asks, and Cas laughs again like it’s the most ridiculous question.

“Hardly. That would be Anna, who is much better at being an omega than I am.”

“Being a Seraph is a cooler job anyway.”

Cas smiles softly. “I suppose it is, yes.”

Dean watches him carefully for a few moments before speaking again, running his fingers along the stubble on his cheeks.

“And wait, you said the Arch? The hell is that?”

Cas sighs heavily. “They are like your Council. The three in charge of our pack. Our wise leaders. Have you had enough of our politics yet?”

Dean ignores his complaints and keeps talking. “Did somethin’ happen? Why’d they call you all together?”

Cas eyes him for a moment, pressing his lips into a line and thinking. Something flits across his face, but it’s gone before Dean can catch it. Then he slowly brings his hand up to cup Dean’s jaw, to slide his thumb across his cheek.

“No, Dean. Nothing happened. Just routine.”
Dean makes a vague noise of acknowledgement, rolling to the side and pulling Cas with him so they are both on their sides and facing each other. He leans forward and kisses his mate thoroughly, maybe too intensely, but there’s a bundle of tension unwinding itself in his chest that he didn’t even know had been there.

“Everything okay?” Cas asks quietly, his fingers stroking Dean’s lower back.

“Yeah, man. Everything’s good.”

Dean doesn’t say anything about the humans, about how close they’d been to the flat rock, about how the Pack has no idea what they were up to. It probably has nothing to do with Cas anyway, especially if his Council—the Arch, or whatever—hadn’t even talked about it. They were probably just some run-of-the-mill hunters, hoping to catch one of the deer that had wandered into wolf territory.

Cas nods and they are quiet for a few minutes, both of them just watching the other one. Dean feels calm again, at rest, and damn he loves feeling in control like this. Loves being able to listen to the steady beat of Cas’ heart, to pick apart the subtle threads of his scent. It’s layered with other things, including Dean’s own scent, but he’s getting to know it better and better. It’s like bark on trees, but the kind of wet bark that you can peel away after a heavy rain, the thick pieces you find on the forest floor. It’s pine trees, but it’s the sticky scent of sap, the smell of the tree when you get up underneath it’s branches. There’s also the sweet smell underneath everything, like honey.

“What do I smell like?” Cas hums, a smile in his voice.

He isn’t sure how Cas knew what he was doing, but it’s amusing anyway. Apparently he isn’t being as subtle as he’d thought.

“Like tree bark and Christmas.”

Cas actually laughs at that, low and quiet. The wolf preens.

“Interesting.”

“What do I smell like?” Dean asks, meeting Cas’ blue eyes and not even trying to resist the urge to cover his lips in kisses.

“Old oak,” Cas sighs, pressing harder into the kiss as his voice gets breathier. “And chestnuts.”

Dean screws up his nose, cause what the hell does that even smell like?

He soon forgets all about that though, because he’s too focused on kissing Cas in earnest. They aren’t clawing and fighting with each other this time, neither of them is trying to beat the other one out. Cas’ breaths are soft and needy, not angry growls, and as fucking hot as that was Dean feels better about this, at least until they’ve established themselves. They can have crazy pheromone sex later. Lots and lots of it.

“What do I smell like?” Dean asks, his fingers hesitating at the waistband of Cas’ sweats. Cas licks his lips slowly and nods, and it’s so tempting that it takes another couple of minutes before Dean remembers what he was up to.

He shifts to slide Castiel’s sweats off of his body, then does the same for himself. Neither of them bothered with underwear, and the sudden clash of skin is almost enough to overload his brain. But Dean moves slowly, deliberately, fully soaking up each and every moment. Cas is warm and flushed against him, his tanned skin heated and soaked in all kinds of pheromones. He shifts his arms around
Dean’s neck and pulls himself closer, and Dean groans as his erection presses against the hard expanse of Cas’ stomach. Dean lets Cas kiss him however he wants as he trails his fingers across Cas’ waist and around his back, his hands sliding down to cup his ass and pull him closer. Cas rumbles happily, and Dean nips at his lips in response.

“Is this okay?” Dean asks again, wanting to be sure. He can feel the wetness of Cas’ slick on the tips of his fingers, but he doesn’t want this to go too fast. He wants Cas with him.

“Please,” Cas says quietly, licking into Dean’s mouth and tugging lightly on his hair. “Yes please.”

“Very polite,” Dean chuckles, getting a soft bite in return.

He uses one hand to hold Cas flush against him, while the other slides between his legs. He just barely brushes his thumb over Cas’ wet hole, smiling when Cas moans unashamedly into his mouth. Dean uses his thumb to tease a couple of times, feeling the tension build up in Cas’ body each time. When Cas finally breaks and growls at him, just like Dean wanted him to, he relents and dips his thumb inside the ring of muscle, listening to Cas’ growl turn into a whimper.

Cas’ kisses turn hungrier then, and Dean is totally on board. He parts his lips to Cas’ tongue, presses back and crushes Cas against his chest while his thumb carefully slides in and out against Cas’ rocking hips. Dean’s in fucking heaven, cradling his squirming, moaning mate while their mingled scents fill the room. He’s not even thinking that it could get better, not until Cas reaches behind himself to coat his hand in his own slick before fisting both of their cocks in that one hand. Dean groans and shudders, and before he knows it he’s thrusting into Cas’ hand and they aren’t even kissing anymore because they’re both panting.

It’s Cas who comes first, and watching how his eyes flutter closed and his lips part in pleasure sends Dean right over the edge. Cas works him through the whole thing, coating Dean in his slick and peppering his face with kisses while Dean practically whimpers against his shoulder. And Dean really doesn’t mean to pop a knot, hasn’t done that on accident since he was like fourteen, but he really can’t help himself. Cas doesn’t seem fazed though, squeezing Dean’s knot and working him through each successive load of come. His touches are far from expert, but the hands belong to his mate and they are everything that Dean needs.

He’s in a daze by the time it’s all over, drunk on Cas’ scent and loopy from his touches. Dean wants to stay like this, covered in each other, his arms wrapped tight around his cat. His wolf is a possessive bastard at best—not that Dean is very different—and thinks that all those other alphas that got their scents on his mate today would definitely think twice about going near him again if they smelled him now. Cas even puts up with it for a little bit, but Dean can tell he’s getting tired. Still, that doesn’t stop him from growling and trying to tug him back when Cas does finally pull away just a tiny bit.

“You would do this all night if I let you,” Cas says with a knowing look, getting a guilty smile from Dean. “And I want to sleep. There are towels and water downstairs.”

Dean raises an eyebrow. “Am I s’posed to get them?”

Cas just nods, and Dean is about to protest when he decides that taking care of his mate is a close second to just leaving him as he is. So he reluctantly stands up and stumbles downstairs in the dark, finding the towels hiding in the pseudo kitchen. He get’s one of them a little damp in a small bucket of water that he finds, then wanders back upstairs.

Unsurprisingly, Cas is basically asleep by the time he gets back.
“You are such a cat,” he grumbles, wiping the cloth over Cas’ skin until he’s clean. Cas doesn’t answer, but he starts purring quietly and Dean thinks that that’s thank you enough.

Chapter End Notes

I promise, there WILL be crazy pheromone sex and there will be cute fluffy sex. Be patient with me. Sometimes A/B/O fics straddle the line of consent pretty precariously, and I don't want this to be like that. So they'll get there.
The sun wakes Dean up in the morning, and he has to say that it’s kind of peaceful. He’s on his back, with Cas sleeping right on top of him and drooling on his chest. How adorable.

He runs a soft hand up and down his mate’s spine, moving his palm in careful circles while his other hand pushes through Cas’ dark hair. He can still smell last night’s activities all around them, but he’s not prepared to break the peace just yet. Instead he lets Cas sleep, and entertains himself by staring up at the mismatched pieces of wood that make up the ceiling.

Cas’ treehouse really is quite impressive. It’s beautifully built, for one thing, crafted right into the tree like it belongs there. The trunk of the tree goes through the middle of the downstairs, but up here where the room is smaller it’s only visible in the back corner. Other branches pass through the room and out the wall on the side, bare of any leaves. There’s an opening in the ceiling, a small skylight, through which Dean can see the green canopy of leaves above them. The sun is peeking through now, just barely, and Dean knows it must still be early since it is far from above them. There are openings in the walls, too, like windows, and Dean catches sight of some kind of colorful bird watching them before it flutters away.

The bedroom they’re in now isn’t huge, but it isn’t even really a room. It’s more like a really big bed, and Dean guesses that there’s gotta be about fifty blankets and even more cushions covering the floor. And now that he thinks about it, Cas doesn’t seem to have any real furniture at all. It seems weird, but then again it’s a treehouse. So. Everything is relative.

There’s no electricity up here either, and maybe that should’ve been obvious but something about it is sort of nice. He’s not sure how Cas keeps food in here, or how he keeps it warm in the winter, but he did notice some small electric lanterns downstairs in his search for towels the night before. And the bucket of water was great and all, but Cas must be going to a stream or a river nearby to bathe. It’s all very hippy, to be honest, living off of nature like this, but not in a bad way.

Dean isn’t really sure how long he’s been staring and thinking when Cas finally stirs. He barely moves, just shifts a tiny bit and sniffs lightly.

“Hey kitten,” Dean mumbles into his hair, scratching Cas’ scalp.
Cas grumbles and yawns, sticking his nose underneath Dean’s jaw.

“Is it morning already?”

Dean laughs, loving how sleep-scratchy his cat’s voice is this early in the morning.

“Yeah, it is.”

“Let’s not get up yet.”

“Good plan,” Dean chuckles. They lay there for a little while longer, and Dean is pretty sure that Cas is asleep again. Somehow, he isn’t surprised that Cas is a sleeper. But now he’s really feeling like he has to pee, and he should probably get his radio and check-in with Sam.

“I gotta get up,” Dean finally sighs, shifting Cas off of his chest.

“Mmph,” Cas protests, wrapping his arms around Dean’s middle like tentacles. Dean wants to stay, but the squeeze reminds him just how full his bladder is.

“Sorry kitty,” he says with a smile, kissing Cas softly and prying his hands off his back. “Be right back.”

Dean pulls on his sweats and jogs downstairs before he can change his mind. Once there, he decides that he’s probably going to have to climb out of the tree and go pee in the woods. How luxurious. So he grabs his radio and drops the ladder down out of the trap door, lowering himself until his bare feet hit the ground. He relieves himself first, sighing happily, then switches on the radio and turns to the right frequency.

“Sammy? You there?”

The radio crackles with static, but it takes a couple of minutes for Sam to respond.

“Yes. What’s up?”

“Everything good there?” Dean asks, hoping beyond hope that he says yes. He really doesn’t want to leave.

“Yeah, Dean. Everything’s fine. Go back to your honeymoon.”

Dean laughs, rubbing the back of his neck even though his brother can’t see him squirming.

“Thanks, bitch. How’s Ms. Jessica?”

“Jerk,” Sam laughs too, sounding a little weary. “She’s fine. She’s been tired, but Mom says that’s normal. So…”

His voice trails off.

“So you’re worried.”

“Yeah,” Sam admits, with a heavy sigh. “Yeah.”

Dean wants to offer him some words of comfort, but he doesn’t really have any. It’s gotta be hard on Jess, and hard on Sam, and Dean doesn’t know nearly enough about pregnancies to offer any reassurances. Still, he’s has to say something.
“She’s gonna be fine, little brother. Jess is a tough girl. And you need her.”

“Ain’t that the truth.”

A couple more minutes of words that are probably falling on deaf ears, and Sam leaves for breakfast. Dean stands in the silent forest and listens to the crackle of the radio for a few more minutes before heading back up. He doesn’t really feel like worrying right now.

When he climbs up into the tree, pulls the ladder up, and gets upstairs, it’s to find Cas sitting up in the middle of the room right where Dean left him. His hair is standing up in little tufts, and he’s blinking sleepily with one eye barely cracked open, a tiny frown on his face. Dean can’t help but smile. Cas tilts his head at him when Dean enters, reaching out one hand towards him and wiggling his fingers.

“Come back.”

Dean’s wolf leaps at the opportunity. It knows their mate is still naked under that blanket that is draped over his hips, and it thinks they should definitely take advantage of that.

“Nope,” Dean says with a smile. “Let’s go run around. And find some food.”

Cas groans and tilts his head back, clearly deciding to sulk over this.

“It’s early, Dean. We can run around later.”

“I’m gonna go. But hey, you lounge around here as long as you want.”

Dean doesn’t wait for a response, jogging back downstairs and tossing the rope ladder through the trap door. He climbs down and pulls off his sweats, letting his body shift at its own pace and dropping down to all fours. Dean raises his hackles and sneezes as he finishes shifting, flexing his claws in the dirt. He trots around the tree and takes in all the smells, adjusting to this part of the forest and its differences from his territory. And if he rubs his scent on Cas’ tree and the trees nearby, well…whatever. When he’s satisfied he sits at the base of the tree with his tongue hanging out of his mouth, waiting for the trap door to open again.

It takes a few minutes, but soon Cas is climbing down too. He doesn’t use the ladder like Dean did, choosing instead to pull it back up and climb down the branches. His bare feet and long fingers easily carry him down the tree with grace, and Dean just knows he doesn’t look nearly that capable when he climbs down. Even with some help. Once Cas is on the ground he turns and glares at Dean, rubbing the sleep out of his eyes. His hair is still sticking up and he’s still frowning, and Dean kind of wishes he had hands right now. Cas’ sweats are hanging low on his hips, and Dean can’t help but notice his sharp hipbones and flat planes of his stomach. He’s also carrying a towel and Dean’s sweats, so the question of where Cas bathes will probably be answered soon.

“Really?” he snorts, sniffing at the bark of the tree. Dean barks and gives him a wolfish grin. Cas just rolls his eyes. “Hope you’re happy now,” he grumbles, crossing his arms and hunching his shoulders. Dean walks next to him and bumps his legs with his side, huffing and brushing his nose over Cas’ bare skin. This just gets him a hand to the face as Cas pushes him away, but he just snaps his teeth and jogs away.

Cas sighs and follows him for a few minutes before stopping again.

“Dean, the stream is this way,” he says, pointing south. “I’d like to wash off.”

Without waiting Cas heads in that direction, and Dean automatically turns to follow. It isn’t a long walk, and Dean spends most of it wandering circles around Cas and sniffing everything. He can tell
that they haven’t left Cas’ little piece of territory, but there’s an overlapping scent that he doesn’t recognize.

The sun is much higher in the sky when they reach the stream, and Dean is thinking that some cool water would probably feel wonderful on his fur. Cas automatically strips off his sweats and strolls into the water, which looks to be only about mid-thigh in depth, dropping his towel and Dean’s sweats on the riverbank before going in. Dean wants to join him and cool off, but he decides to find a spot by the side of the river to watch instead. From here he can see everything around them, can catch the smells on the breeze, if he swivels his head just so.

“You don’t need to keep watch,” Cas chuckles, sitting down in the water so that just the tops of his shoulders are visible. Dean rumbles and ignores him. “You’re impossible.”

Dean swishes his tail a few times and huffs, letting out a wide yawn and purposefully baring his teeth.

“This would be much more enjoyable if you joined me.”

Dean eyes him, a low rumble in his throat. He does want to cool off. And even though his wolf is sure that they should be watching for threats, Dean is pretty sure that’s a ridiculous thing to be doing. So he gives up and jogs over to the river, wading into the water and sitting down in front of his cat.

Cas smiles softly, falling backwards into the water and then pulling himself back up. He’s dripping in water now, droplets clinging to his skin and falling out of his hair. He’s smiling wider too, and Dean tilts his head in confusion until Cas shakes his head rapidly from side to side. The water droplets go flying everywhere, splattering in Dean’s eyes and all over his face. Dean tries to growl but Cas is just laughing, and before he can snap his teeth in annoyance Cas is scooping up a handful of water and dumping it on top of his head.

His lips pull back and his ears flatten in a growl, but Cas doesn’t even react until Dean imitates him and shakes all of the excess water off of himself and onto Cas. Then Cas is laughing, his blue eyes bright and his dark hair sticking up in all directions. There’s a small curl behind his ear, and one tuft at the crown of his head that sticks up higher than the others, and Dean decides he likes his mate like this.

“Hi puppy,” Cas says, splashing him with more water and running his hands over his wet fur. His voice is fond, so Dean holds back the rumble in his throat over the nickname. Instead he licks some of the water off his nose. “Very helpful, thank you.”

Dean grins and lets his tongue hang out of his mouth, panting as his body cools off in the water. He doesn’t like that Cas is washing his scent away, but he likes this.

“I’m thinking we’ll go to Anna’s,” Cas says casually, dumping more water on his head and tugging on his ears. Dean shakes the water off. “She’ll have food there. But it’s possible that there will be some other pack members present.”

Dean huffs, trying to convey his consent. That means he’ll have to shift back soon, too, but he doesn’t quite feel like it yet.

“I’ll take that as your agreement.”

They spend a few more minutes splashing water at each other before Cas stands up and steps on to the bank. Dean goes to follow, but Cas stops him.

“You stay there. Hold on.”
Cas spends a minute drying off and ruffling his hair before pulling on his sweats, unconcerned by his own nudity. It’s a common thing among shifters to be naked around each other, since the shift doesn’t magically bring clothes along with it. Seeing Cas now though, Dean has to put in some effort not to make it sexual.

“Okay, over here,” Cas gestures, sitting down far enough from the bank so the ground isn’t wet. Dean pulls himself out of the stream and shakes the water off of his fur, giving Cas a strange look. “You’re going to get muddy. Let me dry you off.”

His wolf is running in circles, rolling around happily, wagging its tail. It is downright ecstatic at how their mate is taking care of them. Dean, on the other hand, is cautious. He walks over carefully, flinching when Cas drops the towel on his back and starts drying him off. Dean manages to stand so that Cas can reach the other parts of his body, but he’s stiff. And when Cas drops the towel on his head and carefully dries each of his ears one by one, the space between his eyes, the scruff of his neck, the underside of his muzzle, Dean gets an inkling for just how intimate this is. And god help him he likes it.

Dean has never been one for romantic cuddling or intimacy, beyond what he gets from his pack, but within two days Cas seems to have shattered that. Dean just wants to be close to him, and he doesn’t mind that Cas slips right past the alpha that keeps everyone else out.

Cas can apparently sense his tension, because once he’s satisfied with the dryness of Dean’s fur he drops the towel into his lap and sighs heavily.

“Stop thinking so much,” he says, wrapping his long fingers around Dean’s muzzle and squeezing, shaking his head gently from side to side. “Come on.”

He stands up then and walks away, and Dean whines and growls low in his throat.

The walk to Anna’s is longer than the walk to the stream, and Dean stays close to Cas’ side the whole time. They aren’t in Cas’ territory for most of it, and Dean is less interested in exploring and more interested in keeping Cas as close as possible. Cas chastises him a couple of times for getting in the way of him walking when he trips on Dean’s big paws, and mumbles a few times about them still being in his pack’s territory, but he just rolls his eyes and keeps going.

When they get close, Cas stops him again.

“You should shift back now. It would be a bad idea to arrive like this.”

Dean rumbles but he listens, wincing a little bit as he shifts and pulls on his sweats. When he shakes the last of the shift through his fingers, cracking his knuckles, he decides to put his thumbs to use.

Cas makes a muffled sound of surprise as Dean pulls their lips together, already craving the taste of his mate. He keeps his hands on the sides of Cas’ neck while he kisses him, growling when Cas finally folds under his touch and wraps his arms around Dean’s waist, giving in to his kisses. Dean can already smell the lingering scents of other leopards, and he doesn’t like the smell of them around his mate. He wants to make sure that they all know that Cas is his, and if that means getting some more of his scent buried into Cas’ skin then, well…he’s willing to sacrifice.

He nips at Cas’ bottom lip and kisses up the side of his neck, carding his fingers through Cas’ soft and slightly damp hair.

“Dean,” Cas whines, even as he presses closer to Dean’s body. “We can’t do this here.”

Dean growls. “Fine. Can we go back to the treehouse after?”
And that seems to be an idea that Cas can get behind. He licks his lips and kisses Dean enthusiastically, purring against his chest. “Absolutely.”

Anna’s house is situated in the middle of a ring of trees, and Cas explains that it’s just about the center of their territory. It looks like a fairly modest cabin, though it is bigger than Dean thought it would be. Out in front of the house is a large garden surrounded by longish grass, and right on the edge of the garden Dean can see a fair-skinned red head sitting with a baby on her lap. As soon as they are out of the trees the girl turns to them, a wary look in her eyes but a smile on her face.

“Castiel. Good to see you.”

Cas smiles back at her and strolls across the grass, sitting down next to her and scooping the baby off her lap. The little infant gurgles happily, and Cas laughs and ruffles its light brown tuft of hair.

“Anna, this is Dean.” Cas gestures at him, and Dean approaches slowly. Anna smells like wet leaves and something floral, but there’s something familiar about her scent, something that feels similar to what Cas smells like. He thinks it must be the omega, unless Cas and Anna turn out to be related.

“The wolf,” she says, eyeing him carefully. Dean tries not to ruffle under her scrutiny, instead sitting close to Cas’ side facing Anna and placing his hand on Cas’ knee. Cas gives him a look and rolls his eyes.

“My mate,” he corrects, bouncing the baby on his lap. Dean’s wolf loves how their cat looks with a pup, even if it isn’t their pup. Dean squashes that thought. Anna says something under her breath that sounds a lot like not yet, but Cas shoots her an icy glare and she doesn’t say anything else. “Dean, this is Anna. Our pack healer.”

Anna eyes him and smiles, but she smells more wary than anything else.

“It’s, uh, nice to meet you,” Dean tries, forcing a smile on his face. Anna nods, apparently accepting that. “I heard you have the food?”

That makes them both laugh, and Dean isn’t entirely sure what he said that was so funny.

“Is that what you’ve been telling him, Castiel?” she says, standing up and brushing some dirt off her legs. “I swear.”

She picks up a basket of tomatoes that she must’ve been picking and walks off towards the house, and Dean just hopes that she’ll come back with something to eat. His stomach is starting to grumble.

“Did I say something funny?”

“A little,” Cas laughs again, ruffling Dean’s hair. Dean swats his hand away.

“You did tell me there’d be food here,” Dean grumbles, crossing his arms. “Your fault.”

“Yes yes,” Cas waves his hand, wiggling his other fingers and making the baby on his lap giggle.

“She does have food here. I just abuse it because I don’t keep much at my house.”

“You don’t really have anywhere to put it.”

Cas smiles, a sneaky little thing. “That’s what I keep trying to tell her.”

Anna returns a second later with a plate full of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches on soft white bread. Dean’s wolf want’s more meat than that, but he can deal. She comes with a bottle for the baby
too, and Cas takes it automatically.

“Is he yours?” Dean asks, watching the soft smile on her face and the way she strokes the baby’s cheek when Cas cradles him.

“He is.”

Dean wants to ask where her mate is, because he would definitely never leave his mate and his pup alone in the fucking woods, but these leopards are different than him. He gives Cas a questioning look, and apparently that gets the message across.

“Michael is meeting with the rest of the Arch, about two miles north of here.”

That comes as a surprise to Dean. With how young Anna is, at least one member of Cas’ council has got to be pretty young. And maybe it isn’t as weird as Dean is making it out to be, since the five of his Council’s members are all his parents’ age, but still.

“So you’re kinda a hot shot around here.”

“You might say that,” Anna says with a small laugh. “Although the power is not mine. I just give out the food. Right, Castiel?”

He sighs and rolls his eyes at her, grumbling something that Dean doesn’t catch. The two of them start talking, something about somebody named Balthazar and how he was hanging out in some girl’s territory while still smelling like somebody else from the night before and then about some juvenile named Samandriel who keeps stopping by trying to get away from his parents and a bunch of other things that Dean can’t really keep up with. There’s a shocking number of weird-ass names happening, but he thinks it would probably be rude to say so. Instead he just listens, feels the rumble of Cas’ voice as he runs his palm absently up and down his spine.

And, to be fair, the baby has a lot of his attention. It’s slowly drifting off in Cas’ arms, the grip on its bottle loosening with every second. Heavy eyelids fall closed and its tiny chest rises and falls steadily. Cas barely seems to notice, just setting the bottle down on the ground and lowering the volume of his voice automatically. God Dean is distracted.

It’s Anna’s voice that tugs him out of his thoughts, and only when she says his name. “Dean, you’re a Hunter?”

“Oh, yeah,” he says, rolling his shoulders back. “That’s me.”

She tilts her head, eerily similar to Cas, and purses her lips before speaking again.

“That must mean you’re John’s son. The eldest, I assume.”

Dean freezes. He definitely hadn’t told Cas about his dad yet, so how the hell does this chick know? Cas looks equally as confused, looking from Dean back to Anna and back to Dean again with his eyebrows furrowed.

“Yeah?” Dean says, suddenly very wary. “How’d you know that?”

Cas looks surprised and annoyed, and Dean can’t really blame him.

“The Arch is more than familiar with the members of your Council and their families,” she says, like it isn’t friggin’ weird that she knows who he is. “What’s the saying, keep your friends close?”
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

“Do I look like I’m lying?”

Chapter Notes

Thank you guys, as always, for your wonderful support and patience. I hope this chapter somewhat satisfies, or at least gets you excited for the next one.

A little warning here for mentions of past abuse. Again, nothing specific, but it's implied in talking about Layla's history.

"Uh huh," Dean says, narrowing his eyes. "So what, you just a good guesser?"

"I suppose," she says with a serene smile. "There are only five Hunters, no? Two females, three males. All alphas. Of the males, only one is unmated. John has two sons, both Hunters. And your brother is expecting pups, is he not?"

Dean bites back a growl. She isn’t being threatening, he knows that, he knows their packs aren’t friends. Still, it puts him on his heels that she seems to know everything about the Pack and he knows next to nothing about them. Especially that she knows about Sam, somehow. That worries him the most. He tries not to think about how he’d told Cas about the pups, because it's likely that that's how she knows.

Cas blinks, his mouth opening like he’s going to speak and then closing before he tries again. “Your father is on the Council? The one that threatened to put you down?”

“Threat came from Dad himself,” Dean huffs, forcing a bitter smile. Cas looks pissed.

“How could he—"

“He’s taking care of the Pack,” Dean interrupts, eager to defend. His dad might be a dick, but he knows what he’s doing. “If he did it, it would’ve been necessary.”

Before Cas can respond Anna is speaking again, and her words automatically make Dean’s entire body go rigid.

“Well Castiel, you certainly wasted no time going straight for the top of the Pack,” she says with a knowing smile. “It will be helpful for us to have Dean in the coming days.”

In the coming days? The fuck does that even mean?

“Sorry? Not sure I follow.”

“Oh, it’s nothing really,” Anna says casually, ignoring Cas’ hissed Anna, stop it. “The Pack doesn’t
trust us, and your Council has been uncooperative. Now that we have you, someone highly ranked
and highly respected, on our side, swaying your Council should be no problem at all.”

Dean looks at Cas for some kind of sign, but there’s nothing. His blue eyes are wide, and his mouth
is clamped shut, and that’s all Dean needs to see.

“I’m not on your side,” Dean snarls, immediately feeling guilty when the baby makes an unhappy
noise. Cas says his name but he ignores him, standing up and storming into the woods. He’s being
childish, but there’s blood rushing in his ears and his wolf is growling and his vision is edged with
red. His dad was right, about these cats. Right all along.

He doesn’t want to believe that this is about his position in the Pack. He really doesn’t. But fucking
hell he doesn’t even know Cas. The guy could be the biggest fucking liar on the planet and Dean
would have no idea. He’d acted like he hadn’t known about Dean’s dad, but that was probably a
huge act. Cas had probably known the entire fucking time, and Dean is just the sap who fell for his
shit. God he’s a fucking idiot. Sure Cas smells like fucking ambrosia, like Dean’s personal heaven,
but he’s an omega. That’s what omegas smell like. Like home and happiness and peace and mate—

Fuck.

Dean is so caught up in the raging storm of his own thoughts that he barely feels Cas’ hand on his
arm, barely hears his rough voice.

“Dean, look at me.”

He growls and pushes Cas’ hand away, careful not to shove too hard. His voice, when he speaks,
sounds far away and way too foreign.

“You lied to us.”

Cas’ eyes are sad, but his face is neutral. Dean can smell his worry all over him.

“No, I didn’t. I didn’t know about your father.”

“The red one knew,” he snarls, baring his teeth. “You knew. You told her about our brother.”

Cas touches his palms to the sides of Dean’s neck, and this time he lets them stay there. “Anna is
trying to cause trouble. Your pack is not popular among us, little wolf. But I didn’t know. I swear.
And I didn't tell her about Sam, I wouldn't do that. I don't know how she knows.”

“Why should we believe you, cat?”

“Do I look like I’m lying?”

Dean eyes him, hears the steady beat of his heart, the way his eyes meet Dean’s without faltering.
Thoughts are whirling around his mind but they’re all incomplete, running in circles, and Dean can’t
fucking think with his wolf riding him and Cas’ fucking smell in his nose. He wraps his arm tightly
around Cas’ waist and covers his mouth with his lips, lifting him off the ground. Cas automatically
wraps his legs around Dean’s waist, and the wolf gets a shot of wild satisfaction at the whimper that
escapes their mate’s mouth.

The smell of Cas’ slick hits the hair and Dean growls, nosing at the corner of his jaw and the line of
his throat. Cas tilts his chin, and Dean is glad that Cas doesn’t choose this moment to challenge him.

“What do you want from us?” Dean rumbles against the skin of Cas’ neck, feeling Cas’ fingers
tighten on his skin. One of them is still on the side of his neck, while the other arm is wrapped around the back of his neck.

“Nothing,” Cas groans. “Nothing, Dean. Just...you.”

“And your pack?”

“I don’t...know,” Cas manages, his words broken up by his breathing. “They didn’t...tell...us any of that...stuff. They won’t...use you. I won’t let them.”

Their cat is protective of them. Good. The wolf wants to believe him, too, but Dean doesn’t trust him. Has no reason to trust him. And his rational brain is rebelling against all of this, even as Dean’s lips cover Cas’ throat with wet, sucking kisses. He wants him, wants him so bad, but he also wants to get away from him, needs to get away from him, from the threat to his pack and his family. He just needs to--

“Dean,” Cas groans, and the spell breaks. Dean pulls Cas off of him and stumbles away, putting distance between them.

It’s too good to be true, anyway. Of course it is. The wolf howls, but Dean ignores it. He has no idea how much of this shit is real, how much of it is just exactly what Anna said. That the leopards need an in. And he will not endanger the Pack to help himself. Not even for his true mate. He won’t do it.

“Stay away from me, stay away from my pack. I see you again, I’ll tear you apart.”

Castiel starts to speak again, but Dean ignores him. He tears off his sweats and forces himself to shift. It hurts—fucking hurts like a bitch—but the clear-mindedness of his fur is a welcome relief from the swirl of thoughts in his head. He tears off through the forest, and he isn’t even really sure that he’s going the right way but he doesn’t care. He smells six or seven different leopards before he hits the territory line, and maybe Dean should care about the repercussions of a wolf running through their territory but the wolf doesn’t give a fuck what other cats think. It’s too busy tearing at the restraints to go back, but Dean has just enough self-control to stop himself.

He crosses into Pack territory, and walks the rest of the way to the den, because his dad will be pissed if he goes tearing in there all pissed off. So he walks, and acts like he has some control over himself.

All in all he’s not sure what he’s feeling. There’s too much going on to process. He just knows that angry is definitely one of the many things, and definitely the easiest to access. So he lets it flood him, until he decides he’s ready to deal with the other shit.

Inside the den, he doesn’t shift back. Everybody avoids him. It’s par for the course, at this point, but it doesn’t suck any less.

He thinks for about .02 seconds about finding Sam, but his brother would probably be all fucking rational and reasonable and that’s not what Dean wants right now. He wanders down to his room instead, feeling the wolf bubbling under his skin and hoping that a cold shower will help. He’s about halfway down the hallway when a door to his right opens, and he’s doused with the scent of salty seawater.

“Oh. Dean. What’s the matter?”

The wolf immediately quiets down, no less cagey but far less willing to show it around Layla. Dean stops walking and stares at her, rumbling low in his chest in response. She glances up and down the tunnel, but there’s no one else around.
“Would you like to come in? Talk?”

Dean doesn’t want to talk. But Layla doesn’t know about Cas, so she won’t ask about him, and her scent is helping clear his head. He trots through her doorway, careful not to brush against her. She follows him inside and shuts the door, sitting down at the edge of her bed. Dean stations himself between her and the door. Just in case. She smiles at him.

“You can shift, if you want,” she says, pausing to see if he’ll listen. He doesn’t. “Should I talk, then?”

He huffs and lays down at her feet. She seems to take that as a yes.

"How much do you know about my pack? Your sister pack?"

Dean grunts and shrugs, or shrugs as much as he's able in his wolf body. In theory he should know all about them, but he finds himself unable to really come up with any concrete information.

“The beginning, then,” Layla smiles gently. "Your grandparents, Samuel and Deanna, they were our leaders when I was born. We did not, in our pack, have a Council like you have here. Samuel was a good alpha, and Deanna was a tough omega. Your mother had already left, at that point. They died peacefully. Deanna first. Samuel followed her not long after. I do not think he wanted to be without her. We mourned them for a long time.”

Dean raises his head and listens intently. Layla is staring down at her hands. Even his wolf, ears pricked, is listening.

“An alpha named Roy, and his mate, a beta named Sue-Ann, took their place. For a long time, we thought they would be good for us. The pack changed, it was true, but I think I was too young to really understand it. And anyone who spoke out, well…I suppose I was too young to understand that too.”

Dean shifts back, almost involuntarily. By the time he’s changed and is cracking his knuckles, Layla has retrieved a plain pair of black sweats and hands them to him. He pulls them on and sits at her feet, submitting himself to her. Some instinct tells him that she needs that, right now.

“Why are you telling me this?” he asks quietly, staring up into her eyes.

“I think you maybe need a distraction, right now. Besides, someone should know where I come from.”

He doesn’t feel worthy of being that person. But he listens, because she wants him to.

“When I was eleven or twelve, we had an unusually high number of omegas in our pack. It didn’t take long for Roy and Sue-Ann to realize the usefulness of such a thing. Especially when their leadership started to fail. You know, I’m sure, the importance of the role the dominants play in a pack.”

A wave of angry protectiveness flares in Dean’s chest. She doesn’t even need to say anything out loud for him to know what she’s getting at.

“They didn’t lead us in the way that we needed. The pack didn’t bond, our Hunters lorded their power over us, skin privilege was limited to mates only; we were so isolated that even families barely even spoke.”

“The pack rotted. From the inside out,” Dean says quietly, the calm in his voice covering up how
angry he is. Alphas, dominants, Hunters, they’re supposed to protect and comfort, keep the pack healthy. They aren’t supposed to abuse their dominance, hold it over the submissives like it makes them better, in some way.

Layla nods and smiles, but it’s filled with sadness. “The power went to their heads, along with the isolation. You might imagine how it was for the omegas. Roy and Sue-Ann used us, hoping that we might reverse the effects. Bring the dominants back from the edge of madness. It didn’t work. We learned quickly that submission was the quickest way to get by.”

Dean is thankful, in that moment, that Layla is an omega, that her scent soothes his animal. He has enough shit that he’s pissed about, and the addition of this information is just making it worse. Realistically he knows that she, at least, is safe from that threat. He cannot say the same for the others in her pack.

“Why didn’t you call for help? Reach out to us?”

“Honestly? I’m not sure that I knew anything was wrong. I had grown up in that pack, it was all I had ever known. I thought that was my life. It was Roy, who sought help. I think, had Sue-Ann not been around, he might have reached out sooner. It was your father who came to our aid.”

Dean freezes. His dad had gone on a trip, almost a year ago, with his mom. Neither of them specified where, and Dean hadn’t asked. Now he knew.

“My parents…you met them?”

“I saw them,” she nods, brushing her hair behind her ear. “I don’t think either of them noticed me. There was much else going on.”

Dean nods. He’s sure his dad noticed her, and probably his mom too. The urge to protect is too strong, and there’s no way the alpha in John didn’t notice an omega who must’ve been hurting so much.

“Your father, he…well, it couldn’t have been easy for him. It was too late for some. They were lost, all of the ones he took, and I think he almost became lost too. I think that’s why your mother was with him. She was as strong as he was. In her own way.”

That sounds right. Mary isn’t one to be messed with. Dean, probably more than anyone else here besides maybe Layla, knows how much John needs her. And really, Dean and his father aren’t so dissimilar in that way.

“And now, is everything…?” he lets his voice trail off, hoping she’ll fill in the blanks.

“We are healing. Slowly, but surely.”

“I’m sorry,” Dean says, not sure what else he can say. Even that, seems pitiful. Layla offers him a smile, though, and it’s much warmer this time.

“I am here, because of you. Because of your family. I was given the opportunity to leave and I did. The apology is not yours to give.”

Dean sighs and stares down at the floor. He can give her this much. She is quiet for a minute or so, but her next words almost make Dean jump out of his skin.

“Would you like to talk about your mate, now?”
He flinches and stares up at her, eyes wide. “What? What are you talking about?”

She smiles knowingly. “Whoever they are, I have yet to encounter them around the den. Unless they aren’t in the den?”

Shit. Shit shit shit.

“You told you?”

Layla laughs. “No one told me.” She taps her nose with her finger, smiling down at him. “I know things. So what happened?”

Dean blinks. He didn’t rinse off after he got back to the den, or before, so what Layla is smelling probably is Castiel’s scent clinging to him. Still, he’s not sure how she jumped straight to mate. He decides to let it go, though. Omegas can smell all kinds of shit that alphas and betas can’t. With his mind relatively clear, the events of the day don’t seem as clear cut. Why would Cas lie to him anyway? What benefit would he get? And he always seemed so honest, how could he have hid in those clear blue eyes? But then Dean would do a lot of things to protect the Pack. Cas is probably no different. And—yeah. He definitely needs to say this shit out loud.

“I thought he lied to me. About something big. Now I’m not so sure.”

“Do you have reason to believe he lied?” Layla asks, tilting her head to the side. Dean considers this.

“I don’t have reason to believe he didn’t lie.”

That makes her laugh. Dean isn’t sure what’s so funny.

“An awfully pessimistic point of view, don’t you think?”

Dean shrugs. “Maybe. Maybe not. When the Pack is on the line…”

He clamps his mouth shut. Shit. He said too much. Layla doesn’t pry though, she just gazes at him calmly.

“So this is about the Pack. Not about your mate.”

“It’s both. They’re not, like, mutually exclusive. Or whatever.”

“I see,” she hums. “Has he tried to hurt the Pack?”

“No. But he could.”

“So could I,” Layla adds, raising her eyebrows. “Why aren’t you worried about me? You don’t really know me, but you accepted me with open arms.”

“You’re a wolf,” Dean says simply, like it’s obvious. Wolves stick together, no matter what pack they’re from.

“And your mate isn’t.”

Dean freezes again. Shit. He can’t answer that. But from the look on Layla’s face, he doesn’t have to.

“So that’s why I haven’t smelled them around.”
Dean sniffs and stares at the floor. “You can’t tell anyone. Not yet.”

She doesn’t respond right away, and he keeps staring at the floor until he feels her palms on his cheeks.

“Not all wolves can be trusted. Learn that lesson from me. And not all non-wolves are undeserving of your trust. Learn that lesson yourself.”

She meets his eyes directly as she speaks. Clear, blue, unfaltering. But not the right shade of blue. Not his blue. A smile spreads across his face.

“Thank you,” he says, standing up and backing towards the door. She nods and smiles, quiet and beautiful like always.

Dean doesn’t go right back out into the woods. He makes a couple of stops first. To shower, to see Sam, to check in with the Council. There haven’t been any more human sightings, and for that he’s glad. Kevin finally got in touch with their embassy, too, and should hear something from them soon about the mishap with the hunters. He promises to update Dean once he’s met with them, too, which Dean feels good about. Then he heads over to IT, to pop in on Charlie and see if there’s been anything else interesting happening. There usually isn’t much going on in IT, so it catches Dean by surprise that he seems to have arrived at a bad time.

There’s a screeching noise that hurts his ears, and one of the computers has all sorts of lights flashing.

“What up, homie,” Charlie says with a smile when he enters, her fingers flying across the keyboard. “A little busy. Something I can help you with?”

“What’s going on?” Dean asks, squinting at the computer. All of it means nothing to him.

“Minor perimeter breach. No biggie. Probably one of those deer, or a really big bunny. Jo is going to check it out already. Just trying to shut these damn things off.”

Dean furrows his eyebrows and looks at a different computer.

“A breach? Where?”


Dean locates the spot on the map. It’s the rock. The flat rock. Shit. His wolf has been relatively quiet ever since he left Layla’s room, but it is anything but right now.

“Fuck,” he growls, already rushing out the door. He thinks he hears Charlie say something as he exits, but he doesn’t stay to listen. Jo is the bite first, ask questions later kind of Hunter, and in no world does he want her to find his cat before he does.
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

“You could have said please or something.”

Chapter Notes

You guys are so funny when I leave you with cliffhangers. I might just have to do that a little more often...and I actually wasn't going to post this until Sunday, but I am wildly upset after tonight's episode and so here I am. Sue me. Anyway.

*plays sexy music*

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He doesn’t shift, because he doesn’t have the time. And words will probably come in handy. It takes him a little longer to make it out there on foot, instead of paws, and he knows before he even arrives that Jo beat him there.

Castiel is sitting on the rock, his legs crossed and a serene look on his face. Dean knows better. There is fire in those blue eyes. Jo is wearing her wolf, her teeth bared and her stance tense. She’s ready to leap at a second’s notice. Dean jogs up and slows down, his gaze flicking back and forth. Castiel is staring right into Jo’s eyes, and neither of them seems likely to back down soon.

“Hello, Dean,” Cas says smoothly. “Nice of you to join us.”

Jo snarls.

“You cross the sensors on purpose?” Dean asks, shifting his position so that he’s standing between Jo and his mate.

“I needed your attention. It worked.”

“You’re a dumbass,” Dean growls. Cas just shrugs. “Jo, you can relax. I know him.”

Jo stops baring her teeth, but she’s still growling. She tears her gaze away from the intruder to glance at Dean, squinting her eyes suspiciously.

“It’s okay. He’s a good guy.”

“You’ve decided to believe me then,” Castiel chimes in, and Dean definitely doesn’t miss the snark in his tone. He ignores him though, focusing on Jo.

“I’m back on patrol tomorrow,” Dean says. He wishes he had more time, but he knows how much his presence is needed right now. “I’ll tell you everything then. Just give me tonight.”

She growls and shifts her feet, flexing her claws in the dirt. He knows, ’cause he knows Jo, that she's
not going to give this up easy. Dean turns and puts his back to Cas, squaring his shoulders towards Jo and planting his feet wide. He rolls his shoulders back and stands tall, letting his wolf out just a little bit. Dean is more dominant than Jo is, and he doesn’t like going all alpha on her but he doesn’t have much of a choice. Still, he tempers it a little bit, avoids issuing any direct commands. He’s already putting his relationship with Cas on display here, showing Jo how much he trusts him by putting the cat at his back. She might not know the nature of the relationship yet, but she definitely notices.

"Jo, drop it. Please."

Jo’s eyes flick back and forth between Dean and Castiel several times before she seems to make up her mind. She barks at Dean and bares her teeth at Cas one more time before jogging off into the woods, towards the den, and Dean thinks that that’s a good sign.

“You comin’?” Dean grumbles, avoiding eye contact and turning to climb up into one of the trees along the territory line. He doesn’t need to set off the sensors again.

“No thanks.”

Dean stops, turns to see Castiel happily sitting on the rock still. His arms are crossed, and there’s a defiant look on his face.

“No?”

Castiel unfolds his legs and strolls over to Dean, taking his goddamn sweet time about it. He stops when there is only about an inch between them, and Dean’s brain is already getting muddled by the proximity of his scent.

“No,” Cas says simply.

Dean rolls his eyes and grabs Castiel around the waist, spinning and using his whole body to pin him up against the wide trunk of the tree. Dean can see the smile in his eyes.

“Can you get your ass up the tree so we can leave,” Dean growls, resisting the urge to kiss him. Now is not the time. Cas just sighs and rolls his eyes at the display.

“You could have said please or something.”

With that he pries Dean’s hands away and climbs up the tree with ease, disappearing into the branches. Dean follows him, with decidedly less ease, but he manages. Neither of them say anything until they are both safely on the ground on the other side and on their way to Castiel’s treehouse.

“Why’d you come here?” Dean asks, glancing over at Cas.

“I thought about letting you run off and then I decided that it was likely that you wouldn’t come back. So I came to give you a piece of my mind regarding your attitude.”

Dean huffs a laugh. “That so? You saving it for later?”

Instead of responding Castiel grabs his hand and pulls him to a stop, forces Dean to turn and look him in the eyes. God they’re so blue. And the right shade of blue, this time. Cas puts his hands on either side of Dean’s neck, his eyes roaming his face and looking for god knows what.

“You seem to have changed your stance from earlier, so I might not need it.”
Dean hums and nods, but he can already feel himself being drawn in by his mate’s presence. The warmth of his gaze, that intoxicating scent, the roughness of his fingers. It barely takes a thought for Dean to wrap his arms around Castiel’s waist, to pull him forward and close the space between their lips. Kissing him feels a million times better than the memory Dean has of that morning. It already feels so far away, the peace of it. And Dean wants it back.

“I’m sorry,” he sighs against his lips. “I shouldn’t have gotten so pissed and run off. Trust isn’t an easy thing for me to give.”

Cas pulls back and stares into his eyes, runs careful fingers along the line of his jaw.

“So I’m not an evil liar anymore?” Cas says, eyebrows raised.

“Don’t think I said evil,” Dean grumbles defensively.

“In any case. This won’t work if you don’t trust me,” Cas says sadly, his lips turning down. He places a hand on Dean’s chest, eyes scanning Dean’s face. “True mates or no.”

“I know. I know.”

Dean sighs heavily and drops his head to Cas’ shoulder, breathing him in. Cas doesn’t press any more, so Dean thinks he's letting it go for now. It feels like a warning though.

“What changed your mind?” Cas asks a minute later.

Dean hesitates for a second. “This girl, Layla. Kinda gave me some perspective.”

Cas hums thoughtfully, studying Dean’s face again. It feels like being under a microscope, to be honest. “It would seem that I owe her a thank you.”

Dean sighs and kisses the corner of his jaw. “When you meet her, you can tell her that.”

Cas just smiles a sneaky smile and pulls away, leading Dean through the forest with him. It’s almost dark by the time they get to the treehouse, and a few minutes of struggling on Dean’s part puts them up in Cas’ room with a small lantern between them. The moon and the stars are slowly appearing in the sky above them, and there’s something peaceful about the shadows cast across Cas’ face.

“We have right around fifty pack members,” Cas says, crossing his legs underneath him and turning his body so they are facing each other. “I thought I might tell you about some of them, so you don’t feel like you and your pack are at a disadvantage. Will that help?”

“Okay,” Dean breathes, a kind of calm settling in his bones. He didn’t even know that that’s what his wolf needed, and maybe at some point he’ll stop being surprised about what Cas knows about him.

“The Arch consists of three members,” Cas starts, his rough voice more soothing to Dean’s wolf than anything else. “Michael, the eldest, mated to Anna, our pack healer. Lucifer, mated to a beta named Lilith. Gabriel, who is unmated. Very recently our pack elder, Metatron, stepped down. He has never been mated.”

Dean stares at him, tries to process and keep up with all the names and relationships. Not his strong suit, but he’s trying. It’s odd to hear that one of their head honchos is unmated, but Dean tries to remember that they aren’t like the wolves; mating must not affect the pack so much.

“There are six Seraphs, myself included. Raphael and Gadreel are both mated. Naomi, Balthazar, Hannah, and myself are all unmated. They are all alphas. We have five Dominions, and several in
training.”

“What’s that mean?” Dean asks, unfamiliar with the term. He knows Seraphs are like Hunters, but he hasn’t heard about the other kind.

“Dominions are a lower rank of protectors,” Cas says, his voice calm and even. “They are similar to what you in your pack call soldiers. They work beneath the Seraphs to maintain order.”

“Got it. So five of those guys?”

Cas nods. “Inias, Uriel, Rachel, Hester, all betas. Zachariah, an alpha. He is, as you might guess, unhappy with his position.” Dean laughs, and Cas smiles a tiny bit right at the corner of his mouth. "Michael was the first of the Arch to bear children. His and Anna’s cub, Sariel, was named for our elder, Metatron.”

“So what’s up with the weird names?” Dean says, sliding a little closer and smiling when Cas glares at him.

“ Weird, or different from yours?”

Dean thinks. “Different from ours, I guess.”

Cas just hums, and places a palm on Dean’s cheek. “Feeling better?”

He’s about to say no when he realizes that...yeah, he actually is. His wolf is pleased that they know their enemy, or potential enemy, as Dean reminds him. He doesn’t feel so off balance now.

“Yeah, actually,” he says, his eyebrows furrowed. "One question, though. What did Anna mean, about swaying the Council? Why would you guys need me?"

Cas chews his lip for a second, squinting his eyes and thinking.

"To be honest, I'm not entirely sure. The Arch hasn't exactly been forthcoming regarding talks with your Council."

Figures. It's good to know that the Council aren't the only ones keeping secrets, but it doesn't exactly make him feel any better.

"Same on our end."

"I think, more than anything, the Arch wants to present a united front against the humans. To scare them away from trying anything. Although it doesn't sound like they've had much luck."

"Not surprising," Dean sighs, rubbing his eyes. "Dad is firmly opposed to any kind of alliance with you guys."

"Because we aren't wolves?" Cas asks, sounding annoyed. Dean's honestly starting to understand the frustration, despite his earlier panic. It makes more sense to him to side with other shifters, over the humans, but he's not in charge.

"I guess. I dunno, Cas. I don't get it. And none of them are listening."

His wolf is pacing and growling, irritation racing through his veins. All of this shit is exhausting.

"Relax, puppy," Cas says softly, touching their foreheads together. "Don't bring that here. We'll figure it out."
Dean nods and lets Cas soothe him, let’s the scent of mate and omega sink into his bones. His wolf finally flops down unhappily, but it’s something. And Cas is right. None of that pack business belongs here between them. They can face it all, out there together. But not in here.

“You smell better,” Cas sighs after a few moments of breathing each other in, so close that their lips are hovering centimeters apart. “You smell quite good.”

“Yeah?” Dean chuckles, sliding a hand up his spine. Cas nods.

“You smelled like angry alpha before. My angry alpha, but angry alpha.”

The wolf grunts happily, and Dean kind of has to agree.

“What, pissed off alpha’s not your thing?”

Cas rolls his eyes. “On the contrary. I love it when it’s coming from an alpha that is angry that some little omega like me has more power than they do, or that I’m a better fighter, or that I won’t kneel down and bare my neck like a nice little submissive. It’s very satisfying.”

A pleased growl bubbles out of Dean’s throat, and Cas seems amused by it.

“I don’t mind angry, I mind when you are angry.”

Dean pulls up short, because woah that got unexpectedly sentimental super fast. Instead of responding he closes the small space between them, covering his mate’s lips and drawing a sigh out of him. With the scent of Cas’ slick in the air and the taste of his mate on his lips, Dean’s mind is singularly focused with one goal in mind. And when Cas lays down on his back and pulls Dean partially on top of him, he knows the cat is on the same page.

It takes all of Dean’s focus not to ravage him right then and there, to not claim his mate and fill him up and mark him in every way possible.

“Have you ever…?” Dean asks, not because he really wants to know. ‘Cause yeah, thinking about Cas with some other alpha sends his wolf into all kinds of frenzy. But he kinda needs to know how careful he has to be here.

“No,” Cas says quietly, his pulse fluttering and his scent blossoming.

“Not with an alpha?”

“Not with anyone.”

Dean blinks. Fuck yes.

He slows down though, as happy as he is, because he’s not gonna rush into this. Cas matters too much. So tonight, at least, his wolf can shut the fuck up about it.

“What about when you were in heat?”

Cas hesitates. "Spending a heat with someone, especially an alpha, it is...an exercise in trust. As I'm sure you're aware."

In principle, Dean knows. But his experience with omegas in heat is restricted to the few days every three months when his mom disappears with his dad and...yeah. Not something he wants to think about. He’s never actually been with an omega either, and he sort of likes that his mate will be the only one. Still, if going into heat is anything like his ruts, then he can imagine.
"Kinda like a rut, right?"

"Similar," Cas hums, squinting his eyes and chewing his lip. "Although, I don't think alphas experience quite the same level of need."

Dean can't imagine waiting out a rut by himself. As far as torture goes, that's pretty high on the list. Although with a rut coming up...yeah. Not sure how that's gonna go.

"Doesn't that...suck? A lot?"

"Heats suck quite a lot in general," Cas laughs. "Though, perhaps that's me. I don't enjoy feeling like I'm incomplete without a knot, like I would do anything in this world for some alpha to take me. That isn't me, it's my biology, and going into heat turns me helpless against it."

Dean feels kind of queasy at the thought.

"I didn't know it was like that," he says quietly, shying away from Cas' blue gaze and staring down at his chest.

"With someone I trust," Cas says, tilting Dean's chin up, "I think it wouldn't be so terrible. Fun might be a stretch but...enjoyable, maybe."

"We don't have to..." Dean tries, the words sticking in his throat. He wants to promise to take care of Cas while he's in heat, to be there for him, but he's not sure that's what Cas actually wants. "I mean if you'd rather..."

Cas leans up and kisses him quiet, settling his anxious wolf immediately.

"I'm not in heat, and I have a while until my next one. Perhaps we can talk about it later?"

Dean breathes a sigh of relief, kissing his mate in agreement and pressing his body down against him.

After several lingering kisses Dean sits back slowly, pulling Cas' clothes off and switching off the small lantern. The darkness of the forest engulfs them, the only light coming from the moon above them. Dean can't see a whole lot, at least not until his pupils adjust, but he kind of likes it. He can focus on the details of Cas' scent, the stuttered breaths when Dean pulls him up and onto his lap, the quiet purr in his chest. Dean slides his hands underneath Cas' thighs and pulls him closer, groaning as his erection slides between Cas' wet cheeks. He's so slick already, and the way his breath hitches almost makes Dean crack.

"My mate," Cas breathes out, kissing Dean's lips hungrily. The wolf snarls and leaps at the opportunity, chanting taketaketaketake. Dean inhales slowly and pushes that urge away. Cas obviously wants this, wants him, but he wants to give, to give his mate everything. Unselfishly.

"Let me take care of you."

"Dean," he says, his gravelly voice soft. "If this is because of what I said..."

"Just tonight," he breathes. "Let me. Please."

Cas sighs and looks at him, and Dean thinks belatedly that Cas probably has slightly better night vision than he does. His eyes are adjusting, but still.

"You are the strangest alpha I have ever met," Cas says, tilting his head. "Most knot first and ask
“You deserve better than that.” Dean says. “You’re my mate, Cas. And once we figure all this shit out, I plan on having a pretty damn long life with you. We got time.”

It kind of slips out without his permission, and Cas seems to be at a little bit of a loss for words, so Dean doesn’t wait for a response, instead sliding his fingers into Cas’ hair and tugging him down to kiss him. Cas melts into him, purring as Dean runs a rough hand down his spine and strokes his soft, tanned skin. It feels like agreement. Dean lets Cas take control of their kiss as he moves both hands to his hips, feels the sharp jut of his hipbones against his hands, rolling them and shifting his own hips to slide between his legs.

For a brief second Cas breaks the kiss, arching into Dean and moaning quietly. Dean smiles and watches him, how his eyes flutter shut and how he parts his damp lips and how the flush spreads across his bare chest. It takes a few seconds of Dean moving him before Cas gets the rhythm, rocking his hips against Dean’s lap. Dean, on the other hand, is losing all semblance of rational thought as Cas moves against him and the smell of his slick fills the air.

Carefully Dean slides a hand underneath him, circling his entrance for a second before slipping a finger into his wet hole. Cas groans and arches his back again, pressing his hips back against Dean’s finger. Dean moves his lips to Cas’ neck, mouthing at his collarbones and his throat and every other surface that he can reach. Cas’ fingers just clutch at him the whole time, nails digging into his skin in a delightful way.

When Cas stops panting so much Dean slides a second finger into him, and he moans even louder after that.

He seems to regain a little bit of self control then, his hands coming up on either side of Dean’s neck and his tongue easily parting Dean’s lips. Dean has to tilt his head back to satisfy how Cas is leaning into him, but he doesn’t care. Cas can claim and take all he wants, as far as Dean is concerned. The wolf agrees.

Cas is a writhing mess on his lap when Dean presses a third finger into him, and god it’s satisfying. The way he can just take his mate apart, piece by piece. Cas nips at his shoulders and collarbones with leopard teeth and groans his name and Dean takes the marks for what they are. He’ll have to be careful to keep his shirt on at the den for a few days, but he doesn’t care. Alpha or no, he fucking loves them.

“Oh god Dean,” Cas moans, his hips shifting faster. Dean knows he’s close, and it brings him a fiery satisfaction. Cas presses back against his fingers as Dean nibbles at the corner of his jaw, smiling against his skin.

“Come on, kitten. Come for me.”

Those few words, along with a barely there brush of his fingers sends Cas spiraling into an orgasm, crying out Dean’s name and panting as his come paints Dean’s stomach and chest. Dean kisses him through it, stroking his back with his free hand.

Dean can feel his own erection straining underneath Cas, but he’s not motivated to do anything about it. He’s too content right now, sitting with his sated mate on his lap, kissing and sucking on the skin of his neck. Cas, however, seems to disagree.

He slides slowly off of Dean’s lap and spreads his knees, draping his arms over Dean’s thighs and laying on his stomach between them.
“What are you up to?” Dean says, leaning back and propping himself up on his elbows.

Cas doesn’t answer, but Dean’s question is resolved a second later when Cas’ lips touch his skin. Together with his lips and tongue Cas cleans the slick off of Dean’s thighs, even licking it off of his balls. That sends a throb shooting through Dean’s groin, and he’s pretty sure he sees Cas grin at the reaction. And even though he knows it’s coming, Dean is caught wildly off guard by the feeling of Cas’ tongue on his cock.

“Fuck,” Dean groans as Cas fits his head over the tip, only barely taking the head into his mouth and sucking softly. He traces his tongue over the sensitive skin experimentally, tastes the slit that Dean knows is leaking. He slides his fingers into Cas’ thick, dark hair, somehow resisting the urge to pull down and thrust up into his mouth. God that sounds good, burying his knot in his mate’s mouth. Instead he tugs lightly, his wolf growling happily at the soft sigh that escapes his cat’s mouth.

Then Cas is licking him again, swallowing him down and carefully squeezing the base of his cock with his free hand. There’s something hesitant about Cas’ touches, laced with a kind of determination that Dean thinks might not be so uncommon in his mate.

When Dean’s skin is clean of slick—not clean of Cas’ come, however, which Dean notices belatedly with an amused smile—Castiel refocuses his efforts, bobbing his head and testing how much of Dean he can take at once. Dean’s knot doesn’t swell—a concerted effort on his part not to pop a fucking knot again—but Cas seems to know where to press anyway. One well placed squeeze and some suction in the back of his throat and Dean is a goner.

Dean flops down onto his back as he comes down Cas’ throat, arching his back and swearing happily. He sighs Cas’ name, too, loving the feel of it on his lips.

Cas swallows Dean’s release before popping off, kissing his way up Dean’s abdomen. He lays out on top of him as he does, nosing at the underside of his jaw and scenting his neck. The wolf growls low and possessive and pleased, and Dean let’s it escape his throat. Cas smiles against his neck.

“Little wolf, is that you?” Cas says, amusement in his voice.

Dean grunts and doesn’t answer, focusing instead on how his mate licks into his mouth and rolls their hips together, and maybe letting out another quiet growl.

Cas holds his jaw in his fingers and kisses him, and Dean just lets him take what he needs while stroking the soft skin of his back. They lay like that for a while, kissing and figuring out how the two of them fit, how their bodies slot together in this space. Little noises pass between them, sighs and quiet moans, purring from low in Cas’ chest or growls from the back of Dean’s throat. Cas smiles at each growl, and Dean’s pretty sure that his cat shouldn’t be encouraging him but he loves it anyway.

Dean’s body seems to decide that it’s done being awake, and Cas seems to be able to tell by the increasing sluggishness of his movements. He pulls back a little bit, staring down at Dean with those big, stupidly blue eyes. Dean raises a hand and pushes it through his dark hair, marveling at his mate.

“You’re staring awfully hard,” Cas whispers, his voice gravelly and quiet between them. Dean just hums and moves his hand to Cas’ cheek, stroking his stubble and running the pad of his thumb over his lips. Cas responds by nipping at his thumb, and touching their noses together. They lay there for a while, scenting and touching each other, and Dean pretends like his wolf isn’t reaching for that incomplete mating bond that stretches between them, just waiting for them to finish it.

“Don’t fall asleep,” Cas says, dragging himself into a standing position despite Dean’s protests. He’s
gone for a second, and maybe Dean dozes off a little bit. He wakes up again when he feels the touch of a wet cloth on his skin, and belatedly thinks that yeah, clean-up is a good idea.

“Thanks,” Dean mumbles with a dopey grin, grabbing Cas’ wrist and kissing the palm of his hand. Cas just hums and shakes his head. When he’s done he disappears again, presumably to dispose of the towel.

He returns again a few seconds later, tucking himself in against Dean’s side and pulling a warm blanket over top of them. Dean huffs and rolls onto his side, sort of half on top of a mildly annoyed Castiel. Dean tucks his nose underneath Cas’ jaw, nuzzling the side of his neck. Cas’ fingers automatically find their way into Dean’s hair, stroking the short strands.

Dean is fucking happy. Shit he’s happy. His wolf is laying in a satisfied heap, snuffling in his sleep, and the smell of happy omega is fucking intoxicating. His happy omega.

He wraps his arms tight around Cas, holding him tight.

“I’mma keep you,” Dean says sleepily, his words slurring together. It’s like being drunk, but so much better. “Fuckin’ perfect omega.”

“Oh?” Cas says, his voice amused. “That so?”

“Mmm. My mate.”

“Sleep, puppy,” Cas chuckles, pressing a kiss to his hair.

“G’night, kitten.”

Chapter End Notes

For those of you who are thinking WTF WHY AREN’T THEY HAVING SEX YET don’t worry, I wrote TWO chapters of smut. This is just the first. A little patience will pay off.
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

“Big, tough, alpha. With a damn ego.”

Chapter Notes

aww yee, porn all day. nice. This chapter is also SUPER LONG. so. you're welcome.

Also, it might be worth clarifying here that in this 'verse, the completion of a mating bond requires a bite. So good old fashion knotting won't do the trick.

Not for the first time, morning arrives far too soon. Cas is laying on top of him again, and Dean decides that this is probably going to be a regular thing. He kind of hopes it is.

“Good morning,” Cas says in a gravelly voice, lifting his head and nosing at Dean’s throat.

Dean grunts and rolls over, taking Cas with him and pinning him underneath his body. Cas smells sleepy and content, adding aroused to the mix when Dean licks and sucks each of his nipples.

“Mine,” Dean growls against his skin, scraping his teeth lightly across the tendons of his neck. He’s wary to do it, but the soft sigh that escapes Cas’ throat is definitely a good sign.

“Still feeling possessive this morning, hmm?” Cas hums, arching his back up. Dean smiles and looks down at his blue eyes, pushing dark hair off his forehead. He responds by kissing his mate senseless, licking into his mouth and swallowing every sound of pleasure he makes.

Every instinct is telling him to knot and mate and breed, to claim, but Dean knows he has to wait until his mate wants that too. Still, that doesn’t stop him from gently rocking his hips against the slick between Cas’ legs.

“You’re going back to your den today,” Cas says, not a question. Dean mouths at his throat and holds him tighter. He doesn’t want to go back to patrol. “When?”

“Afternoon,” Dean sighs, nipping at Cas’ lips and kissing his words away. His cat’s fingers tighten fractionally against his skin, a tiny whine in the back of his throat. “How should we spend the day?”

Cas kisses him a couple more times before responding. Those few make his heart race, make his blood rush south.

“I would like to spend the day knotted with my mate.”

All the air in Dean’s lungs leaves him in a rush. He searches Cas’ face for any kind of uncertainty, and finds none. Cas looks sure of himself, and there’s that determination again.
“Cas…”

“You said just last night,” he says, nosing at Dean’s jawline. “It’s not last night anymore.”

“Yeah, I got that,” Dean chuckles, pulling back to stare into his eyes. “But we don’t have to—”

“I know.”

“And you want to—”

“Yes.”

“Even though—”

Cas groans dramatically, rolling his eyes. “Dean. You may be the only alpha on the planet that I would have to work this hard to have sex with. You have a very aroused, very willing omega quite literally underneath you, who also happens to be your mate. Can we stop acting like this isn’t something we both want?”

Well. All of that is true. It isn’t like he’s pressuring Cas to move this along too fast. Right? This is all Cas’ idea. And. Why’s he still saying no?

“Tell me why you’re so hesitant.”

Dean blinks down at him, and does his best to put his worries into words.

“Just…want you to want me. Not alpha and omega, not mates driven by some, friggin’ biology thing, not our animal instincts. Just. You and me.” Dean swallows thickly, the words weighing heavy on his tongue. Cas furrows his eyebrows and stares up at him for a long few seconds before responding.

“I cannot promise you that this has nothing to do with instincts, or being mates. I’m not sure what it’s like to want you as something other than my mate, because that is what you are. My mate. But I can tell you that I do want you. Outside of instinctual needs, I want you, Dean.”

The wolf is fully on board, but the little shit was on board the first time he saw Cas on the rock. So. But Dean can’t deny that this has, like everything else, become less about instincts and more about just Dean and what Dean wants.

“You’re sure?”

“Yes. I’ve waited long enough, for you. Just for you.”

Jesus. Dean isn’t gonna make it.

He can’t help the pleased growl that escapes when he kisses Cas again, but his mate laughs and smiles against his lips and he’s pretty sure his wolf has gone catatonic at this point.

But this time, the first time—when there’s no heat or rut clogging their brains and sending their hormones into overdrive—Dean is determined to go slow. To learn his cat’s body. Every inch of it.

He carefully kisses his way down Cas’ neck, leaving little marks all over his skin. The ones he’d left before are already fading, thanks to their heightened shifter blood. He wants to leave something more permanent, wants to sink his teeth into the soft flesh, but he can’t. They can’t mate right now, as much as he wants to.
It takes some effort, but Dean manages to drag himself away long enough to shift his body until he’s laying on his front between Cas’ legs. Then he starts at Cas’ ankles and works his way up his mate’s body, kissing every inch that he can reach. He nibbles at the skin on the inside of his thighs, licks the soft spots behind his knees, breathes over the hardened cock resting against his stomach, tastes each fresh wave of slick as it pours out of him. Dean flicks his tongue over each of Cas’ nipples, kisses the pads of his fingers, tugs on his bottom lip with his teeth. The whole time Cas is panting, whining, and shivering by the time he’s finished.

“Dean,” he groans, a low rumble in his voice.

“What’s a’ matter, kitten?” Dean grins, kissing behind Cas’ ear and tensing when he whimpers and automatically tilts his head to the side. It’s just this side of too much to have Cas yielding to him like that, especially when he knows that his cat doesn’t do that for anyone else.

“Stop teasing. Need you.”

“Need me where?” Dean says, one of his hands skimming over Cas’ heated skin until it’s cupping his ass.

“You know where,” Cas growls, his bluster lasting a short few seconds when Dean’s hand drifts closer to his wet hole. He whines again, his fingers tugging on Dean’s hair and his hips lifting up.

“Like this?” Dean asks, kissing Cas’ lips as he presses a finger into him. Cas moans unashamedly into his mouth.

“More,” he manages, squirming and pushing against his finger.

Dean slides a second finger into him along with the first, so achingly hard that he’s only barely managing to keep up this game he has going. He’s scent drunk and completely lost in Cas, but he wants this to be perfect.

“Better?”

Cas’ back arches and he kisses Dean desperately, but he’s apparently not satisfied. “No…shit…no, more, want your knot.”

And fuck Dean almost loses it right then and there. His mate just asked so nicely for his knot, so he’s going to give it to him. But…

“No yet, baby.”

He shifts down and lays between Cas’ thighs, pulling his legs up over his shoulders and lifting his hips up and mouthing at the inside of his thighs. He can taste the slick on his skin, and god it’s fucking outrageous how much he likes it. Dean doesn’t waste any time, licking into his mate’s wet hole and grinning at the string of curses that leave his mouth. Dean doesn’t stop, not when Cas claws at his scalp, not when his legs tighten and squeeze the sides of his head uncomfortably hard, not when he whines Dean’s name. He just licks and nips and teases, plunging his tongue into him with his nose buried between his legs. And he tastes like heaven, so perfect and sweet, his scent curling all around Dean.

It’s only when Dean is sure that he’s going to explode that he finally pulls away. And he’s more than a little surprised when Cas immediately turns over and fucking presents.

“Cas…” he says, not really sure what he’s trying to say. Are you okay? Was that okay? Is this okay?
“Now, Dean. Please.”

Fuck.

Dean kneels behind him and wraps an arm around his waist, pulling him up so that Cas’ back is pressed against his chest. “I’m going to kiss you next time,” Dean says, kissing up the side of Cas’ neck.

Cas smiles. “That sounds like a promise.”

He twists his neck to plant a wet kiss on Dean’s lips before bending down again. Dean smiles. His wolf was right. Their mate is everything.

Dean shifts his weight, spreading his knees and sliding into him with as much control as he can manage. Cas’ back arches as Dean fills him, and Dean groans something about how good he feels but he really isn’t sure what because his brain is filled with matematematematemate and Cascascascas. It takes every scrap of bodily control he has to make himself move, and the whimpering moan that’s dragged out of Cas’ throat as he does is fully worth it. He’s wet and tight and slick and Dean already knows that this isn’t going to last long for him. He feels like a goddamn teenager, but whatever.

Cas whines and presses back, and it’s all Dean can do to just push deeper, to draw more of those sounds out of Cas, to claim every inch of him.

His thrusts go from long and smooth to short and stuttering, changing as Cas’ breaths change. Dean’s hands run over Cas’ hips as he rocks back into him, the heat of his skin too irresistible. His knot starts to swell soon, too soon, and he shortens his strokes even more when Cas hisses at the tug of it. A couple of grinding twists and Dean is coming, just after he reached around and stroked Cas to completion.

Cas cries out when his knot swells, tying them together. It’s loud, god its loud, and the wolf has never been so proud. Dean bites down on Cas’ shoulder blade as his orgasm rocks him ten times harder than usual, moaning and somehow managing not to break the skin. It’ll last though. His wolf likes that.

“Fucking shit,” Dean groans. It satisfies some deep ache in him, Cas’ whimper as he fills him, knowing that Dean’s knot is the only one he’s felt, that Dean is the only one to see his mate like this. “Mate. My mate.”

“Yes,” Cas whines, collapsing down onto his stomach as Dean lays out along his back. “Yes, mate. Mine.”

When Dean feels like he can move he shifts them both, laying on his side and tugging Cas back against his chest while their hips are tied. Cas hisses again when his knot tugs, and Dean gets thrown into another haze as another load of come is dragged out of him. When he can he buries his nose in the hair at the base of Cas’ neck, wrapping an arm tightly around his waist and hooking a leg over his hip to tug him even closer.

“You are not allowed to drag it out like that every time,” Cas sighs, sounding half-asleep already.

Dean grunts, trying to form words. “Just the first time. Next time’ll be quick ’n dirty.”

“Sounds like a dream,” Cas chuckles, shifting his hips and stroking Dean’s fingers as he moans into his skin. “I think I’ll sleep for twenty-four hours now.”
It’s Dean’s turn to laugh, because he’s not entirely sure that Cas is joking. Normally he’d be out running patrol, or training the soldiers, or getting shit from the Council. Instead, he’s nestled in this weird little tree-nest knotted in his mate and about to sleep for as long as he damn well pleases.

_Fuck. Yes._

They doze on and off for a while, kissing lazily until Cas’ neck gets sore from the angle. Dean continues to worship him then, covering every inch he can reach with his lips. Especially the bite mark on his shoulder. Every once in a while Cas rolls his hips and draws another orgasm out of Dean, and each one leaves them both panting. Dean a little bit more so than Cas. Some lazy stroking on Dean’s part gets Cas hard again, and he grinds his knot in lazy circles until Cas is coming in his hand, his moans loud and fucking incredible in Dean’s ears.

Cas doesn’t say anything about the hand that Dean settles low on his belly, if he notices it. Dean’s pretty sure he does.

It’s the longest Dean’s knot has stayed up probably ever, and they ride out every minute of it. Dean stays buried inside his mate even when he probably could’ve slipped free, holding him close with the leg over his hip. Cas never protests, not until Dean finally pulls out. Even then he just makes an unhappy noise and stays close, turning over in his arms and burying his nose in Dean’s throat. His stupid primal alpha brain is ecstatic that Cas doesn’t wash away the scent and come and slick that’s all over him.

“Wake me up later,” Cas sighs, a soft purr emanating from his chest, Dean smiles and strokes his spine.

“You got it, kitten.”

***

Dean only wakes up because he’s _sweating_, the midday sun streaming in through the windows and skylight making him feel like he’s being cooked alive. Cas, on the other hand, seems unconcerned. He’s sprawled out in the patch of sun, his tanned skin gloriously bare. Dean finds himself staring, but he doesn’t give a shit.

He is fucking hot, though. He grumbles and rolls away from Cas, out of the beam of sunlight and into the marginally cooler shade. At least now he doesn’t feel so much like he’s sitting inside of an oven. Cas, who appears to still be asleep, scrunches up his face and frowns, then starts purring quietly.

It isn’t the contented, sleepy kind of purring that Dean’s heard before. It’s slow and rhythmic, and it makes Dean want to wrap Cas up in his arms and never leave. His wolf urges him to get closer to their mate, to make that sad sound stop. Dean doesn’t even try to resist. He rolls back into the patch of sun, wrapping his arms around his cat and pushing a thigh between his legs. Cas may have chuckled quietly, but honestly Dean’s too distracted to notice. Dean nuzzles his nose against Cas’ throat, laying open mouthed kisses on the already marked skin. The smell of his mate fills him to the brim, like heaven, lightly sweet and absolutely mesmerizing. He’s laying in the fucking sun again, _roasting_, but whatever.

“You smell fucking amazing,” Dean mumbles, his voice raspy and quiet.

“As do you,” Cas responds, his own voice cracking as Dean puts his teeth on his throat. Cas shifts to slot their lips together, humming against Dean’s mouth. “I’m starving.”
“You got food here?” Dean chuckles. “Cause I’m not crazy about seeing your crazy pack healer again yet.”

Cas rolls his eyes and extricates himself from their little pile, running a hand through his hopeless hair and shuffling down the stairs. Dean stares after him, and he’s pretty sure the look on his face could be called dreamy but nobody else can fuckin’ see him so whatever. He hears the sounds of Cas moving around beneath him, and it takes a few minutes for him to reappear with an armful of different snacks.

He’s got a bottle of water, one of those refillable ones, two granola bars that smell like peanut butter, a packet of jerky, and an open can of some kind of fruit.

“What a feast,” Dean says with a smile, snagging the bag of jerky.

“I spoil you, I know.” Cas drops the rest of the food on the ground and sits down, sticking his fingers into the can of fruit and putting what looks like a pear into his mouth before licking the juice off his fingers.

Dean rolls onto his side, chews on his jerky, and tries not to get distracted.

“I apologize for Anna’s behavior, by the way.”

“She get your wrath too?” Dean grins, nudging Cas with his elbow. He gets a look in response, but it just makes him smile wider.

“Yes, in fact. She did. She antagonized you intentionally, which I didn’t appreciate.”

“Why’s she hate me so much?” Dean grumbles, setting the jerky aside and drinking some water before tearing open a granola bar.

“I think it has very little to do with you, and quite a lot to do with your biology.”

Dean snorts, and he sees a tiny smile at the corner of Cas’ mouth.

“Jesus, Cas. Go right ahead and make it sound like we’re not even the same species. Thought you didn’t care what animal I shift into?”

Cas frowns and glares at him. “Yes, Dean. Thank you for the reminder.”

Dean grins and rolls onto his back, scooting over to pillow his head on Cas’ crossed legs. They’re quiet for a few moments, while Dean finishes his granola bar and drinks some water.

“Those pears?” he asks, staring up at Cas.

“Want one?” Cas replies, sticking his fingers into the can and pulling out a slice, holding it out over Dean’s face. Dean’s not usually a big fan, but. He hums and opens his mouth, letting Cas drop the piece of fruit into his mouth. He chews and smiles up at his mate.

“Thanks, kitten.”

Cas rolls his eyes.

“That’s not going away anytime soon, is it?”

“Hey, you started it.”
“I suppose that’s true,” Cas laughs quietly. “But you are such a cute little puppy.”

Dean growls and does some glaring of his own. Cas is just amused. He sticks one more pear in his mouth and then drains the juice from the can, setting it off to the side.

“Apologies, puppy. Did I say cute? I meant scary. Definitely very tough and very scary.” He says it with so much fuckin’ sarcasm, there’s no way Dean’s gonna let it fly.

“Uh huh. Wanna say that again?” he says, his voice layered with a soft growl that puts a spark in Cas’ eyes. He sits up and turns, leaning in close and inhaling the irresistible scent of his cat.

“There he is,” Cas licks his lips slowly, tilting his head to the side. “My big bad alpha.”

Dean growls and kisses him, pinning him to the floor on his back. The fucker is smiling too, and he smells so fucking good and god Dean needs him now.

He nuzzles at his neck and runs a hand down Cas’ side, sliding a hand behind his knee and hooking his leg up over his hip. Cas groans and arches his back, his hands tugging lightly on Dean’s hair and his hips canting up.

Dean slides into him without resistance, his mate wet and open and wanting just as much as he is. Dean isn’t as soft this time, his hips moving faster and just a little bit harder. He pulls back to look at Cas’ face, grinning at the hungry look in his eyes.

“One more time, kitten,” he grunts, his breaths short and ragged.

“Big, tough, alpha,” Cas says with a smile, moaning and dragging Dean down to kiss him, to lick into his mouth, and nip at his bottom lip. “With a damn ego.”

Dean laughs and growls, kissing him thoroughly.

He only slows when his knot starts to tug, and he reaches between them to finish Cas off before his knot swells and he’s thrown into an orgasm. Cas kisses him through it, rolling his hips and pushing his fingers through Dean’s hair.

They lay panting against each other’s mouths, their foreheads resting together and their bodies tied.

“Shit,” Dean laughs. He inhales deeply, picking apart the scent of mate and happy omega and happy Cas and thinking just how much he loves all of it.

Cas hums and nudges his chin, sticking his nose against Dean’s throat. Dean lets his mate scent him, and is caught totally off guard when Cas tightens his leg and shifts his hips. Dean groans something completely unintelligible, dropping his head down to the crook of Cas’ neck and curling his arms under his shoulders.

“Good to know you keep your promises,” Cas says, and though Dean can’t see the smile on his face he can definitely hear it.

Dean mumbles something to the affirmative, blearily and completely nonsensically. Great job, kid.

It takes every ounce of Dean’s willpower—plus Cas basically pushing him out the trap door along
with his bag of stuff—to get Dean to leave that afternoon. Once out of the tree Dean flops down on the ground at the base of the trunk, staring up at his mate. Cas is hanging half out of the trap door, looking mussed and well-fucked, an amused smile on his face.

“Go home, puppy.”

“It’s not nightfall yet,” he reasons with a grin, determined to win Cas over. Cas just raises an eyebrow.

“You’re reaching.”

“I’m—"

Dean stops short. He frowns and inhales deeply, trying to figure out where that smell is coming from. Cas reacts a second later, his eyebrows furrowing.

“Who is that?” Dean growls, his wolf pacing and getting ready to take this stranger out.

“Another Seraph,” Cas says distractedly, dropping down out of the tree and brushing a hand across Dean’s chest. “Gadreel.”

“Why’s he here?”

Cas gives him a look, and Dean tempers his growl a little bit. Just a little bit.

“If I knew, I wouldn’t be standing here as surprised as you are. Now would I?”

Dean huffs and crosses his arms. It takes another minute or so for this Gadreel guy to walk into view, and Castiel pushes past him when Dean tries to station himself between his mate and the offending alpha.

“Castiel,” he says in a low, rumbling voice. “I have urgent business.”

Dean rolls his eyes. Guy’s got a flair for drama, that’s for sure. What he doesn’t expect is for Cas to turn to him and tell him that he should go.

“Wait. What?” Dean says, completely thrown. The wolf scoffs. Why should they leave their mate with this alpha? Their cat smells like them, yeah, but the wolf doesn’t like the look of this alpha.

“Don’t look at me like that. You were on your way out anyway,” Cas says distractedly, already walking towards the other alpha. “You need to get home.”

Dean tries not to growl at him. He doesn’t succeed.

“You can’t come to our territory. Patrols are up, sensors are live, somebody’ll catch you. They won’t all be as understanding as Jo.”

“Of course,” Cas says, but Dean gets the impression that he didn’t hear any of what Dean just said. Gadreel is speaking to him in a low voice, something he obviously doesn’t want Dean to hear.

And then he’s gone, and Dean is left wondering how in the hell their quiet day up in the tree just blew up into this clusterfuck in the span of a few minutes.

***

The trek home feels hours long, and Dean is practically dragging himself across the ground at the
end of it. Luckily the den is quiet though, and he thinks he can sneak in and get away with not checking in with the Council until the morning. He’s already dreaming of a hot shower when he gets to his room, which he needs to get rid of Cas’ smell anyway, and finds Jo sitting on the floor with her back pressed up against the outside of his door.

“Nice of you to show,” she snaps, crossing her arms and glaring at him.

“Jo—”

She stands up and storms into his room before he can say any more, sitting in the middle of his bed with an angry pout on her face.

“So you’re letting cats into our territory now?”

Dean laughs at that, shutting his door and sitting on his bed with her. “Jo. Come on.”

“Well, I don’t know, Dean,” she sighs, tossing her hair over her shoulder. “Apparently you keep secrets now. And the stench is terrible.”

“I can’t smell that bad.”

“Uh, dude. You stink like sex. It’s that bad.”

Dean sighs and gives her a look.

“It’s gross,” she grumbles. “And just fucking weird. You never carry anybody’s scent for long. And that guy, he’s like, melded into you.”

“Like we’re mates or somethin’?” Dean says, trying not to smile.

“Yeah,” Jo snaps her fingers. “Like you’re—”

She freezes, her mouth gaping.

“No.”

“Yeah. I mean, not officially yet. But. Sometime.”

The surprise on her face morphs into a grin, and she punches him in the shoulder before wrapping her arms around his neck.

“What the fuck, man. I’m so fucking mad at you! Why didn’t you tell me?”

There’s a sliver of hurt under her excitement and surprise and anger, and Dean feels the most guilty about that.

“Didn’t tell anybody. Except Sam. Then Jess. But I wasn’t exactly advertising.”

“Why not? Dean this is exciting.”

Dean laughs derisively. Like it’s that easy.

“You think John is gonna feel that way when he finds out that he’s a leopard?”

Jo’s face falls. “Oh.”

Yeah. Oh is right. Jo knows his dad better than anybody else outside of his family and the Council. If
anybody knows how much his dad would not handle that news well, it’s Jo.

“We gotta tell your dad.” Jo steps toward the door, and Dean goes full panic. He scrambles to get between her and the doorway, plastering his body against the exit so that she can’t get out. “What the hell, Dean?”

“You can’t tell anybody,” Dean says, his words feeling heavy and sour in his mouth. He already hates this. “Not yet. Not until I can figure out a way to break it to him.”

“Dean, come on,” she says, rolling her eyes. “What is your dad going to do?”

“Anything, Jo. He could do anything. Take a guess, huh? How many times he’s been in our territory?”

“I don’t know, Dean,” she crosses her arms. “Once? Twice?”

“Five times. You know that truce well as I do. So remind me, what’s the punishment for one of them entering our territory one time? One goddamn time?” His wolf is pacing and whining, getting all jacked up again rapidly. God he’s worried. He’s more than worried. He’s freaking the fuck out.

“Come on, Dean. You can’t think that the Council would hurt your fucking mate over some stupid truce,” she rolls her eyes. He wants her to be right. He wants to think that his dad would never do that. He also wants to think that his dad wouldn’t kill him if he got in trouble with his wolf. He knows the latter isn’t true. Ultimately he just doesn't know what John might do. And the uncertainty is driving him nuts.

“It’s Pack law. What’s the cardinal rule of Pack law?”

Jo grinds her teeth. He can tell she doesn’t want to answer him.

“Pack first. Always.”

Dean nods and doesn’t speak. He doesn’t have to. Jo heaves a heavy sigh and flicks her blonde ponytail over her shoulder.

“So every time he comes here it just gets worse. The longer you wait—”

“Don’t you think I know that?” Dean growls, and he doesn’t mean to raise his voice at her but here he fucking is. “Don’t you think I told him to stay the hell away from here?”

Jo ducks her head and holds up her hands, a submissive gesture in the face of Dean’s rampaging wolf.

“Okay, but eventually—”

Dean snorts, sliding down the door until he’s sitting on the ground with his head in his hands. He needs to calm the fuck down. He breathes slowly, focusing on the tendrils of Cas’ scent that are still clinging to his skin. Thank god for small miracles.

“Yeah. Eventually. When I’m sure that Dad isn’t gonna hurt him, I’ll tell him about Cas.” Only then. Not before.

“Of course,” Jo says. the sympathy clear in her voice. She sits on the ground next to him, wrapping an arm around his shoulders and ruffling his hair. “So, his name is Cas?”

Dean sighs, breathing long and deep.
“Yeah. His name’s Cas.”

***

“Another?” Castiel says, matching Gadreel’s stride as they head towards the Arch. “Who?”

“This is not my discussion to have,” Gadreel says in a clipped tone, serious as ever. “You will hear everything from the Arch.”

Castiel sighs and is quiet for a minute, already mourning the loss of his peace. He wants to ask who, or how, or where, but Gadreel is less than likely to humor him. So he keeps quiet. They aren’t far from the Arch anyway.

Their chambers are located inside a relatively deep cave, one that might’ve hosted bears during hibernation if there were any bears nearby. Castiel holds his head high and strolls in in front of Gadreel, all too aware of how several other Seraphs scrunch up their noses when he enters. He knows he smells like Dean, and he doesn’t care one bit.

“Hey, Bucko,” Gabriel says with a delighted grin, inhaling deeply and strolling towards Castiel to survey him more closely. “What is that delicious man musk you’re wearing? Is it…wolf?” he winks, getting an eye roll from Castiel.

“Enough, Gabriel,” Michael says in a low, calm voice. “This is not the time for your antics.”

“Ah, yes,” he says, clearing his throat and strolling back towards where Michael and Lucifer are standing. “Hear ye, hear ye. Gather around, kids.”

The other Seraphs step into a straight line, their shoulders held high and straight. Lucifer nods his approval, taking over where Gabriel left off.

“You all know that Inias has not been seen for some time. This is, on it’s own, suspicious, though not unheard of.” Lucifer looks to Michael, who nods his head in acknowledgement.

“This is no longer the case.” Michael pauses, and Castiel resists the urge to enquire further. Michael will get to his point. Eventually. His eyes travel down the line of Seraphs, surveying the leopards standing before him. His eyes look worried, and the set of his mouth is hard and tight. Castiel wonders if he’s the only one that can smell the stress melting off of Michael’s skin. Certainly no one else is reacting to it. Michael sights heavily before speaking.

“Samandriel has gone missing.”

Castiel’s stomach drops. Samandriel is hardly even grown up, no more than a juvenile by their standards. He’s young, and innocent, and Castiel feels a wave of irrational protectiveness over the boy.

“What does that mean, missing?” Hannah asks, tilting her head.

“Missing may be an overstatement. It means that Samandriel left his house to roam for the night,” Lucifer says, as he steeples his hands under his chin, “and hasn’t been seen since. His parents haven’t seen him. But there is no scent trail, no signs of struggle, no evidence to suggest foul play.”

A wave of murmuring bleeds through the five Seraphs, all of them growing increasingly uneasy. After all, if Samandriel truly is missing, then they have a serious problem. On the other hand, Samandriel has been talking about getting away for a while, and he’s known to spend quite a bit of time away from his parents. Castiel knows what he believes, though. Samandriel wouldn’t just run
away, not without telling him, telling someone. And that means someone took him. Guilt racks Castiel’s bones, and he has to grit his teeth so as to not physically react. He can’t show emotion here.

“He’s a child, Luci,” Gabriel says with a fiercely dramatic eye roll. “He hasn’t run off without telling anyone. And what it means, ladies and gents, is that we might just have a kidnapper.”

Chapter End Notes

So fun fact, house cats purr primarily for two reasons. The first, when they are happy (obviously). The second, when they miss you and they don't want you to leave. I imagine Cas here employing the second type and turning Dean into a puddle.

Also, this hopefully begins to explain the main reason why Dean’s so hesitant to friggin' mate already. I promise they will get there, it just won’t be easy. And if you feel like you are missing pieces from Cas' side, or that his perspective seems disjointed, that's sort of the point.
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

“Don’t touch me.”

Chapter Notes

I know I said that this would be late, but I got my grubby little hands on some WiFi and decided to take advantage. I am posting this from my phone though, so....sketchy.

Dean can’t avoid the Council for forever, but he manages it for a little bit longer. He’s on patrol in the morning, with Krissy, and ends up spending a little bit longer in the forest than he needs to. He lets his wolf lead the way, wandering along the border of the territory and scenting all the minor changes. Patrols are running so often now that there are layers of scents coating the forest, and it takes Dean’s nose a minute to readjust.

Eventually he has to get back inside though, and after a quick shower he pads down to the Council room to get updated on everything. Kevin is in there when he walks in, but John gestures for him to join them.

“You’re lookin’ good, kid,” Ellen comments, surveying him from top to bottom. Mary is watching him too, carefully, a knowing look in her eye.

“Feelin’ good,” Dean grins, straightening his shoulders. “What’s up, Kev?”

Kevin sighs and rubs his eyes. “We got in contact with the human embassy. Turns out they were in the middle of a...regime change.”

Dean raises his eyebrows. “Good for us or bad for us?”

“Unclear,” John rumbles, rubbing at the scruff on his face. Kevin nods in agreement, dropping his gaze to the table.

“Their new president is a man named Crowley. He’s apparently been with the embassy for a while, but the jump to president was a pretty hefty promotion. He’s a rule follower, which is good. Believes in integrity, and all that.”

Kevin doesn’t even need to say but, Dean can hear it loud and clear in his voice.

“But,” he continues, “he’s full of himself. Overconfident. You know, smirking.”

Dean wants to laugh, but he knows what Kevin means. A character like that at the head of their opposing side could end well for them, or end very very bad. Hard to tell which.

“He cooperative?” Dean asks, interested to see if this Crowley-guy knows anything about the hunters that stumbled into their territory.
“Very,” Kevin says. “He says that the humans we encountered have been ‘dutifully punished to the maximum extent of the law.’”

Huh. On the one hand, that’s good. On the other hand, it puts a queasy feeling in Dean’s stomach.

“So, what? They were just hunters?”

“Or hikers,” Bobby sighs, adjusting his hat and crossing his arms. “Everythin’s been real quiet.”

Dean nods. Part of him is glad to hear it, a bigger part of him is wary. Good things don’t just happen, and that’s what this feels like.

“Now what?” he asks.

“Now nothin’,” Rufus grunts. “Life goes on.”

“Speaking of,” John adds, “we got a girl arriving in three days. You seem good, so I’m thinkin’ it’ll go well.”

Mary opens her mouth like she’s going to say something, then closes it again. She gives Dean a look, but he very studiously doesn’t look back at her. She knows something, obviously, but he doesn’t think she knows enough to bring it up.

“Uh, yeah. Here’s hoping.”

He takes his leave after that, leaving Kevin to discuss the finer details of his meeting with Crowley with the Council. He doesn’t really care about any of it, anyway. He heads towards the dining quarters instead, hoping to grab some grub and catch up with the other Hunters. He feels good right now, no surprise why, even if he did have to spend last night alone. He actually slept, which was mildly surprising, but a welcome surprise at that. His wolf knows they’ll see their mate again soon, which is probably why it’s so calm. Dean has already decided to head back out there tonight, since he doesn’t have morning patrol the next day.

He barely makes it through the doors of the dining hall before he catches a whiff of Sam, his brother grabbing him by the collar of his shirt and hauling him backwards. He yelps a little too loud, shoving his brother off when he regains his balance.

“What the fuck, Sam!” he snaps, growling. “What do you want?”

“I don’t want anything,” Sam growls right back. He looks a little manic, too, which isn’t a good sign.

“We have a problem, Dean.”

“Cool, bro, I don’t care. Can I go eat now?”

“A feline, problem.”

Dean freezes, resisting the urge to swear. If it’s Cas…god damn it he told that stupid cat not to come here. And he knew that Cas hadn’t been listening.

“Is it…?”

“Yeah. I smelled him at the border. Didn’t see him, but he’s there. And you need to deal with it. Before somebody else notices something that shouldn't be there.”

Dean swears and growls, jogging down the corridor towards the main exit. Fucking great. All he can think is that this is now the second time that they’ve gotten lucky, and that luck is bound to run out
real soon.

Cas is exactly where he expects to find him. Well, almost. The bonus is that he hasn’t crossed the sensors, at least not yet. Instead he’s out of sight up in the trees on the other side, waiting. He drops down as soon as Dean gets close, stomping right up to the sensor line and stopping there.

“What the hell are you doing?” Dean growls, doing the same. There’s only about two feet of space between them, and fuck the sensors he wants to close the distance. “I told you not to come here. The fuck were you thinking?”

“Don’t you dare,” Cas snaps. “What are you doing? You said you’d come back.”

Dean softens a little bit when he realizes what Cas is so mad about. And now that he’s paying more attention, he can smell the distress wafting off of his mate. So maybe it isn’t the exclusive cause of his mood, but still.

“Baby, it’s been less than 18 hours. I had things to do here. I can’t just stay in your treehouse all day.”

Cas crosses his arms and glares. “Don’t call me that. And don’t coddle me.”

Dean automatically holds up his hands in a gesture of surrender. Cas plows on angrily.

“I needed you, and where were you?”

Guilt smacks Dean right in the face. Want is one thing, need is another. And Cas is right. There’s no excuse for not being there when his mate needs him. All he’s got is the stupid logic that his pack doesn’t know about Cas. If they did, Cas could’ve come to him.

Fuck.

“I’m sorry,” Dean says sincerely, stepping a tiny bit closer. He’s dangerously close to setting off the sensors, but it’s physically painful maintaining this distance right now. “What happened?”

“Nothing,” Cas snaps.

Uh huh. Sure.

Dean wants to press, but he doesn’t. Even if he doesn’t like it, here isn’t the place.

“Okay. Give me an hour to get a radio and to let somebody know I’m leaving. I’ll meet you.”

“Fine,” Cas spits, turning on his heel and strolling away. Dean sighs and rubs the back of his neck, staring up at the sky as the scent of Cas fades away.

He needs to deal with this.

When Cas is out of sight Dean heads back into the den. Sam is waiting for him, his long arms crossed.

“So?” he says, giving Dean a bitchface of epic proportions. Dean rolls his eyes.

“So, nothin’.” Dean tries to walk past him, but Sam isn’t having that. His brother follows right on his heel, looming over him like the Sasquatch that he is.

“Don’t bullshit me, Dean.”
Dean huffs and ignores him, walking around his room and gathering up a handful of things. Including his radio.

“I’m serious!” Sam says, grabbing Dean’s shoulder and forcing him to look at his brother. “Your mate is pissed off, you’re pissed off, you’re not mated, and all of this is getting out of hand.”

“What the fuck does my mood have to do with anything,” Dean growls resisting the urge to bare his teeth.

“The Pack is struggling enough without you making it worse!”

Dean freezes. “What the hell does that mean?”

Sam sighs and drops his head into his hands, sitting down at the edge of Dean’s bed. Dean stands and stares at him, waiting for his brother to start making some goddamn sense.

“I didn’t want to tell you. I thought if I gave you some time, you’d handle it.”

The wolf snarls. What don’t they know?

“And?”

Sam drags his fingers through his hair before finally making eye contact again.

“And you know how many of our soldiers shed blood this morning in training? During a tracking lesson? Twelve. You know how many soldiers were at training? Fifteen.”

Dean curses. The first sign of pack-rot is almost always violence. On a larger scale, of course, but this is the first sign. Dominants fighting with each other, fighting with submissives.

He’d thought things were getting better. He’s been under control, mostly, and he’d thought that it would transfer. That it would be enough. He was wrong.

And the shit just keeps rolling in.

“I need more time,” he says, sighing heavily. “I take this to Dad and he reacts badly, if any of the Council reacts badly, we’re even more f*cked than we are right now.”

“I know,” Sam grunts. “You have some time. We aren’t falling apart just yet. But you have to figure out a way to bring Dad around. He’ll only react worse if he finds out before you tell him.”

Of fucking course Sam is right. Kid’s always right. Dean turns to leave with his stuff, but Sam stops him one more time.

“Dean, you guys gotta accept the bond. You need it, but our pack needs it, too.”

Dean grits his teeth. He’s really fucking tired of hearing that, of people telling him what to do for the sake of the damn Pack. None of them even consider what he wants. None of them even think about the fact that this is his life. None of them.

Except Cas.

A wave of need washes through him. The need to bury himself in his cat’s scent, the need to wrap his arms around his mate, the need to stay with Cas forever. He feels itchy with it, and it’s a good fucking thing he’s already heading out or else he’d need to handle this asap.
“Got it, Sammy,” he says with a plastered on smile, trying not to run as he heads out the door.

***

Cas is on him before he’s even completely through the trap door. Not that he minds, necessarily, but the scent of pissed off Cas is grating and makes his wolf all snarly and mad.

“That took longer than an hour,” he growls, tugging sharply on Dean’s shirt and sending him sprawling to the floor. Before Dean can even process that much Cas is quite literally ripping his shirt in an attempt to get it off and smashing their lips together.

“Sorry,” Dean manages between bruising kisses. God this all feels wrong. Cas isn’t even turned on right now, Dean can smell it, he’s just angry and…upset. Fuck. “Cas,” he tries, but his mate ignores him. “Cas, what the fuck?”

“Stop talking,” he snaps, closing their lips together again. Dean kisses back two or three more times before pulling away, or as far away as he can with Cas literally on top of him.

“Cas, stop,” Dean says gently, threading his fingers into Cas’ hair and tugging just a little bit. He doesn’t expect it to work, not really, but Cas pauses. His eyes are hard and far, far away.

“Why?”

“Tell me what’s going on with you. What happened? With that Seraph, what’s his name?”

Cas eyes him for a second then sighs, carefully rolling his hips and nosing at the underside of Dean’s jaw. Dean inhales sharply. If there were even a trace of omega arousal in the air he might have fallen for it, or pretended to, but there isn’t. So he holds his ground.

“I don’t want to talk,” Cas purrs, his voice low. God damn him.

“Uh huh. Well you don’t get a choice. Try again.”

Cas pulls back sharply, his eyebrows furrowed. “Excuse me? I don’t get a choice?”

Shit.

“Cas—”

Cas stands up and backs away, putting distance between them. His chest is rising and falling too fast, and his blue eyes just look hurt.

“Fuck you, Dean.”

“C’mon, man, I—”

“No. You came here and I didn’t ask questions until you were ready. Do I look ready to you?”

His chest is heaving and his cheeks are flushed, and Dean feels his own guilty blush crawl up his neck. He’s entirely unprepared to see Cas this angry, and all of his instincts are telling him to just fucking give his mate what he wants. Whatever it is, the wolf doesn’t care. Their cat needs them. And it’s fucking hard to think straight when all this shit is whipping around his brain like a goddamn tornado. He didn’t mean to say it like that, but he fucking did and he can’t take it back now.

“I’m not your little omega bitch,” he snarls, and the wolf growls in agreement. Their cat is so much more than that, so much stronger than that. Their cat doesn’t need protecting, doesn’t need an alpha,
but he lets them play that role and it means so much more. “I will *never* be that. And the first time you go all alpha on me and try to order me around is the *last time* you will see me.”

There isn’t even a *hint* of exaggeration in his tone. The scent of his anger is seeping into the air *rapidly*, and its practically *ripping* at Dean’s self control.

The wolf howls miserably.

“I would never treat you like that,” Dean says carefully, standing up slowly and tightening the reigns on his wolf. Cas glares at him. “Ever. I fucking swear to god I won’t. I’m *sorry*. I didn’t mean…you don’t have to tell me anything.”

*Of course* I don’t,” Cas snaps, taking another step back when Dean reaches out a hand. “Don’t touch me.”

“We’re sorry,” he says, cognizant of the fact that his wolf is speaking. Maybe if Cas can hear the wolf, he’ll believe it. The wolf has no time for anything but pure honesty. And anyway, it’s getting harder by the second to keep it under control. If Cas is surprised to hear the wolf, he doesn’t show it.

Dean waits a moment, then takes another experimental step forward. Cas doesn’t step away, and Dean takes that as permission. He takes two more fluid steps forward and wraps his mate up in his arms. Cas turns his back to him, but he lets Dean wrap his arms around his middle and curves his spine into Dean’s chest. The wolf flops down and rolls onto its back. Submitting to their mate. They will do anything for their cat. Anything he wants. They just need him to stop smelling so *angry* and *upset*.

“I’m sorry,” Dean says into his ear, feeling a shiver run through Cas’ body. He’s not sure if he’s still apologizing for himself or for whatever happened, whatever is upsetting him so much, but he thinks Cas hears it. It takes him a long time to respond.

“He needed me, and where was I?” Cas says quietly, his voice far away and lost-sounding. Dean’s got no clue what the hell he’s talking about, but it’s an echo of what Cas said to him earlier. There is, apparently, more going on than Dean had originally thought.

“Who needed you?”

Cas doesn’t respond.

When it becomes clear that Cas is never going to respond, Dean goes with a different tactic. He takes a step back and lets go of Cas, feeling a surge of guilt when Cas stumbles a little bit. He steels himself though, pulling off the remains of his tattered shirt.

“C’mon,” he says, turning and taking the couple of steps towards the trap door. Cas eyes him, and Dean ignores the wetness of his gaze. “Let’s go for a run.”

“Leopards don’t go on runs,” Cas snaps, glaring again.

“A walk then,” Dean says with a grin, trying desperately to lighten the mood. It feels like his skin is on fire, like it’s about to bubble right off his bones. “C’mon, kitty.”

He doesn’t wait for Cas to follow him that time, climbing down out of the tree and waiting down there. The sun is going down, bathing the forest in a warm glow, and Dean feels kind of excited that they’ll get to run around in the dark. Or, walk. Whatever.

Cas is already shifted when he climbs down more than a few minutes later, and Dean makes a mental
note to watch Cas climb trees more often because damn, he's good at it. He then strips off his own clothes and shifts, pushing it a little too fast but not letting the whine out of his throat. The wolf puffs up their chest and stands tall, proud to be showing off their fur for their mate. Cas just yawns and grunts.

Asshole.

Overall, it’s better. He can release his grip a little bit, let the wolf have a little more control. They want the same thing here, him and his beast. To make their cat feel better. He can let the wolf help out. Dean’s first instinct is to take off running, but that’s what he would do with another wolf. He isn’t really sure how to go about playing with a leopard. He cocks his head and whines quietly, and he swears his cat rolls his eyes.

Cas pads lazily around him in a circle, his mouth hanging open and his lips pulled back over his teeth. Dean turns in a circle on the spot to keep Cas in his line of sight. With the sun rapidly setting it’s getting harder and harder to see him, and Dean has the distinct feeling that he’s being hunted. This should be fun.

His eyes stay on his cat as he jumps up into the trees and disappears among the leaves. Dean’s vision is adjusting, but not fast enough. He gives Cas, wherever he is, a wolfish grin and takes off through the forest. It’s not a full sprint, but it’s not a jog either. Every once in a while he thinks he hears a branch snap or the crackle of leaves, but there’s no sign of his mate. He’s starting to wonder if Cas is even following.

Dean cuts around a tree and slows down, sniffing the air around him. It’s all unfamiliar, everything around him. He sticks his nose to the ground, only to whip it back up when a branch cracks in the trees. He turns his gaze to the source of the noise, but sees nothing.

Then another crack, right behind him. He turns again, growling. Nothing’s there.

A third crack, to his left. He snarls this time, because the wolf doesn’t like being hunted. He thinks they are acting nice and tough, and just as the thought crosses his mind he is flattened by the weight of a huge panther on his back.

He yelps and rolls, tossing the sneaky-ass cat off of his back. Dean leaps up and gets his feet under him just in time to see Cas stalking around him again, tail flicking around. Dean bends his knees and growls, forcing his head still and just using his eyes to track the cat’s movements. He puts on the air of “I don’t care if you’re behind me” pretty well, or at least his wolf thinks so.

And his cat seems to agree. Cas comes full circle until they are standing face to face, baring his long sharp teeth again. They’re bigger than Dean’s, shaped differently, made for a different type of hunter. And it’s more of a turn on than it should be to see his mate being openly aggressive like that. But god dammit Dean loves it.

Dean lowers his chest and hangs his jaw open, a clear invitation to play. He even wags his tail a little bit. Cas just waits. The wolf snarls happily.

*Good kitty.*

He waits another second before lunging forward, only partially succeeding in catching his cat off guard. Cas is fast, though, and it takes him one powerful leap to get back up into the trees. Dean growls. If only he could fucking climb.

The wolf isn’t worried, though. They can be the hunter now. And they aren’t afraid to wait. Dean
swivels his ears and listens, tuning out the wind and the shuffling of leaves. He’s listening for claws on bark, soft padding of feet. It’s almost completely dark, but Dean barely notices. He just trails behind, gives his cat enough space to think that he’s gotten away.

He hears a soft thud to his left, and freezes, one paw in the air. Their prey is out of the trees. He treads carefully now, following the scent trail on the ground. It weaves back and forth, heads halfway up trees before coming back down. It goes in circles and doubles back on itself. The wolf is fucking ecstatic. Cas is doing this on purpose, leaving this trail for him. It’s a goddamn challenge, and Dean plans on succeeding.

Things get mucky when he hits the small stream. The trail ends there. He can’t decide if Cas would’ve crossed over, but there’s definitely some kind of trick here. He wanders up and down the bank, catching no other traces of scent on the ground. He’s about to cross the water, has his two front paws in it, when he pauses. Crossing the stream would be too easy, too obvious. Cas wouldn’t do that. Instead Dean turns around and surveys his surroundings. There’s the trail he followed in, the river, and a couple of trees around. Not much to go by. But—

Fuck. The trees. He’s a goddamn idiot.

There’s an old, scraggly looking tree with a heavy-looking branch that must’ve broken years ago further down the stream. Said branch has long since died, burying itself at one end in the muddy bank of the stream. The other end seems to still be hanging on to its source. Dean grins.

He trots down the riverbank until he gets to the tree, sticking his nose against the bark. And there’s the scent of his cat. He turns his gaze up into the branches and barks, only to be greeted by a pair of reflective eyes.

**Gotcha.**

The wolf howls triumphantly, and Dean lets it out of his throat. He’s proud.

Cas lets out a sort of huff in return, padding down the long branch and leaping down into the water. He makes a relatively big splash, too, and Dean ends up wetter than he wants to be. But he can’t find it in himself to care.

They end up chasing each other up and down the stream, splashing and slipping in the muddy bank anytime either of them tries to get out. It feels good to run some of the animal energy out, and surprisingly enough Dean’s starting to catch faint traces of his mate’s arousal in the air. His wolf puffs up and grins.

They’re both exhausted when they finally drag themselves out of the water. Dean forces himself to stand while his body shifts back at its own pace. *Then* he collapses into the mud. He’s filthy anyway. Cas does the same, flopping down against Dean’s side and tucking his nose in against Dean’s neck.

Dean rumbles happily when he feels Cas’ lips against his skin, even goes so far as to tilt his head to bare the skin. It’s so fucking submissive, but Cas purrs happily. Just for his cat. And Cas mouthing at his neck, his tongue sweeping across the delicate flesh, the scrape of his teeth, god it feels fucking good. Dean groans and pulls Cas closer.

“Thank you,” Cas says softly, biting the corner of his jaw and tilting Dean’s face until they are looking at each other. Dean pulls him down and kisses him. Nothing else needs to be said.

They end up back in the water to clean off, then they stumble back to the treehouse. They’re exhausted, and as much as he wants to Dean doesn’t have the energy to do anything but sleep right
now. He barely even makes it up the tree. So they curl up together, their limbs tangled and their foreheads touching, pressing sleepy kisses to each other’s lips until they both drift off to sleep.
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

“Y’all can fuck off.”

Chapter Notes

This is a bit of a filler, but I promise we will have some plot movement soon!

It’s the first morning in this tree house that Dean has woken up alone. Not really alone, he can smell his mate in the air, but there’s no purring cat in his arms or on his chest. He cracks open an eye and looks around, noticing by the brightness of the sun streaming in through the skylight that it must be pretty late in the morning.

He pads downstairs to where his bag got forgotten the night before, pulling out the extra pair of sweats he brought along. He’s pretty sure the other pair is still on the ground at the base of the tree. After he’s relatively clothed he wanders back upstairs, following his nose to find Cas.

Turns out his cat climbed out one of the windows, and is currently sleeping—in panther form, of course—on one of the thick tree branches. All four of his limbs are hanging off the branch, his whiskers twitching and his fur shiny and gorgeous in the sun. Dean takes a minute to survey his options before climbing out the window himself. He has to scale the side of the treehouse a little bit before edging out along a branch that lets him reach the branch Cas is on.

He can just barely reach, and he has to jump a little bit, but he doesn’t think he’ll break his neck if he falls. Shifters are resilient.

Cas has an amused look on his face as Dean struggles to pull himself up onto the branch, and he doesn’t even need to open his eyes to know that it is a struggle. The shaking of the branch is enough.

Dean pretends that he’s not panting when he finally gets up, scooting along the length of the branch on his butt until he’s sitting right next to the stretched out panther.

“Morning, kitten,” he says, petting his mate’s soft fur. It’s almost hot to the touch, the morning sun collecting warmth in his black fur. Cas purrs in response. Dean thinks about making a snarky comment about Cas getting up without him, but he doesn’t actually mind that much. Nothing says “I don’t want to talk about it” like purposefully removing verbal speech as an option, and Dean can respect that. He’s definitely pulled the same stunt with Sam more than a few times. It sucks, but he learned his lesson yesterday. He's just gotta wait 'til Cas feels like bringing it up. Besides, Cas looks peaceful.

Part of him is starting to get why Cas likes it up here so much. He can see like, every{}th{}in{}g. Even the top of the small mountain where his den is. The air is fresh and cool on his cheeks, the tweeting of birds and the clicking of squirrels and other mammals in the trees. The only smells, besides those of
the forest, are Dean and Cas, which is calming for his wolf. Just them and their mate.

They are quiet for a while, Dean’s fingers stroking through Cas’ fur while he watches the wispy clouds that float by overhead, Cas’ tail curled around his waist while he naps the morning away. It’s really kind of nice. Dean’s never imagined a scenario when he would use that word sincerely, without a drop of sarcasm or dishonesty, but here he is. It’s just nice.

“Ya know, you do actually have spots,” Dean says after a while, examining Cas’ fur. “I thought you’d just be black, but you got some spots here. They’re just hard to see.”

Cas grunts and growls a little bit, peering at Dean with one blue eye that seems to say really? with startling clarity. Dean guesses that Cas is objecting to the terminology, but he plays dumb on purpose. He knows they've got a name, but his brain doesn't feel like coming up with it.

“What, you don’t like your spots?” he says with a chuckle, leaning in closer. “Kinda cool, actually. You’re a real leopard.”

He swears he sees Cas roll his eyes. His mate lifts his head and starts licking his paws, using them to clean the top of his head and behind his ears.

“Cute,” Dean laughs. “You gonna get a hairball later?”

That earns him an icy glare, but he laughs it off. His cat smells content, so he can’t be that annoyed.

“Just sayin’, man. You better not yak in our bed.”

Cas gives him a look, standing up abruptly and turning to arch his back and stretch. He flexes his claws into the bark of the tree, and Dean admires the sharpness of them. He’s busy looking down at Cas’ feet when he feels him nudge at Dean’s cheek with his nose. It’s a little wet, not as much as Dean’s own but still a little damp. Cas curls closer, purring and rubbing his face against Dean’s cheeks, neck, and shoulders. He’s pretty sure that Cas is basically marking him, but it just makes him laugh.

“Might as well just get a stamp that says ‘mine’ and put it on my forehead in red ink, it’d be more subtle,” Dean says, looking at Cas knowingly. Cas just grunts and climbs over him, hopping down off the branch and climbing back into the treehouse.

Dean shakes his head. What a showoff.

Getting back inside proves to be a bit more difficult than getting out, but Dean manages without causing his own death so. Success. Cas is waiting for him inside, sitting with his legs crossed in the middle of the nest.

“Our bed?” he says when Dean climbs back through the window, tilting his head in that feline way of his.

Dean furrows his eyebrows. “Huh?”

“You called it our bed.”

Oh. Right. He had done that.

“Oh, guess so, yeah. Sorry, that okay?”

Cas rolls his eyes and shakes his head. “You stupid wolf.”
“Thanks, man. You really know how to boost a guy’s confidence.”

Cas hums and gives him an amused smile. “Get over here.”

Dean obeys, following Cas down and laying out on top of him when Cas lays down on his back. His mate guides their lips together, but it’s obvious he wants Dean to take the lead. So he does, cupping the back of Cas’ neck and parting his lips with his tongue. Cas opens for him automatically, arches into the weight of Dean’s body and sucks on his tongue. Dean growls when the scent of slick hits the air.

Cas is already naked, and it takes Dean only a second to shed his own clothes before they are pressed together again. He wants to take it slow, but Cas shifts his hips and the second Dean’s dick slides against the slick between his legs he changes his mind. Dean keeps one hand on the back of Cas’ neck, tugging gently on his messy hair and directing the kiss where he wants it to go. The other he slides down Cas’ body, pressing a finger into him and getting a satisfying moan from his throat.

Cas pushes down against his finger, his pleased noises disappearing into Dean’s mouth. Dean adds a second finger then, knowing that he doesn’t really need to do any of this prep but enjoying it nonetheless. His mate would welcome him right away, but Cas seems to like this.

Unfortunately, there isn’t much self control to cling to. Cas doesn’t even have time to whine at the loss of Dean’s fingers before Dean slides into him.

He feels like fucking heaven. Dean is 100% sure that he could do this all day every day and never get over how goddamn good it is. Even better than the first time. Because yeah, it’s hot as fuck to see his mate presenting for him. During his rut he’ll fucking lose it. But this is what Dean really wants, to hold him and kiss him while their bodies move together.

He’s a fucking sap. He knows it. And he doesn’t care for one goddamn second.

Dean watches Cas’ face as he fills him, watches how his eyes screw shut and his teeth bite down on his bottom lip. Dean’s having none of it.

“Look at me, kitten,” Dean says softly, rocking his hips and using his thumb to save Cas’ lip from his teeth. Cas whimpers and cracks open his eyes. His fucking blue goddamn eyes. Dean smiles.

Cas kisses him again, licks at the seam of his lips and nibbles on Dean’s lower lip. Dean obliges him and kisses back with the same intensity, thrusting his hips and adjusting his angle until Cas arches his back and moans, long and loud.

Found it.

Dean has to keep a hand on his hip to keep him where he wants him, Cas’ legs wrapping around his waist as he attempts to pull Dean closer. Cas takes over with his fingers in Dean’s hair, his other hand sliding between their bodies to wrap around his own cock. Dean pulls his mouth away for a few seconds to kiss up Cas’ neck, unashamedly biting and sucking the skin. His thrusts pick up as he does, and the urge to really bite is overwhelming.

He tries not to think about that.

As soon as his knot starts to catch he groans and moves back to Cas’ lips. They aren’t kissing so much as they are just panting against each other’s mouths, but it’s perfect. Cas comes between them with a cry, and Dean thrusts two more times before his knot swells and ties them together. He’s breathing heavy but he closes their lips together anyway, tasting the sweetness of his mate’s lips. It makes breathing hard, and he gets lightheaded, but whatever.
There is sweat and come and slick between them, the overwhelming scent of sex in the air, but Cas keeps pushing his fingers through Dean’s hair and they keep kissing, keep memorizing each other’s mouths, until both of their mouths are red and swollen and spit slick. And then Dean goes back for more.

Then there’s the warm smell, the one that smells like happy mates, buried under the scents of sweat and come and sex clouding the air around them. Dean knows he’s imagining things, because they aren’t mated. Much to his increasing displeasure. His wolf is probably projecting, making up scents that he wishes were there. Still, it sends a happy thrill right to his primal brain to smell that scent all around him with Cas in his arms, to know that it belongs to him, or could belong to him. One day. Hopefully.

***

Dean is dopey and scent drunk when he gets home, and he barely remembers to shower and scrub it all off his skin before he goes to find something to do. It’s still fogging up his brain though, and it feels fantastic.

He strolls lazily down to Jo’s room, because there’s always a good chance that there’ll be other Hunters and some kind of snack food. He’s right, of course. Jo, Sam, Jess, and Charlie are all in there, Sam and Charlie nerding out about some thing Dean couldn’t care less about while Jo stares at Jess’ barely showing belly with a kind of concentration he’s never seen before.

“You can’t see through, no matter how hard you stare,” Dean says with a grin, tugging lightly on her ponytail. She punches him in the leg.

“Eat me.”

Jess laughs and covers her stomach again, exchanging a disgustingly sweet smile with his brother. “Don’t worry, sometimes I think Sam thinks the same thing. Like he’ll develop x-ray vision if he just keeps trying.”

Sam tries to scowl at her, but it doesn't work even a little bit.

Dean flops down on Jo’s bed and lays his head in Charlie’s lap, snatching a hunk of jerky out of her hand. He should probably eat a meal, but this’ll do.

“Not cool, dude,” she grumbles, reaching into the bag next to her to grab another piece. “Don’t steal a girl’s food.”

Dean just grunts and keeps chewing. His eyelids feel heavy, too, and if he lets them close he can float around in his scent memory.

“So, Dean,” Jo says in a suspiciously happy voice. “How are you?”

Dean raises an eyebrow at her. “M’fine.”

He hears his brother snort. Fucking Sam.

“You got somethin’ to say, Sasquatch?”

“Yeah, dude,” Sam laughs. “You’re hammered right now.”
Dean furrows his eyebrows and stares at the ceiling. Not true. He’s a little scent drunk, yeah, but he washed most of it off anyway. He’s fine. Perfectly clearheaded.

“Am not.”

Everybody laughs, except for Charlie who seems to just be confused.

“Nah, you’re just in your happy little la la land, aren’t you, Deano?” Jo says in a teasing tone. He growls at her.

“Y’all are dicks.”

“I don’t get it,” Charlie finally pipes up. “Why’s he scent drunk? Dean who’re you sleeping with and why don’t I know about it?”

"What, you can't smell it?" Jo asks, sniffing in Dean's direction. He pushes her away. Charlie furrows her eyebrows and does the same, sniffing at him.

“Smell what? No fair. What’s it smell like?”

"Fuckin' quit it," he grumbles, squirming away from Charlie too. He fuckin’ scrubbed his skin in the shower, no way he still smells like Cas. “Jo, you're imagining things. I don’t smell like anything.”

"Am not," she scoffs. "Sam. Back me up."

"It's barely there," Sam says, apparently agreeing. "But there’s definitely something extra. Why didn’t you shower?"

“I did already,” Dean says, gritting his teeth. Sam frowns.

“Can’t smell anything,” Jess chimes in, taking a long inhale and squinting her eyes.

“Maybe ‘cause Jo and I know what he smells like? I wouldn’t notice otherwise. Just smells like forest.” Sam shrugs it off, but he can see his brother’s brain ticking away and it’s freaking Dean out.

Meanwhile Charlie takes another deep inhale, getting a glare from Dean. “ Seriously, who is it?” she says excitedly, bouncing a little bit.

“No one,” he grumbles, feeling his buzz slip away. Jo and Sam and Jess all glare at him simultaneously. He glares right back. They don’t get to just gang up on him. He’ll tell Charlie when he feels like telling Charlie. He shouldn’t even be telling anyone, that’s the truth. The more people that know, the more people that can tell John. And wouldn’t that just be a clusterfuck and a half.

This already isn’t fucking good. He knows he doesn’t smell mated, but nobody should be able to smell Cas on him right now. Not even Sam and Jo who know what to look for. He knows his body has already accepted Cas as his mate, but he thought he’d be able to hide the scent-clinging-thing with showers and soap until they actually completed the bond. Apparently not. And if John notices...

But then...this isn’t John. It’s Charlie. And they’ve never kept secrets from each other.

“I found my mate,” Dean mumbles, half hoping that Charlie doesn’t hear him. No such luck.

“You what?” she says, right before Sam and Jo apparently decide to take it upon themselves to fill her in.
“He’s a leopard,” Jo says with a smile. “A *leopard.*”

“They met recently, too. His name’s Cas. And from what I can tell he doesn’t take Dean’s shit.” Sam claps Dean on the shoulder, getting a laugh from Charlie. Dean growls at him.

“He’s *hot,* too,” Jo continues. “Dark hair, *gorgeous* blue eyes, all feisty and—”

*Enough,* Dean growls at her, sitting up and glaring. “We’re done.”

They all stare at him for a moment before breaking into another bout of laughter.

“Who knew you were such a possessive little alpha?” Charlie teases, ruffling his hair. He swats her hand away.

“Y’all can fuck off,” Dean snaps, climbing off the bed and stomping towards the door. He has patrol soon anyway, and apparently he needs another shower. Unfortunately, Sam takes it upon himself to follow Dean out the door, stopping him in the hallway.

“Dude, stop. Talk to me.”

“About what?” Dean sighs, rubbing his hands over his face. Sam hesitates for a second.

“You slept with him, didn’t you?”

Dean glares at him and crosses his arms. Sam returns the favor. It fucking sucks having an alpha as a little brother.

“Wasn’t the first time. I dunno why it’s a problem now.”

“I don’t know either.” Sam sounds mildly frustrated, and Dean can’t help but think that his brother has *no idea* what frustration really feels like. “You sure you weren’t just, lazy about getting the scent off?”

He gives Sam a *look.*

“Yeah, I’m sure. Probably some true mate bullshit,” Dean grumbles. Sam starts, opening and closing his mouth a few times before he speaks.

“You…you’re true mates?”

Oh. Shit. Apparently Sam hadn’t figured that out. Dean just nods. All this talk about Cas is making him itchy.

“I mean, isn’t that good news? No way Dad denies you. Not when it’s this serious.” Sam sounds so damn hopeful, Dean almost believes him.

“You didn’t hear the way he talked about the cats, Sammy. He won’t even consider an *alliance* with them, let alone one of his sons *mating* with one of them. True mates or not.”

Sam gets that damn kicked puppy look on his face, and it just makes Dean feel more guilty.

“You have to talk to him, Dean. You have to change his mind.”

Hah. Like he didn’t already fucking know that.

“Look, we got the Hunter meeting tomorrow right?” Dean says, getting a nod in response. There’s
apparently some updates that the Council wants to discuss with all of them. Dean isn’t really sure what they’re about, but the Council made it seem important and meetings like this one are pretty routine. “I’ll talk to him after that, see if I can’t warm him up to the subject. For now, I gotta get to patrol. Okay?”

Sam runs his hands through his hair, looking and smelling frustrated, but he chews his lip and nods.

“Okay. I’ll—” Sam stops talking abruptly, his eyes widening fractionally as he looks at something over Dean’s shoulder. Dean inhales, and he doesn’t even need to turn around to know what Sam is looking at.

A heavy hand lands on his shoulder, and Dean automatically straightens up and tilts his chin, holding his arms straight at his sides.

“Sam, Dean,” John says, his voice low and commanding. “What’s going on?”

Dean quickly weighs his options. They live in a fucking cave, and all the shifters have good hearing, so there’s a good chance John heard at least the end of their conversation. So he can lie, and see if John calls him out for it, or he can try to weave a story that makes their conversation make sense out of context. Door number one looks easier.

“Nothin’. Just about to report for patrol.”

John narrows his eyes, and Dean knows his dad doesn’t believe him. Sam’s eyes widen fractionally when John inhales slowly, obviously scenting the air around them.

“What’s that smell?” he says, leaning towards Dean and inhaling again. Dean swears up a storm inside his head. His dad is baiting him, he’s pretty sure. If Sam is telling the truth, his dad can’t smell anything. So Dean lies his ass off.

“Rolled in some herb patch out in the forest, I think,” he says, focusing on keeping his heart steady and believing his own lie. If his dad smells it on him, he’s toast. He definitely could have rolled in some herbs, and that could be contributing to his scent. It isn’t outside the realm of possibility.

“What’re you doing down here anyway?” Dean asks, eager to change the subject.

John’s eyes flick up and down, to the sides of his neck all the way down to his feet. Dean does his best not to squirm. Thank fucking god Cas kept all his marks below the collar.

“Left some papers in my room. Council needs ‘em.”


With that he squirms out of his dad’s grasp, slipping into his room and straight into the shower. He scrubs at his skin even harder than before, rinsing and repeating three times before he finally gets out. Just in case.

Patrol, thankfully, goes smoothly as expected. Dean wonders if they’ll step back on patrols again soon, now that this Crowley guy has taken care of the intruders, but he honestly doesn’t care enough to ask. He hangs around the den that night too, because he has patrol early the next morning. Plus, he’s maybe feeling a little paranoid and maybe trying to act as normal as possible. Maybe. So he spends time with the pups, catches up with Layla, even heads over to soldier training for a little while. They’re sparring, which is even better.

He finds Jo and Ruby down there when he goes. They aren’t leading the lesson—that’s usually Benny’s job, since Rufus and Bobby have all but handed over the reigns—but they’re helping out.
Well. “Helping.” Mostly they’re taking on the newly-presented alphas and taking their egos down a notch. The to-be-soldiers that haven’t presented yet, or that presented as betas, don’t cause so much trouble.

Ruby seems to be having a little too much fun doing it, but it’s part of their job as Hunters so he can’t fault her for it. Some of these kids will be Hunters one day, and they look up to the rest of them. Dean and Sam tend not to spend too much time down here when they’re sparring, since they’re too dominant even for the overactive hormones of the new alphas, but it’s been a while. Dean could use a little exercise.

“Nope,” Ruby says when she spots him, her face shiny with sweat. She flips the alpha in front of her onto his back carelessly, ignoring his pained grunt. The floors are padded anyway. “Where’s Ken?”

“Good to see you too, sweetheart,” Dean says with a sarcastic smile, shaking his head at the alpha plastered on the floor. Ruby isn’t his favorite, but he has to give it to her. Girl can kick some ass.

Dean strolls over to Benny, waving at Jo as he goes and clapping his friend on the shoulder.

“How goes it?” he says with a grin.

“Ain’t bad, kids are workin’ out some aggression. Sammy tell ya about trackin’ the other day?”

Dean nods and sighs, gritting his teeth. “Yeah, man, I know. Sorry about that, I know it’s on me.”

“Ain’t my first rodeo, darlin’. I can handle some pups.” He slaps Dean on the back and winks then goes back to work, picking at the form of one of the betas. It doesn’t really make him feel any better, but it’s something.

Dean decides to follow in his lead, wandering around the room with corrections as he goes. Square your shoulders, keep your hands up, light on your feet, test your opponent, find their weak spots, all that jazz. He doesn’t think he has anything particularly revolutionary to say, but they all listen to him like he’s some kind of all-knowing God.

They’re wrapping up, getting ready to go have dinner, when Jo bounces up next to him.

“What d’you say, wanna put on a show?” she whispers conspiratorially. “Show these kids how cool we really are?”

Dean laughs out loud. “You mean how cool I am and how cool you’re not?”

“Shut up,” she says, punching him in the arm. “C’mon, Benny wants us to.”

Dean glances across the training room to where Benny is standing, only getting a noncommittal shrug in response.

“That so?”

“Yes.” Jo turns to the rest of the room, clapping her hands to get everyone’s attention. “Who wants to see me kick Dean’s butt?”

They all quite literally trip on each other in an effort to get into some kind of circle around Dean and Jo. He just raises his eyebrows at her and crosses his arms across his chest.

“Really?”
“Yes, really. Now pucker up.”

Off to the side Krissy pushes several of the younger trainees aside to get a better viewpoint, Meg and Ruby flop down on the floor with amused grins on their faces, both of them dying to see Dean’s ass handed to him, Adam leans back against a beta girl that Dean has seen him with before.

Well. Since they have an audience and all…

He whirls around and swings at Jo, more intending to catch her off guard than anything else. They aren’t really trying to land hits, but they know how to make a fight look flashy.

Jo has speed on her side, and Dean swears her fists blur a little bit as she flurries. Dean just stays light on his feet and lets her move around him, meeting each swing, trying to wear her down. She’s got speed, but he could do this all day.

The way they dance around each other is almost choreographed with how precise it is. They each know the other too well to really get in anything substantial. Dean spots the twist of Jo’s knee before she even thinks about throwing that fake to her left, and Jo knows not to take the bait when Dean leaves his stomach unprotected.

Still, the soldiers and soldiers-in-training ooh and aah and watch with rapt attention the whole time, right up until they both surrender. In a real fight there’d be a winner, but it doesn’t matter here. Dean is sweating and he knows his muscles will feel this tomorrow, but he feels good.

Jo just pats his chest and laughs, her own breaths coming hard and heavy. “

“Let’s go. I heard there’s sloppy joe’s for dinner.”

She’s right. And Dean is in heaven.

It’s Garth’s idea, unsurprisingly, to pile up into the nursery after dinner for movie night. The pups are long asleep, to the room overflows with Pack from the teenagers up to the Hunters. Mary isn’t there, but Layla is, and her presence combined with the overall sleepiness of the room seems to be keeping everyone relatively mellow.

They put on Star Wars as per Charlie’s request, and Ash is all too happy to oblige. It’s actually a testament to how much everyone likes it that it stays quiet for the most part. Some people doze off, everybody is laying on at least two other people. The mated pairs—Sam and Jess, Benny and Andrea—slip out fairly early, and a few of the soldiers filter out to run the night patrols. Garth, of course, sticks around with Bess.

Dean is content with it all, but his wolf is pouting a little bit. They had their morning in the treehouse, and now they should have their night in the den. Dean can’t even deny that it sounds good, having Cas here. What he wouldn’t give to curl up with his mate, nestled here amongst the warmth and comfort of his pack.

But they can’t have that. The wolf whines. It doesn’t understand why they can’t just go get their mate. It even thinks that if they just howled loud enough, that their mate would come to them, would know they want him. Wouldn’t he?

His mood persists for the rest of the night. And it fucking sucks. Anger, aggression, frustration, all that shit he can handle. He’s used to it. But that’s not what he’s feeling when he lays down in his cold bed that night, his hair still damp from his third shower of the day and his eyes staring off into the blackness of his ceiling. He’s just kind of…bummed.
And goddamn, he actually misses Cas. Not that he’s surprised, necessarily, except that he’s spent what amounts to a handful of days with the guy and his perspective is just...different, now. Like the axis of his world has shifted just a little bit.

His wolf kindly reminds him that it’s probably not 1am yet, and they don’t have patrol until 6. The wolf doesn’t care much for sleep, when seeing their mate is the other option. Dean tries to tell himself that no, this is in fact a Bad Idea.

That lasts about three seconds.

Dean is sneaking out the back door of the den and into the forest before he even really makes up his mind. He has to wait a few minutes before approaching the rock, until after the patrol runs by, so that they don’t see him sneaking out. Once they’re gone he creeps up to the rock and is about to start climbing one of the trees when someone drops down from the branches above him.

“Hello, Dean.”

Dean whips his head around only to see Cas standing there, clad in a t-shirt and a pair of grey sweats that are, as usual, hanging way too low on his hips. He tilts his head carefully, and goddamn he looks wild and feline and fucking sexy as hell. It takes Dean all of two seconds to press close to him, wrapping his arms around his waist.

Apparently they both had the same idea, to seek each other out. Dean’s fucking glad he listened to his wolf.

“You shouldn’t be here,” he rumbles, even as he pulls his mate close. Cas just chuckles.

“Not even a hello?”

“Hey, Cas,” Dean growls quietly, automatically scenting his throat. The wolf basically passes out. He smells like his usual fucking intoxicating self, but—“You smell like me,” Dean manages, and he’s pretty sure the wolf has died of happiness.

Their mate smells good, their mate smells so good.

“Mmm,” Cas hums with a tiny smile, just at the corner of his mouth. He kisses Dean warmly, sliding their tongues together. “And you don’t smell like me.”

“I know,” Dean sighs, kissing back harder. He’s pretty sure that Cas couldn’t make him feel any more guilty. His cat doesn’t say anything else about it. He just kisses him and touches him and purrs happily. Petting might be a more accurate term, since Dean is sure that Cas can smell the unhappiness oozing out of his skin. He’d never admit that out loud, though. “I missed you, tonight,” Dean says, mumbling under his breath. Cas pulls back and looks at him with amused, crinkly blue eyes.

“Oh?”

Dean nudges his jaw to the side and kisses up his neck, grunting some kind of affirmative. Cas chuckles, but melts into him anyway.

“I missed you too, puppy.”
Dean feels like he should regret staying out until the sun comes up, and maybe he does. A little bit. Only after patrol, though, when he’s dead fucking tired and honestly pretty damn horny. He goes back to his room and crawls into bed, wishing it smelled like more than just himself. Dean wonders briefly where Cas is, if his mate is curled up in their nest all warm and soft and smelling like home. Knowing how much that cat likes to sleep, that’s probably exactly where he is. It makes Dean’s chest ache and his wolf whine miserably.

He’d spent three times as long in the shower as normal before going out on patrol that morning, and nobody sniffed at him or looked at him funny so he’s pretty sure it worked.

It just sucks.

It goes against every instinct he has to wash away his mate’s scent, basically every goddamn day. It’s starting to piss his wolf off, and it feels like fighting with a roommate. Except the room is his brain, and said roommate can occasionally control his body.

He has to be especially careful when he wears his fur, because the thin line between Dean and the wolf grows even thinner. He feels okay now, though, and decides on a little nap before he has to go meet with the Council. He’ll deal better with their bullheadedness and the looming conversation with his dad if he’s not exhausted.

When he wakes up, it’s to a soft hand on his shoulder and the scent of a familiar omega.

“Mom?” he mumbles, cracking open an eye and frowning. “W’sup?”

She smiles at him, but it looks tight and a little strained.

“We’ll be meeting soon. I thought the two of us could talk, first.”

Dean sits up in his bed, feeling wary. He doesn't really want to have this talk with his mom, because he knows what she’s gonna ask. His dad might think he’s handling himself because he got some time off, but Mary knows differently. She knows there’s something out there, outside their territory, that he’s going to. And he’s damn sure he won’t be able to lie to her about it.
“Uh, sure. Yeah. About what?”

She tilts her head and cups his cheek.

“I’m not sure where you’re going, or who you’re seeing. If they are human, that’s alright. I know your father can be... difficult. But the Pack wants you to be happy. You know that, right?”

Dean resists the urge to snort. A human. Like that’s the most likely possibility. Yeah right. And if anything, he’s been feeling the exact opposite. The Pack wants him to just do what he’s supposed to do; protect the den, mate some pretty little beta and pump out some pups, maybe sit on the Council one day. It’s all *do this for your pack, Dean* or *you’re doing good for your pack or the Pack needs it*. It has nothing to do with him.

And he can’t even blame them. Being part of a pack isn’t about thinking and doing things for yourself. It’s about *sacrifice* and doing things for the greater good. He used to believe that.

“Yeah,” he says instead, offering up a smile. “Got it.”

His mom purses her lips. It’s glaringly obvious that Dean doesn’t believe her, but he doesn’t say anything else. She didn’t even *consider* the idea that Dean might be going to one of the leopards, like it’s more believable that his source of calm is a *human*.

“I can’t force you to talk to me. I just hope that you will, when you’re ready. You will have my support, and everything else can be dealt with.”

She sounds so sincere. He almost believes her. Almost.

“So, uh, should we go?”

Mary sighs, looking sad. “Yes. We should.”

The air in the Council room is thick and choking. There’s so much tension, Dean’s not even sure he can walk through it. His mom takes her seat next to the other Council members, and Dean doesn’t miss the way his dad’s eyes flick between them. Sam, Jo, Benny, and Ruby are already seated, which is unusual. Kevin is in there too, looking uncomfortable and tired. Dean takes the end seat next to Ruby, clearing his throat lightly.

“S’posed to be a check in meetin’ today. Been a change of plans. Speak, boy,” Rufus grunts, leaning back and crossing his arms. Kevin glances down and nods.

“We’ve been contacted, by the human embassy. Crowley, their president, he. Uh. Sent a message. Personally.”

The Council are listening, but in a way that makes Dean think they’ve heard this already, probably earlier this morning. So this briefing is strictly for the Hunters. He looks back at Kevin, trying to focus on his words.

“As you all know, we have a long-standing truce with the humans of this area. They don’t bother us, we don’t bother them. It has allowed us to live relatively free of the threats of their race.”

Dean sighs. None of them need the history lesson. He wishes Kevin would just get to the point. The kid hesitates though, stuttering a little bit before his next line.

“The leopards have not reached a similar agreement with the humans.”
The shift in atmosphere in the room is palpable. Dean’s stomach drops, and he’s not sure that he isn’t going to be sick on the table.

Kevin clears his throat and continues. “At first, Crowley makes it seem like they weren’t able to agree on terms. Normal. Since then, the situation has escalated. According to Crowley, they have been openly aggressive towards the humans. Threats, physical and verbal, one of them even attacked a lost hiker.”

Ruby speaks up then, which is good because Dean feels like he’s about to explode.

“Bullshit. That hiker wasn’t lost, and if the human was in their territory then that leopard had every right to attack. End of story.”

“Let the kid speak,” Ellen snaps, silencing Ruby with a glare.

“Um, normally I’d agree,” Kevin says hesitantly. “But, I saw her. The woman who was attacked. She came in to speak with Crowley as I was leaving his office. She was far from threatening, young and maybe weighed 100 pounds. Her wounds were patched up and healing, but the scratches I saw on her face were definitely from leopard claws.”

The other Hunters only seem partially swayed, because Ruby is right. It’s the human’s fault for “getting lost” in leopard country. But she’s also possibly an innocent, and even wild animals like themselves don’t hurt innocents. Although, they all know better than to judge an opponent off of size, age, or gender.

“Whether you agree or not,” Kevin says, trying to regroup. “The leopards have all but declared war on the humans.”

Dean grits his teeth, resisting the urge to swear. Humans are dangerous, and his mate is in the crossfire. The wolf is already panicking, because they haven’t seen their mate since sunrise and what if something happened to him? What if their cat is in trouble? And why didn’t Cas tell him any of this?

“So we help them, right?” Jo says, like it’s obvious. Dean tends to agree, and it looks like the other Hunters do too.

“It ain’t that simple,” Ellen sighs, shaking her head. Jo’s face falls.

“We’ve gotten years of peace with the humans by stickin’ to this truce,” Bobby says, rubbing his beard. “That ain’t changin’ now.”

Dean quite literally cannot believe his ears.

“They’re shifters, like us,” Sam says this time, and Dean can smell his brother’s frustrations. “We have to stand by them.”

“They aren’t like us,” John growls, and Dean’s stomach sinks further. “They are stupid, and they are asking to get themselves killed. We won’t let our pack get dragged through their shit.”

Dean is definitely, one hundred percent, going to be sick. He’s desperately trying not to think about what Anna had said, about being glad to have Dean on their side, about how they would need him. Because he can’t help them. He can’t help Cas.

“So, what? We watch while another shifter pack gets wiped off the map?” Benny asks, his voice low and angry. The aggression is building in this room overwhelmingly fast, but Dean is numb to it.
“Crowley has no intentions of harming the leopards,” Kevin tries, “as long as they stick to their territory. He doesn’t want bloodshed.”

Dean snorts.

“Somethin’ funny, pup?” Rufus says, his tone threatening.

Dean just cracks his knuckles and shakes his head. “No, sir. Just can’t wait to hear what good old Crowley had to say, since he’s got such pure fucking intentions.”

Kevin gives him a look, then glances at Rufus before continuing. Rufus has got a stormy expression on his face, but he doesn’t say anything else.

“We were…warned. Basically. Help the leopards, get taken down with them.”

Dean honestly wants to laugh, at this point. This really couldn’t get any fucking worse. If his dad wasn’t open to mingling with the leopards before, he definitely isn’t now. Dean is just feeling more and more trapped as seconds tick by, his heart racing and his wolf boiling under his skin.

“We agreed to that?” Jo asks incredulously, her jaw dropping. “We’re just letting them threaten us?”

“It isn’t a threat, it’s an agreement,” John says, leaning back in his chair. “And nothing is done yet. Dean’s gonna handle it. Today.”

Dean freezes, not sure he heard that right.

“Sorry?”

“You’ll go with Kevin into the city today. Crowley wants one of our alphas to agree in person, at the embassy. We ain’t got time, so you’re up,” Bobby answers.

That’s it. Dean literally laughs out loud. “Sure, sounds like a blast. Lemme just drive four fucking hours both ways to go to the damn human embassy and bend over for them. Sounds awesome.”

“That wasn’t a goddamn question,” John growls at him, narrowing his eyes. “You will go, and you will act accordingly, and I won’t hear a fucking word of complaint. Got it?”

Dean lowers his eyes and nods. He tries not to, he really does, but his dad is a dominant bastard when he wants to be. He can’t even think about disobeying a direct order when John sinks all of his dominance into it like that. The other Council members, save Mary, have their eyes down too, and the Hunters are all but baring the backs of their necks to him. So Dean doesn’t feel too bad about dropping his gaze.

Even so, his plans to talk to his dad are definitely off the table for now. He hasn’t got a fucking clue what he’s gonna do, even less so than before, but he’ll get ripped to shreds if he tries to bring it up now. Going to see Cas isn’t just about him anymore, it’s about the Pack too now that the humans are involved. And John is no stranger to eliminating the Pack’s enemies.

“Got it,” Dean grits his teeth, focusing more on shoving his wolf away than on his dad.

The wolf is raging. It disagrees with the Council wholeheartedly, yes, but the wolf also understands pack structure and that they have to do what their Council says. What the wolf doesn’t understand is why the fuck they aren’t already on their way to see their mate. All the wolf really cares about is the safety of their cat.
Dean had definitely been planning to go see Cas, but that’s not happening. He can’t even go tell his cat that he won’t be stopping by, and he won’t be able to go the next day either since that girl’s supposed to be arriving. Whatever her name is. John will rip his lungs out if he tries to skip out on that. At least he doesn’t have patrol tomorrow night or the next morning, so he just has to make it until tomorrow night. Then he can go see his mate, make sure he’s safe.

And the humans can go fuck themselves.

“Hello? Can we back up?” Jo says, clearly annoyed. “Why are we even agreeing to this? Why aren’t we sticking up for fellow shifters?”

“Joanna Beth watch your tone,” Ellen growls, glaring at her. Jo glares right back.

What surprises Dean the most, is that it’s his mom who answers her question.

“We know you are all angry, and probably don’t understand. But consider our perspective,” she says calmly, the atmosphere automatically cooling a few degrees. “If we stand with the leopards, ultimately our goal would be to convince them not to lash out at the humans for the sake of peace. If they don’t, everything would hopefully be alright. Assuming Crowley is telling the truth about his intentions.”

“A big assumption,” John adds, almost under his breath.

“And what if they do?” Mary pauses, giving that question several seconds to set in. “What happens if we side with the leopards, and war breaks out between them and the humans? Where does that put us?”

“Fighting,” Sam says, “like we should be. Standing up to them, not rolling over.”

“Okay, so we fight,” Mary says, with a smile. “We fight their battle with them. And maybe we win. Maybe we arrive at a truce with the humans once again. How many of our pack do you think we would lose along the way?”

The snarl fades off of Sam’s face, and the same for the others. Dean feels his heart break, torn in two different directions.

“You are all too young to know what it was like to watch our pack get torn apart during conflicts with the humans, to live with the smell of death hanging over our heads,” Mary says softly, sadly. “The Council before us wrote this truce before any of you were born, so that you wouldn’t have to live with those memories. But we live with them every day. Trust us when we say that this one concession is worth it.”

“What happened to ‘we should look for allies’? Not having enemies on both sides?” Dean breaks the silence, finally fucking realizing how screwed he is. The whole Council, all five of them, are together on this. United against the leopards. He’d always sort of thought that it’d just be his dad that he’d have to convince, that the others wouldn’t care so much. Especially his mom. And while he’s pretty sure she’ll still support him, probably, she’ll be the only one.

“The humans are not our enemies. Not yet. We will stand against them soon as that changes,” Ellen says calmly, automatically backing Mary up. “Right now, they haven’t acted against us. For years they haven’t acted against us. We will respect that, and we will stay out of it.”

“You don’t even know why the leopards are fighting them,” Dean growls, wishing that Cas had fucking told him about whatever is happening so he’d have been prepared. But he didn’t even know that the leopards were having problems, not really. “Have you even bothered to ask? Because you
bet your ass it’s more than what Crowley is telling us.”

John slams his fist on the table, silencing the sounds of agreement that the other Hunters make.

“No. You will not speak to them. None of you will. I don’t give a fuck what’s going on between the humans and the leopards. It ain’t our problem. We will not risk the lives of our pack. End. Of. Story.”

The air in the room is heavy. Dean can’t breathe through his own anger and frustration, can’t get his stomach out of his throat, can’t calm the racing beat of his heart.

“So we leave them to die,” Dean says, his voice deadpan, the words tearing up his insides on their way out. Mary sighs and looks at him, her eyes sad.

“No,” John says, placing a comforting hand on his mate’s back. “The leopards have made their bed. We let them lie in it.”

***

The drive into the city is terrible. They take the big black truck, because Dean knows he looks scary driving it and it makes his wolf feel big and strong. It’s kind of hilarious, but he’ll do fucking anything to calm it down right now. Kevin even puts up with his obnoxiously loud music.

The cloying, overbearing scents of the city hit him before they even get that close, and he prepares himself for an overwhelming couple of hours before they get out of there. It’s like sweat and piss and blood, stress and anger, sex and perfume, noxious fumes and smoke.

God it’s disgusting.

Where they’re going, the human embassy, is located on the top floor of a high rise in the center of the city. Its around 6pm when they arrive, so there’s assloads of traffic and it takes Dean a frustrating amount of time to find somewhere to stick the truck. He ends up leaving it half in the middle of the road, because fuck these guys and their parking rules. He’d like to see them try to give him a ticket.

People give them a wide berth as they walk up to the building, like something about them screams predator to the human instincts. And honestly, they’re right. They look like mice scrambling around in their city, while Dean is a wolf. Maybe that’s his alpha talking, but whatever.

The elevator up to the top floor is stifling, and oddly sterile. It doesn’t stink like outside, just has the passing scents of humans going in and out, and Dean thinks they must work really hard to keep it clean. Perks of working with shifters, he guesses. That is, right up until the doors slide open on the top floor.

They step into a sort of lobby, where everything is made of glass and the only visible colors are white and dark grey. It’s pristine and modern, and it doesn’t smell like anything.

Dean’s nose twitches. They’re wearing scent blockers. Everybody in this goddamn office is wearing scent blockers. Shit.

“Why didn’t you tell me they wore this shit,” Dean grits out under his breath. Kevin looks surprised.

“The scent blockers? Is that not…normal?”

Dean swears.
“No, it’s not normal. They’re trying to hide.”

At that a man turns the corner, sharply dressed in an all black suit, a smirk on his face accompanied by thinning hair and an air of overconfidence.

Dean doesn’t like him.

“Hello, boys,” he says in a low, scratchy voice. He focuses his attention on Dean, clearly understanding who’s in charge. “Name’s Crowley.”

Dean yawns and crosses his arms across his chest, plants his feet wide. The wolf even puffs up and stands tall. If he stands up straight, he’s got four inches on the guy. His wolf isn’t threatened.

“Crowley, this is Dean,” Kevin supplies.

Crowley’s smirk grows. “Ah, yes. John’s biggest boy. Charmed.”

Dean nods and glances around, surveying the office and it’s inhabitants.

“You guys like scent blockers, huh?”

“Creates a more professional environment, don’t you think?”

Dean holds his gaze for a few seconds, and Crowley doesn’t look down. Humans might not be alphas, betas, and omegas, but they still exhibit certain degrees of dominance. Apparently pretty high degrees, if you’re Crowley. Interesting.

“Shall we?”

Dean smiles at him. “Sure thing, boss.”

The actual meeting is uneventful. Mostly Kevin and Crowley talking over details. Dean nods when he’s supposed to, but he spends most of the time observing. Watching Crowley’s facial expressions, listening to how his heart beats and trying to catch him in a lie, catching the way his fingers drum on the table like he’s impatient. Excited, maybe. He does look pretty pleased with himself, which doesn’t bode well for them. His heartbeat is eerily steady too, which just frustrates Dean even more.

Over his behavior though, Dean notices his appearance. Crowley’s suit is clearly tailored to him, his shoes are shined to perfection, his tie tied in a double Windsor. He’s wearing expensive cufflinks, and an even more expensive watch. A. Lange & Sohne, if Dean is reading it right. He’s never heard of it, but he’s sure that somebody in the Pack has. Everything about Crowley screams money, but in an ostentatious sort of way. In the “I have money now, but I didn’t have money yesterday” kind of way. And that, more than anything, makes Crowley dangerous in Dean’s book.

All in all, the guy kinda gives Dean the heebie jeebies. He has no reason not to trust him, other than his snarling wolf. Which is, to be fair, a good judge. Most of the time. When Crowley and Kevin seem like they’re done, Dean finally chimes in.

“So, why you guys picking on the cats?” Dean says, crossing his arms across his chest. Crowley smiles slowly.

“You make us sound like a bunch of bullies. We have integrity here.”

He shorts. Somehow, he really doubts that.

“Uh huh.”
Crowley eyes him, and Dean’s not sure what he sees but the wolf doesn’t like the way that Crowley is looking at them. Dean sighs and leans forward, meeting Crowley’s gaze and raising his eyebrows, letting his wolf come to the forefront. He can practically see how Crowley wants to drop his eyes, but impressively enough he doesn’t do it.

“Do you have a stake in all of this, Dean?”

He’s fishing, but Dean isn’t about to give him something that Crowley could eventually use against him.

“Just trying to keep my pack safe,” Dean says calmly. Uneasiness trickles down the back of his neck, a wave of protectiveness through his whole body.

“Of course.” The smirk on his face does nothing to settle him.

Not soon enough for Dean’s tastes they are shaking hands and leaving, exiting out into the city once again. It still reeks, even at night with less people around, and after the scentlessness of the embassy all of these scents are practically assaulting his nose. He sneezes automatically, and Kevin does the same.

“I’m sorry about the scent blockers,” Kevin says, rubbing his neck and staring at the ground as they walk towards the car. “I mentioned it to Crowley, but he said the same thing to me as he did to you. It seemed reasonable, so—”

“Don’t worry about it, kid,” Dean says, clapping him on the back. It’s definitely not Kevin’s fault for not knowing, but the Council does need to know about it. “Let’s get home.”

It’s the middle of the night when they get back to the den, and Dean flops into bed pathetically alone. He even whines quietly, because no one is around to hear him. He doesn’t sleep well, but he thinks he gets two or three hours total which is better than nothing. He’s itching to go find Cas, but going now would probably just make things more dangerous for him. So he waits, because it sure as hell feels like this secret might actually be keeping his mate safe. Not just from the humans, but from the Pack, too.

***

All of the stuff that’s going on, all of the stress, is starting to take its toll. Castiel can see it in his face, in the shadows under his eyes, in the last sleepless night, in the overgrown stubble on his cheeks that he can’t summon the energy to shave off. He’s tired of this. All of it. He’s tired of worrying about his pack and worrying about Dean and worrying about himself.

Castiel doesn’t enjoy feeling this way. Like he needs to be protected. He is far from helpless, even if he is a target. Castiel doesn’t enjoy thinking that either, but he’s past the point of being able to deny it’s truth. If the humans want to take out the leopard pack, the omegas are the key members to go after. It makes him feel like a walking bullseye.

Still Castiel refuses to stay with Anna, no matter how much the Arch pesters him about “defensibility”. Castiel lives in a tree. If that isn’t defensible, he doesn’t know what is. That, and he doesn’t need guards. He is a Seraph. And they would do well not to forget it.

The forest around him is dark as he trudges home, exhausted and grumpy from another frustrating meeting with the Arch and the other Seraphs. At least the Dominions hadn’t been there this time. He had been hoping to find his mate waiting for him at home, but that would, of course, be too good to be true. He doesn’t know where Dean has been, and he doesn’t know when to expect him back, and
that makes him more than a little irritable. Castiel tries not to think about it.

Instead he climbs up into his treehouse and goes straight up to his nest, forgoing food or drink in favor of sleep. He only hopes that tonight will be better than the last, though he isn’t confident. His body aches for its mate, for the completion of their half-formed bond. The physical manifestation of his need is…unpleasant. And makes sleep difficult.

Castiel hopes to see Dean soon, for more than the obvious reason. He’s been putting off the conversation that they need to have, in an effort to exclude Dean from the politics of his pack. It would seem, however, that Dean is not so separate after all. The Arch had recently met with the Council of the Pack, and though Castiel isn’t sure that Dean is aware of that fact he’s fairly certain that he should be. Not that the meeting had been successful from their perspective. The Council had, essentially, slammed a door in their collective faces.

The Arch had been under the impression that the wolves would help, especially now that they are reasonably sure that the humans are involved in a big way. The Arch had been wrong.

With all of this in mind, Castiel knows that it’s time for Dean to get the whole story. Maybe then something will change, maybe they can make change together. Castiel is sure that they could do it, him and his wolf. That they could fix this.

***

He’s dragged out of sleep in the morning because there’s a warm body next to him and a finger tracing the skin on his arm. His sleep addled brain is pretty sure that makes sense, for there to be someone sleeping next to him.

Except he’s in the den.

Dean jerks awake then, and is confronted with a beta when he opens his eyes. She has dark hair and long eyelashes and is fucking curled up in his bed like she belongs there. She smells like spice and vanilla, and the distinct wet earth smell of a beta who likes what she sees.

“Who the hell are you?” Dean growls, glaring at her. She doesn’t lower her eyes, she actually leans closer to him, putting her hand on his cheek.

“Good morning, Dean.”

What the fuck.
“Bela,” she says, digging her fingernails into his skin. Dean grabs her wrist with his hand and pulls it away from his face. He doesn’t know who the hell this girl thinks she is. And he’s already feeling edgy as hell. No way he needs this shit.

“Sorry, sweetheart. No touching.”

She sticks out her lip and flutters her eyelashes.

“That doesn’t seem fair.”

“We aren’t mated,” Dean says through gritted teeth. Her voice is lightly accented, and her scent isn’t all that bad, but it’s grating. “You don’t get skin privileges.”

“Oh we could be though,” she says, pressing up against his side and threading her fingers through the hair at the base of his neck. “I think you need a girl like me.”

The wolf is snarling and snapping its teeth, but Dean has to be a little bit more civilized. He pries her hands off of him and gets out of bed, conscious of his lack of clothes. He pulls on pants and a shirt quickly.

“I won’t tell you again. No touching.”

She raises her eyebrow and smiles at him flirtatiously. Then instead of climbing out of bed she lays down on her back, spreading her arms and arcing her back.

“Yes, alpha,” she says softly, meeting his eyes directly when she speaks. It’s a fucking blatant come on, and in his younger days Dean would’ve been all over her in a second. As it is, he’s just annoyed that she’s getting her scent all over his bed where it doesn’t belong, The wolf is more than annoyed, but Dean can’t think about that. He has to keep a handle on himself for a couple of hours.
“You hungry?” he sighs, ignoring her behavior. Hopefully she’ll just stop if he doesn’t acknowledge it.

“Starved,” she says, licking her lips. “I’ll wait here. Bring me something?”

Dean just laughs. Yeah, right. Food sharing is for mates, and family. If Cas asked him to go get some food, Dean would drop the juiciest prey he could find at Cas’ feet. Preferably something big, and strong, so his mate would know what a good alpha he is. That he can provide for them, even if Cas can provide for himself. And great. Now he’s thinking about Cas.

“How ‘bout you get up, and we’ll both go?”

“You are playing hard to get,” she smiles again, finally getting off of his bed and swaying her hips as she stretches. Dean rolls his eyes.

Bela, the girl who apparently just got to the Bunker, manages to walk half a step in front of Dean the entire time on their way to the dining quarters. It surprises him at first, but he tries not to react. It’s fairly obvious to him that Bela is one of those dominant betas, which is interesting, especially considering how hopeful his dad seemed to be about this one.

Once they have food in their hands, Dean intentionally picks a table with some other Hunters and soldiers around. Jo and Garth are sitting with Charlie, with Ruby and Meg who seem to be off in their own little world. Dean is 90% sure that his attempts to put a buffer between himself and Bela are completely transparent, but whatever.

Before they’re even sitting down Jo raises her eyebrows at Dean, her gaze flicking over to the small space between himself and Bela.

“Howdy, Dean,” Garth says with a goofy grin, oblivious to the tension. “Who’s this fine lady?”

“Bela,” she answers, before Dean has the chance to say anything. Jo’s eyebrows creep up higher. It isn’t hard to guess what’s going on in that head of hers.

“Hi,” Charlie says with a slightly awkward smile, shifting nervously in her seat. “Uh, welcome!”

Dean snorts.

“So what’s goin’ on today kids?” Dean asks, trying to shift the conversation. Garth being completely unaware helps him out quite a bit. He launches into some longwinded list of options for how to entertain themselves, but Bela seems uninterested. She sticks a piece of fruit in her mouth and leans close to Dean’s ear, the distance between them so thin that Dean is sure she’s going to touch him again. She doesn’t, though. Impressively enough.

He hears Bela inhale to speak when Jo beats her to it, cutting Garth off mid sentence.

“We’re going to play fetch,” she says through gritted teeth, crossing her arms. Dean chokes on his food.

“We are?” Charlie asks, getting a punch in the arm. “Ow! The hell…I mean yeah, dude. Fetch. Or whatever.” She glares at Jo, but the other girl doesn’t notice.

Bela draws back a few inches and arches an eyebrow at Jo. “Fetch?”

Jo smiles, a predatory thing that has Dean chewing his cheek so that he doesn’t laugh.
“You never played, sweetie?”
Bela seems unperturbed.
“I’m quite a fast learner.”
“Alright!” Charlie interrupts, clapping her hands. “I’ll play games master. You guys want to team up?”
Bela’s eyes catch Dean’s immediately, at the same time that Garth claims Jo as his partner.
“Absolutely.”
The game is simple. Charlie takes three objects into the woods, one for each team, and hides them. Bela and Dean end up paired, Jo and Garth, and Ruby and Meg decide to join. First pair to find their object and return it to Charlie at the entrance to the Bunker wins. They play this with the soldiers mostly during training, but it’s a fun relief for the Hunters and older soldiers too as practice. By now Dean knows most of Charlie’s really good hiding places, so he thinks it won’t be too hard to get through this fast. It’ll mostly be a matter of deciding which hiding place she’s chosen.

They all finish breakfast while Charlie goes out to do her hiding, taking three goofy looking stuffed toys with her from the nursery. The six of them meet her outside afterwards.

“Thumbs or no thumbs?” she asks, already kind of knowing the answer. Rufus sometimes liked to play without shifting, to test their noses, but mostly when they played for fun they let the animals out to roam.

“Thumbs” Bela says, at the exact same second that Jo snorts and says “no thumbs”. Another icy glare passes between them.

“We never play thumbs.”
“How dull.”

Dean is pretty sure that steam is about to start blowing out of Jo’s ears. Unfortunately Garth, Meg, and Ruby all seem to agree. Ruby and Meg just seem happy to see Jo so put out. Charlie looks apologetic for even asking, but Dean doesn’t blame her.

“That’s settled then. Good luck, see you bitches later.”

With that she disappears inside, leaving them to their hunt. Dean grabs Jo’s arm before she stalks away.

“You gotta relax, kid,” he says low, demanding,

“You know what she’s doing, right?” Jo snaps, tugging her arm away. “Tell me you’re not that stupid.”

Dean rolls his eyes at her. “Tryin’ to get through the day, Joanna Beth. Your little plan here isn’t doing much for me.”

She softens a tiny bit, and he means a tiny bit.

“Fine. Sorry. Just…good luck.”

Dean tugs on her ponytail and grins, hoping that it’s not obvious how anxious and riled up his wolf
is. Bela is waiting for him a few feet away, her shoulder leaned up against the trunk of a tree and a self-satisfied look on her face. Her hair lays in curls around her shoulders, and she’s got on tight jeans with heavy boots and a black leather jacket. It’s odd seeing her all dressed like that, since most of the Pack tend to wander around in sweats and t-shirts like Dean has on now. Easier to pull on and off for shifting. His wolf likes how she looks, likes how she holds her shoulders and seems to take up more space than she physically does. He’s impressed by her. The wolf still doesn’t want her though, not like he wants their cat, so Dean doesn’t worry about it.

“Jealous little thing, isn’t she?” Bela hums as he approaches, eyeing Jo as she heads in the other direction. Dean snorts. Now that is hilarious.

“You got no idea. Ready?”

Bela smiles and licks her lips slowly. “Of course.”

With that she grabs his wrist and pulls him away, lifting her nose to sniff at the air around them. Dean pries her fingers off of him again.

“What do you smell?” he sighs, scenting the air along with her. He catches Charlie’s scent fairly easily, but it’s too fresh. Probably a false trail. Bela seems to agree. She follows the trail that Dean scented for a few steps before turning sharply to her right, glancing between two trees before stepping close to one of them and sniffing at the bark.

“That one is too new, there’s another here,” she says thoughtfully, walking in that direction. Dean is begrudgingly impressed. Charlie is a tough sucker to track when she’s trying, but Bela doesn’t seem to be struggling.

“You’re pretty good at this,” Dean says, following along behind her. They’re headed in what he thinks in the right direction, so he’ll let her lead for now. He needs to kill time anyway. The compliment was probably a bad idea though. Bela turns and smiles at him, stepping up into his space.

“Are you impressed?” she says, slipping both hands underneath the hem of his shirt at the same time and sliding her palms over his stomach, touching her thumbs to his hip bones. Dean growls low in his chest and removes her hands.

“I’d be more impressed if you could show some restraint,” he says, feeling the wolf rise to the surface. She just laughs and spins away.

“Ah, that pesky rule. I do seem to be forgetting it quite a lot.”

Yeah. Forgetting it. Bullshit.

“You guys not have that in your pack or somethin’?” Dean asks, trying to be forgiving. He’ll get an earful if he’s rude.

“I don’t have a pack,” Bela says nonchalantly, not even pausing to look at him. Dean almost trips on a tree root and barely catches himself from falling on his face.

“Sorry, what? You were alone?”

Bela just hums and keeps walking. All of this makes a ton more sense now, why she’s like this. He’s never heard of a beta making it as a lone wolf. Ever. Bela’s gotta be tough as hell.

“Shit.”
“Don’t feel sorry for me, little alpha,” she says, winking at him over her shoulder before ducking under a particularly low hanging branch. “I handle myself.”

The wolf grumbles at the nickname, stamping its feet unhappily.

“How’d that happen?” Dean asks, peering around the trees as they walk. They’re still on Charlie’s trail, but not near any of her usual hiding spots. There is one near the northeast border though, and they are sort of headed in that general direction.

“A terrible accident, really,” Bela sighs, sticking her lip out in a dramatic pout. “Humans got the lot of them. Took out our entire den.”

Dean freezes.

“You’re serious?”

Even the thought makes him sick to his stomach, the idea of humans coming in to the Bunker and wiping them out. Putting their hands on his friends and family. On his mate. It makes his wolf want to tear into something, to taste blood on their tongue.

“It was a long time ago,” she says, clearly far less affected than Dean currently is. And it’s a clear dismissal of the topic. Dean gets a uneasy chill at the back of his neck, but he ignores it. There’s obviously more to the story, but he doesn’t plan to dig for it.

They cross over a small stream then, and have to spend a few minutes on the other side picking up another trail. There are criss crossing scents of pack members all around them in twisting, winding, overlapping paths that picking out Charlie’s scent in particular isn’t an easy task. As they head further north, towards one of Charlie’s hiding spots, there’s an overwhelmingly floral scent that isn’t making the job any easier.

“Honeysuckle,” Bela scoffs, going so far as to cover her nose with the back of her hand. “Tricky. I can’t smell a thing.”

“One of her favorite tricks,” Dean laughs, shaking his head. Covering his nose doesn’t sound like such a bad idea, the sweet scent is going straight to his head.

It means they’re getting close though, which is a good thing. Bela wanders a few steps further away before abruptly turning and stepping right up into his space again, sticking her nose against his throat and inhaling deeply. *Scenting* him.

“What the fuck!” Dean snaps, stumbling backwards and tripping over a root as he goes, falling flat on his ass. Bela opens her eyes and flutters her eyelashes happily.

“Just clearing up my nose. You want some?” As she says it she tilts her neck to the side, baring her throat to him.

Dean gets an instinctual push to *bite* that barely has time to form in his brain before he’s growling and pulling himself to his feet.

“That doesn’t belong to you,” he says, hearing the wolf in his voice. Bela stands her ground, even as he looms over her.

“Is that a no, then?”

“That’s a fuck no.”
Dean pushes past her and stomps away, deciding that he’s done playing this game. There’s a hollowed out log a couple hundred feet away, absolutely surrounded by honeysuckle, and he’s pretty sure that’s where their toy will be. Charlie hasn’t used this one since they were kids, but there’s a good chance it’ll be there. He hopes. Dean doesn’t even know if Bela follows him, but he doesn’t care. He needs a second to breathe anyway.

Luckily he turns out to be right, and the stuffed toy is waiting for them inside the rotting stump.

“Got it,” he grumbles, hoping she’s within hearing distance. All he can fucking smell right now are the damn flowers.

“Good job, alpha,” she purrs into his ear, pressing herself up against his back and sliding her hands around to his stomach. Dean immediately throws the toy down on the ground and pulls roughly away from her.

“Bela, I fucking to—”

Before Dean can even get a full sentence out Bela is laughing, snatching the toy off the ground and slipping away behind some trees. Apparently the game isn’t over. Dean rolls his eyes and takes the couple of steps up to said trees, putting his hand on a trunk and looking behind it, fully expecting to see her standing there.

He’s wrong.

“What the fuck,” he grumbles, stepping around the tree and looking around. It’s like she disappeared into thin air. He follows her trail for a few feet before he feels a hand at his nape.

“What are you looking at?”

He spins to see Bela standing behind him.

“Quit doing that.”

“Doing what?” she says, all wide-eyed innocence. Dean lets her hear the rumble in his chest, but she just steps towards him and tilts her head, showing off her long neck and dangling the toy in front of his face. “Come on, alpha. You can do better than that.”

She leans into his space and inhales, her pupils dilating and her own scent growing stronger as she does. Then, quick as she appeared, she disappears again behind another damn tree. Dean doesn’t follow right away, trying to calm himself down.

Bela is baiting him. He knows that’s what she’s doing. Playing off every damn instinct he’s got. Telling him to hunt, to reclaim their prize, to prove himself, to chase a potential mate. Except fuck that last one. Instincts that are already jacked up, even without her help. He brings the image of Cas to the forefront of his mind, but his wolf is uninterested. All it cares about is showing this beta how much of an alpha they are. And the wolf can be rather persuasive.

Dean wanders around a couple more trees before his patience gives out.

“I’m not playing chase with you, Bela,” he yells in the general direction that he thinks she’s in. He’s trying not to care, but the instinct to hunt is a strong one.

“Why not?” she says from behind him, trailing her fingers across the back of his shoulders. He doesn’t turn around that time, and tries not to let his muscles tense. If she can’t already smell his irritation, he doesn’t want to tip her off.
“Because I’m not stupid,” he says, shrugging her hand off. “And I know you’re trying to piss me off.”

“Why ever would I do that?” she says, coming around to his front so that they are face to face. Dean shakes his head and drags a hand over his face. He’s got a pretty good idea. Because Bela isn’t trying to win Dean over, she’s trying to win over the wolf. And his animal is nothing if not predictable in what it likes.

“You tell me,” he says instead, keeping his thoughts internal. She smiles flirtatiously and disappears.

The whole thing is eerily similar to the other day with Cas, with a sour flavor. This isn’t fun for him, chasing this girl all over the forest, having her purposefully rile him up when he works so hard to maintain his self-control. She thinks the key to his wolf is just to push push push. And while it’s definitely succeeding in getting the wolf out to play, it’s just pissing him off. Dean can feel his control slipping with every second, the days away from Cas starting to take their toll.

He wants to just give up and walk away. Just fucking leave already. But he’s pretty sure that Bela won’t be happy if he disappears on her with no explanation, and he doesn’t need any more fucking heat from his dad.

“I’ll make you a deal!” Dean calls out, listening intently for her voice. It appears, again, behind him.

“I’m listening.”

Dean growls and rolls his shoulders back, glancing at the toy dangling from her finger and trying unsuccessfully to push the wolf away. He’s only still holding onto the reigns here cause his animal is letting him, and he knows that.

“I catch you, you give me that thing and then you leave me alone and let me do whatever I want. Same goes if you win.”

“Anything I want?” she smiles, trailing a finger down his chest. Dean lets her, just to make his point.

“Anything you want.”

“Done.”

With that she’s gone. Dean closes his eyes and lets the wolf out to play, trusting him to get them the fuck out of here. The wolf takes its time, examining each thread of scent before following any of them. Their nose is weaker in this form, without their fur, but the wolf can manage.

It’s faint, a tiny thing, a wisp of fresh scent just barely clinging to the bark of a tree. Bela probably touched her fingers to it as she walked by. It’s something, though. The wolf takes a couple of steps in that direction, peeking around the thick trunk, only to see Bela standing a few feet away with her back to him. She’s clearly expecting him to come from the other direction, where the heavier scent trail leads. He stalks up to her and she only notices at the last second, just enough time for her to turn on the spot before he’s pinning her up against the bark of the tree, a growl ripping out of his throat. He uses his whole body, but to be honest he doesn’t care much. All he cares about is a successful hunt.

“Good job, alpha,” she breathes, her eyes wide and hungry. She smiles and licks her lips, and gets a low growl in response.

“We caught you,” the wolf rumbles while he pries the toy out of her hands, and her smile grows. She’s clearly pleased with herself, and she smells it too. The wolf actually puffs up his chest and
preens at the attention. Smug bastard.

“Now,” she says, her hips shifting and her back arching into him. “I, for one, think we should really have angry sex.”

The wolf snorts, and Dean is equally as amused. Doesn’t this beta know that they have a cat? A gorgeous, wild, perfect cat who is waiting for them? Who is their mate?

“You are not what we want,” the wolf grunts, finally stepping away. Dean might have sugarcoated it a little bit more, but the wolf doesn’t have any interest in that stuff. Plus, this girl has been pushing his buttons all day. So whatever.

“Not even a little bit of fun?” she pouts, staying in his space. She reaches up to touch his face but he snatches her wrist, keeping her paws off of him. “Please, alpha?”

Dean has fucking had it.

He takes a deep breath, and spends a moment thinking of all the things he wants to do with Cas when he gets to that tree. The list is extensive.

“My name,” he says calmly, and for once the wolf steps back to let him speak. “Is Dean. Not alpha. Now you can walk back to the den on your own two feet, or I can escort you. Your choice.”

He sinks all of his dominance into those words, his voice dropping to a lower octave. Bela drops her eyes immediately.

“I’ll walk,” she says, her annoyance evident in her tone.

Dean internally heaves a sigh of relief. Thank god.

As soon as she’s out of sight he spins and heads toward the south border, a particular set of blue eyes washing everything else from his mind.

***

Dean gets up into the treehouse in record speed, and finds Cas on his little couch with a book in his hands. He doesn’t smell super happy, but Dean’s about to change that.

“Hello, Dean,” he says with a quiet smile, standing up to greet him. Dean closes the space between them with two long strides, wrapping his arms around Cas’ waist and kissing him hard.

Cas kisses back for a split second before Dean feels strong hands shove against his chest. He grunts and stumbles backwards, picking up on the shift in scent. Cas isn’t just unhappy. He’s pissed.

“You reek,” he growls, stepping back away from Dean. His brain does a double take.

“I—what?”

“Like a beta. It’s all over you.”

Like a…? Oh. Fuck.

“There’s a really good explanation for that,” Dean says, watching Cas’ face as his mate stalks towards him “I sw—”

“Stop talking,” Cas says, sniffing at Dean’s neck. Dean shuts up. “It’s here,” Cas growls after a
couple seconds, the feeling of his lips on Dean’s skin. “And here,” again, followed by a press of lips. Cas’ fingers slip underneath the hem of his shirt and pull it off over his head. “It’s on your arms, and your chest, and your stomach,” he mumbles, his kisses followed by little nips. Cas is marking him up, carefully, apparently in every spot that Bela touched him. Dean doesn’t care. “Tell me why you’re covered in beta.”

Dean swallows, trying to focus. Now is a really bad time for him to realize that Cas doesn’t know about the girls the Council has been sending his way, but all he can really do is fess up.

“The Council, they need me to find a mate. The Pack does. So they invited in five wolves who wanted to mate with me to give it a shot.”

“You have a mate.” Cas pulls back slowly, his blue eyes fiery. The anger in his scent doubles. Dean doesn’t want to keep talking, but Cas is staring at him waiting so he does.

“I know. I wasn’t serious about any of it. Uh, obviously. Just spent some time with them, to appease the Council. The girl today, Bela, she kept just touching me and—”

Cas kisses him and pushes him backwards towards the stairs, hard enough that Dean ends up on his ass a few steps up with Cas straddling his lap. He tries to nudge his mate off so he can stand and get upstairs, but that doesn’t seem to be working. Instead of trying again Dean gives in, pressing back against Cas and answering his angry growls.

“Nothing happened,” Dean mumbles against his lips, his breathing heavy.

“I know,” Cas snaps, biting Dean’s bottom lip and pushing him down onto his back, licking at the redness. The edges of the stairs are digging into his back muscles, but Cas doesn’t seem to care in the slightest. “I can smell you.”

“Then wh—”

“Every time you leave here,” Cas continues, like Dean hadn’t even spoken, “every time, you scrub me off your skin like I’m something shameful. And then you let some beta mark you.” He pulls back just slightly, leaning over Dean with their lips only centimeters apart. He’s breathing heavy, but his eyes are clear and 100% Cas. Fucking pissed off Cas, but Cas. “Like you are hers. But you aren’t. You are mine and she will know next time she tries to touch you.”

And shit if that isn’t the hottest thing to ever come out of his cat’s mouth.

It takes Cas a split second to shove Dean’s pants down far enough to free his cock, and before Dean can even get excited Cas is sinking down onto him. Cas’ moan is long, accompanied by the whine that’s ripped from Dean’s throat and the heavy thud as he throws his head back and whacks it on the stairs.

“Fuck,” he growls, his brain exploding into fireworks. Cas arches his back and then moves, tilting his hips from front to back and using his knees on either side of Deans hips to raise himself up and sink back down. There isn’t a single coherent thought in Dean’s head, every tiny cell dedicated to memorizing every sensory detail. The heat and tightness of his mate, the smell of his slick and both of their arousal in the air, the needy whimpers as Cas rides him, the taste of his lips whenever Cas leans down to brush their mouths together or to push his tongue into Dean’s mouth.

Dean tries to reach for Cas’ hips, but his cat isn’t having it. He shoves Dean’s hands away twice before finally threading their fingers together, which holy shit just makes it so much better, the extra contact. Then Cas pins his hands down on the stairs, resting their foreheads together with a
tenderness that’s entirely unexpected next to the hard intensity of everything else.

Dean plants his feet on the stairs below him, supporting Cas’ weight and pushing up with his legs. Cas’ fingers are squeezing tight, his teeth and tongue leaving little marks and bites all over Dean’s chest, and there is absolutely no doubt which one of them is dominant right now. But Cas needs it, so Dean lets him take and claim as much as he wants. And really, Dean’s not convinced that this whole being submissive thing is all that bad. He’d take his mate in his lap any day, especially with how unafraid Cas is to do what he wants. When Dean’s knot starts to catch Cas groans and grinds his hips down, making Dean’s eyes roll back in his head.

“Please, Dean,” Cas whimpers, pulling him into a sitting position so their chests are pressed together. Cas bares his neck, long and lean, and uses his grip on the back of Dean’s neck to pull his lips up to the skin. “Please.”

It takes Dean a second to realize what Cas is asking for.

A bite.

Cas grinds down one more time and Dean is coming, his knot swelling, and before he can stop himself his teeth are against the skin of Cas’ neck. Cas whines as he comes, and Dean’s skin is literally burning with the need to bite down, to finally make Cas his. He needs it. Just one bite. It would be so easy. So easy.

A growl rips out of Dean’s throat, but somehow he manages not to bite down, not enough to break the skin. Cas whines again, long and loud, and Dean can smell how unhappy his mate is. It makes his wolf angry, and his whole body and mind comes screeching to a halt.

“I can’t,” Dean says quietly against the skin of his neck, holding him tight. “Cas you know I can’t yet.”

Cas snarls and shoves him away, putting as much distance between them as possible considering how they’re still tied. He drops his head into his hands and covers his face, his shoulders shivering, and it’s right then that Dean realizes just how badly he’s fucked up.
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

“Then why don’t you want me?”

Chapter Notes

Y’all a bunch of Cas fans in here aren’t you? No sympathy for our poor Dean... In fairness, I did already kind of know you’d hate me for that ending. So. But with the knowledge that you guys are exactly one chapter away from going full on angry mob at me, here’s a chapter of sex and fluff told largely from Cas’ perspective. Are you happy now?!?!?!

Also SORRY this is a little bit late. But it's still Sunday where I am, so it's not really late. Right??? Lastly, a little warning for some /////very///// brief and /////very///// vague mentions/implications of mpreg here. Just in case.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Cas…”

“Don’t,” he says, his voice cracking.

“Please talk to me, kitten,” Dean says gently, protectiveness oozing out of his pores. Only he’s the one hurting his mate. He sits up and leans closer, but is careful to keep his hands at his sides. He doesn’t think Cas needs him to be touching him right now; or, at least, touching him more. Dean can’t really help that they’re already knotted.

“Do you think this is easy for me?” he says, finally dropping his hands and looking up at Dean. He notices for the first time how tired Cas’ blue eyes look.

“I—"

“To just sit around here and wait? While you run around with pretty little betas?”

“That’s not what I was doing, and you know that,” Dean breathes. He’s pretty sure this isn’t about Bela specifically, or any of the other girls specifically.

“Isn’t it, though?” Cas says, his voice breaking. “Are they that preferable to me, because they are wolves?”

“What?” Dean says, shock wracking his body. No way Cas thinks there is anyone that Dean wants more than him. Dean tries to wrap his arms around Cas’ waist, but Cas pushes his hands away. “Cas, I don’t want them. I never wanted them. You are everything to me. You are—”

“Then why don’t you want me?”
His voice is soft, softer than Dean has ever heard. He sounds goddamn breakable. And Dean made him sound like that.

“Wh-what?” Dean stutters, his voice hoarse and unsure.

“Every instinct in my body is screaming,” Cas says, his voice slightly stronger. “Take me alpha, make me yours alpha,” his tone is mocking, too high-pitched, and Dean can hear how much he hates saying it out loud. “I can’t control it, and I can feel it reaching out for you. I know I told you the bond wasn’t important to me, but...how can you say no to this?”

Cas’ blue eyes meet his own, and Dean’s heart crumbles into pieces. Cas is so strong and tough and unafraid, it’s easy to forget how much power Dean really has over him. He knows, because Cas has the same power over Dean. Dean reaches up and cups Cas’ cheeks, touches their foreheads together. Cas doesn’t pull away, and for that he’s grateful.

“Because we aren’t mated yet, you think I don’t want you? You think I’d pick somebody else over you?”

“Perhaps,” Cas says softly, touching the corner of Dean’s jaw with careful fingers.

Dean closes his eyes, valiantly trying to get control of himself. His wolf is angry, and it’s all directed inward. He did this. He caused all of this, this entire fight.

“You are it for me, Cas.”

Cas blinks at him, his eyes red rimmed and wet and so goddamn heavy.

“I want you more than anything, but I want you to be safe. And right now, if I went home mated, I can’t—I can’t protect you. I don’t know that I could protect you. From what might happen. And I can’t—”

He manages to maintain his calm a lot better than he did when he said the same thing to Jo, but he can hear the panic rising in his voice with every stuttered word. He’s pretty sure it’s only because he has practically full body contact with his mate that he’s able to speak at all, and even so he can feel his wolf getting riled up.

“Your father wouldn’t hurt me,” Cas says, sounding so sure. But Dean doesn’t believe it. He honestly doesn’t know what his dad would do right now. Hurting Cas for the sake of the Pack in an effort to break their bond or to keep Dean away from him doesn’t seem too far out of the realm of possibility.

“You don’t know my dad. What he’d do to protect the Pack. But I promise you, Cas. I promise. I’ll talk to him when I go home. And the next time I see you, we’ll be mated.”

“Okay,” Cas breathes, softening a little bit against him. Dean feels like a crushing weight has been lifted off his chest, like he can breathe again.

“And I’m sorry. For dragging you through this shit. I’m so fucking sorry.”

Cas kisses him then, soft and warm, and Dean doesn’t feel like he deserves it but he takes it anyway.

“I am sorry for letting my hormones get the best of me.”

Dean pulls him closer and nuzzles his neck. “Don’t apologize for that. Don’t apologize for anything. This is on me.”
Cas hums and curls around him, which gives Dean a *scary* amount of relief.

"And Dean?"

"Yeah, Cas?"

"If that beta, or anyone else for that matter, puts their hands on you ever again," he says, his voice calm and even like he's talking about the damn weather. "I will remove their lungs from their chest cavity and you will be exiled from this tree for as long as I see fit." Cas pulls back and places one last searing kiss on Dean's lips, gripping his nape with long fingers as he does. "Clear?"

Dean suppresses a smile. There's his fiery little cat.

"Crystal."

They sit on those stairs, wildly uncomfortable as they are, just holding on to each other for a long time. They kiss occasionally, but mostly they just touch each other innocently. Cas tracing the freckles on Dean’s shoulders, Dean running a finger along the lines of muscle on Cas’ back. They don’t even really talk, not until it’s gotten late and Cas mumbles something about wanting to sleep. Dean stands easily, his knot long since shrunk, carrying Cas up the stairs with him. Cas wraps all six feet of himself around Dean’s torso, his purr almost inaudible.

They fall asleep under a pile of blankets, hidden away from the world, Cas’ back against Dean’s chest and their limbs tangled together. Dean empties his mind and focuses on his mate, letting everything else fade away. Until the sun comes up, until the raw exposed nerves have been soothed by a night of sleeping in each other’s arms, nothing else exists. Not for Dean. There are no humans, no opposing packs, no dangers to his mate. For right now they are safe, his wolf can protect them.

Everything else can wait until morning.

***

Castiel untangles himself from Dean’s side, pulling on pants, shuffling over to the window, and sitting against the wall. This way he can lean his chin against the windowsill and watch the trees, his eyes following two squirrels that are jumping around.

He’s tired, in a way that he knows isn’t physical. He’s glad that he managed to vaguely talk to Dean last night, about how hard this is on him, but he doesn’t feel any better. Though Castiel isn’t angry at *Dean* anymore, he’s still frustrated. Having a mate while not really having a mate is wrecking havoc on his instincts, which he doesn’t enjoy being influenced by in the first place. Castiel had certainly underestimated how hard this would be, but he’d also underestimated how many obstacles would get in their way. He thinks, had it not been for the kidnappings, this might have been sorted out a while ago. As it is, he and Dean have a lot to talk about.

He knows, realistically, that he should have told Dean about what was happening after Samandriel disappeared. Though even then, none of them had been *sure* that there was anything going on, let alone that humans were involved. Castiel had only become privy to that specific piece of information recently, after Rachel was taken. He wonders sort of absentely if the wolves know anything about it, anything about the humans, about what they’re doing, that they aren’t telling the Arch. Though if they do, he doubts Dean knows about it.

Castiel is fairly certain Dean wakes up because he moved, since his wolf only wakes up enough to move across the room and lay his head in Castiel’s lap. He seems to decide to forego pants, but Castiel barely notices.
“You okay, kitten?” Dean mumbles tiredly, wrapping his strong arms around Castiel’s waist. Castiel’s hands automatically find their way to Dean’s shoulders, stroking the hair at his nape and massaging his spine.

“Not really,” Castiel sighs. Dean shifts automatically, rolling over so their eyes can meet. Castiel can smell his worry, and it is one of those rare times when he can smell a little bit of himself on his mate. It settles some deep, primal part of himself.

“Talk to me?” Dean asks, running a rough hand up the outside of Castiel’s arm.

Castiel hesitates for a second, not really sure where he should start. “Perhaps we should start with what you know.”

Dean sighs and nods, taking a deep, heavy breath and rubbing his eyes before he starts.

“Couple days ago, dunno, sometime, we had some humans encroach on our territory. There was a bunch of shit about it, but turns out they weren’t up to anything so we dropped it. Probably just some lost hikers, or a coupla hunters who came out too far.”

“Why didn’t you tell me about that?” Castiel asks, furrowing his eyebrows and trying not to be annoyed.

“Dunno. Seemed like you guys weren’t having issues, and I didn’t want to drag you into the middle of it. Guess I was wrong, though,” Dean pauses and takes another deep breath. “Had a long meeting the other day with the Council. Apparently y’all guys have declared some kind of, leopards versus humans war that we aren’t allowed to get in the middle of.”

Castiel snorts. The humans would twist it like that, try to make it seem like this was his pack’s fault. And he was definitely right in assuming that Dean doesn’t know about the Council meeting with the Arch.

“That’s what your Council told you?”

“Not the Council. Crowley, president of the human embassy. Sent us a personal letter telling us to butt the fuck out, or else. Said you guys were being openly hostile, that you even attacked an innocent. Some little hiker.”

Now that is surprising. As far as Castiel knows, there haven’t been any humans attacked in any of their territories. Which means it must have happened when the humans tried to take one of his pack. He gets a bitter sort of satisfaction from that, knowing that at least one of the humans paid for what they are doing.

“Good. One of them was able to defend themselves.”

It’s Dean’s turn to be surprised this time. He sits up and shifts until they are facing each other, protectiveness practically melting off of him in waves.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Three leopards have gone missing,” Castiel says, quickly like he’s ripping off a bandaid. “I am glad to hear that one of them got a few shots in against the human who took them.”

Dean’s jaw might as well be on the floor. It takes him a second before it sinks in, then his eyes darken and a rumbling growl erupts out of his chest.
“Three? Three? Why the fuck didn’t you tell me about this, Cas! You could’ve been the fourth! What the fuck were you thinking?”

Castiel puffs up his chest and glares back. He doesn’t need Dean going all angry alpha on him right now.

“I am perfectly capable of protecting myself,” Castiel snaps. “And I’m telling you now. We weren’t sure that there was even foul play, not until the third kidnapping, since it is not uncommon for leopards to migrate alone.”

Dean scoffs. “So, what? You thought they just wandered off by choice?”

“It was a possibility. And until very recently we didn’t know that the humans were behind it. There was no scent trail, no tracks, no nothing. It was only after Rachel that we decided that there is, realistically, no other option.”

Dean drags his hands through his hair, smelling even angrier.

“Fuck,” he swears under his breath. “I fucking knew they were up to something. Fucking fuck.”

“Use words, Dean,” Castiel sighs. He’s not sure what, exactly, Dean knows, but it’s something.

“After Crowley sent us that message, the Council agreed not to interfere in your little fight. Probably because the humans know they can’t take us both. Me and Kev, we went out to the embassy and agreed to their terms in person.” Dean reaches out and takes both of Castiel’s hands, threading their fingers together. “They were wearing scent blockers, Cas. All of them.”

Castiel’s stomach drops.

“That’s why we couldn’t smell them, or track them.”

Dean just nods, and Castiel feels like he’s going to be sick. They really do have Inias and Samandriel, and now Rachel too. The humans actually have them.

Castiel doesn’t resist when Dean pulls him forward, climbing into his lap and tucking his head underneath Dean’s chin. His mate’s arms come around him automatically, rough hands against his skin, and he is immensely thankful for the comfort.

“I’ll talk to the Council when I’m home. No way they let this fly. We’ll help you guys. And we’ll find them.”

“They already know, Dean.”

His wolf goes still.

“Sorry, what?”

Castiel leans back just enough to make eye contact. “The Arch and the Council have met. Your Council, they know about the kidnappings. We’ve told them. They do not want to be involved. We thought they might help, but we were wrong.”

The muscles in Dean’s jaw tick, his fingers tight against Castiel’s skin. His anger is like a thick cloud all around them, the air heavy. Castiel can feel calming waves seeping out of his skin, his body automatically trying to calm Dean down, to take the edge off. It only kind of seems to work.

“Something is going on. It has to be. They’re not—They wouldn’t—”
“I know,” Castiel says, cutting him off. He thinks he knows how Dean feels, betrayed by his own leaders. Some other explanation, any other explanation, would be preferable to knowing that the Council voluntarily chose not to help. Castiel hopes, partially for Dean and partially for his pack, that there is something else going on.

“I’ll change their minds,” he says, touching their foreheads together. “Whatever I have to do. I’ll get them on your side.”

The tone of Dean’s voice is so immensely serious and protective, Castiel knows he’s not kidding. He pulls back to look at Dean, catching his green gaze and cupping his stubbled jaw with a hand.

“Big tough alpha, huh?”

“Shut up.”

Dean kisses him, harder than usual, his arms tightening further. Castiel shifts so they are chest to chest, wrapping his legs around Dean’s waist and cupping either side of his neck with his hands, stroking his thumbs over the corners of his jaw. Dean’s hands slide down his back to his hips, pulling him closer. Castiel leans into him and parts his lips with his tongue, swallowing Dean’s moan and groaning himself when he smells his alpha’s arousal in the air. He can feel it underneath him, too, and all he wants in that moment is to feel his mate inside of him, to move together and remind his panther that Dean is safe in his arms. Even if Inias and Samandriel and Rachel aren’t safe at all.

“Dean—”

He’s cut off with a kiss, and a murmured *I know*. They shift around awkwardly to get Castiel’s pants off, and it could’ve been much easier but neither of them is willing to move very far from the other. Still they manage, and Castiel wants to sink right down onto Dean’s erection but he’s stopped.

“Shh. Slow down. We have time.”

Time, yes. But Castiel doesn’t want to waste it.

“Then hurry up,” he says, nipping Dean’s lip. His mate huffs a laugh and complies, slipping a finger into him that already has Castiel whining. He wants *more*. Dean seems to get it, because he moves his hands and then he’s splitting Castiel open and it is everything he needs.

A pathetic little whimper escapes his throat and he practically clings to Dean, breathing against him. He wants to hate it, he should hate it, how he turns into every bit the needy little submissive as soon as Dean’s hands are on him. Somehow, he doesn’t. He can want what he wants, act how he wants to act, because Dean won’t think less of him. It’s okay for him to need his alpha, to need his mate, because Dean needs him too. Dean gets him, knows him, and wants him as he is. Contradictions and all.

Castiel shifts his hips and Dean groans, threading his fingers into Castiel’s hair and pulling his mouth down. The intensity of their kisses doesn’t match the slow, lazy rolls of Castiel’s hips, but neither of them cares. This is more about proximity than anything else, about reassurance.

Things don’t pick up until Dean lays out on his back, slightly bending his knees. Castiel stays sitting up with his knees planted on either side of Dean’s torso, leaning slightly back against his mate’s knees. With Dean’s hands on his hips and his knees on the ground he lifts up and slides back down, groaning at the stretch and push of Dean’s cock inside of him.

“*Fuck,*” Dean swears, his voice low and raspy, his eyes fixed between Castiel’s legs. With how they’re spread, Dean must have a pretty good view of how his cock slides in and out of Castiel’s
slick soaked hole. “Kitten you look so good, you feel so good.”

Dean’s voice is rumbling, almost a growl, and Castiel can hear the wolf under his skin, can feel the animal energy of him. It makes him feel powerful, how much he can affect his wolf.

"Do I?" Castiel says with a slight twitch of his lips, his own voice breathy. He rolls his hips and arches his back for emphasis, paying as much attention as he can manage to the changes in Dean’s breaths, in his voice. “Tell me how I look.”

“Sweaty, and wet, and that fuckin’ blush all over you,” Dean grits out as his gaze burns across Castiel’s chest, pulling his hips down and grinding up hard in retaliation. Castiel is glad for Dean’s knees to hold him up, because the brush against his prostate sends him reeling. “And still mouthing off,” Dean laughs, his smile hungry.

“Just how you like me,” Castiel fires back, smiling, the speed of his hips increasing with each second. Some part of him, a rather large part, feels the burning sarcasm in those words. Though Dean certainly doesn’t take them that way.

“Fucking right,” Dean growls, his pride practically shining out of him. Castiel isn’t sure when he’ll get used to that, Dean being proud of how he is. But that’s something to think about when he’s not in the middle of, frankly, really fucking fantastic sex. “Stretched around my knot, and cheeky as ever. I fuckin’ love you like this.”

And that hits something deep inside him, because a bolt of pleasure shoots up his spine and he’s crying out Dean’s name.

“I got you, baby, I got you,” Dean mumbles through drawn out pleasured noises, his knot catching and keeping Castiel tight against him. Dean grinds up one more time and Castiel comes, painting Dean’s chest and stomach. Dean lets out a colorful stream of curse words and several more rolls of Castiel’s hips as his orgasm rocks him has Dean coming, his knot swelling and filling Castiel to the brim.

Castiel slumps back against Dean’s knees, panting and closing his eyes and focusing on the feeling of Dean emptying himself. He’d never understood the appeal, before he’d met Dean, of being filled. Now he does. Now he wants every ounce of his mate’s come, wants to pull him through as many orgasms as his body will allow. He doesn’t ever want to be separated, doesn’t ever want to lose this.

Even the idea of being filled with pups, of carrying something that is theirs…well. It doesn’t sound that bad. It sounds kind of good. And it certainly makes his panther happy. But mostly just because it’s Dean, and having that together…

Yeah. He would like that.

He knows Dean would, too. He doesn’t miss the way Dean’s hands slide over his belly as he sits up, or the way he scents Castiel’s neck. It’s an instinctual thing, the alpha checking to see if their mating was successful, and he’s pretty sure Dean isn’t doing it on purpose. It still makes his stomach flutter, in a way that isn’t unpleasant.

Castiel curls around him, wrapping long arms around his neck and long legs around his waist. He feels Dean groan against his skin as he empties himself again, and it makes Castiel shiver. Castiel’s lips find their way to Dean’s neck, kissing and nipping underneath his jaw. He can’t bite, he knows that, so he starts working on a mark instead, one that’s dark and will stick around. If Dean minds he doesn’t say it, and the way his fingers dig into Castiel’s back suggests that he definitely doesn’t mind.
Quiet sighs and moans pass between them, and Castiel lazily works on Dean’s neck until his mate drags their lips together. Then he melts into his mouth, memorizing his taste and the smell of his pure contentment. Castiel thinks he might be the one who says *I love you* first, but it could’ve been Dean. It doesn’t matter. Once it’s out it flows back and forth, is said through kisses, through needy breaths, is pressed into flushed skin and mumbled in broken voices.

It’s overwhelming, how much Castiel needs this wolf. Completely overwhelming, and somehow completely okay. Because it isn’t crippling, isn’t confining, doesn’t make him weaker. It makes him stronger, to have Dean in his arms. To have this mate at his side.

And he loves him.

Chapter End Notes

Soak it up, shit's about to get bad. See y'all next Sunday :)
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

“I imagine I’ll see you soon then.”

Chapter Notes

For those of you that are worried, this will have a happy ending. Promise.

And y'all guys were so so lovely and kind and wonderful last week, and I managed to buckle down and get FOUR new chapters written, so there WILL be a mid-week update this week. Check back Wednesday, and I'll see you guys then :)

They don’t pull apart, even when they are physically able. They stay close, curled up in the space below the window, and talk.

“So, uh,” Dean clears his throat awkwardly. “I, um. Got a rut comin’ up. I think it’ll be early, ‘cause, you know. Mate, and all that.”

Cas huffs a laugh and kisses him, licking at the seam of his mouth, his eyes warm.

“You better be spending it here.”

“Is that—would that be okay? If I did? I might not…be myself.” Dean isn’t used to being so unsure of himself, but if he’s learned one thing thus far it’s that Cas does crazy things to his self control.

“I’m aware. But the alpha is still Dean. Some extra hormones flowing, sure, but still you.” He pauses and lays a hand on Dean’s cheek, running a thumb across his bottom lip. “You have to trust me that I’m okay with this, that I want this with you. Is that enough?”

“Yeah?”

Cas actually laughs at that. “Of course, puppy. I’ve never gotten an alpha through a rut before, obviously, but I fully intend to make this the best rut you’ve had. I think I have a fair chance.”

“I think you have more than a fair chance,” Dean rumbles, mouthing at his neck and grinning against his skin. He can smell Cas’ excitement on his skin, and it makes him wish his rut was happening right now.

“I’ll take that challenge,” his mate laughs, snuggling closer.

Eventually, when they do separate, they wander down to the river to wash off. It’s a warm day, and Dean feels kind of sweaty and gross even if he does like being covered in Cas. So they grab some sweats and towels, and Dean grabs his radio so he can check in with Sam when they’re done, and they stroll out to the stream. The cool water feels heavenly on his skin, and they end up just sitting in the slow current for a while, flicking water at each other. More than once Dean gives in to the urge to
kiss the little smiles that appear on Cas’ lips.

“Can I ask something?” Dean says after a while. Cas just hums and nods. “So you just come here when you gotta get clean, but what does everybody else do? Does anybody have like, a shower?”

Cas raises his eyebrows and laughs.

“Here I was preparing for something serious.”

“This is serious. Hygiene is important.”

“But of course,” Cas nods solemnly, tossing a rock towards Dean so that he gets lightly splashed. Dean narrows his eyes. “It depends on who you ask. Many of us use this stream. Balthazar, I think, has some form of running water. Perhaps not what you would call a shower. He does have an indoor bath, though.”

“Balthazar’s the lady's man, right? The one you and Anna were talking about? So he’s gotta impress them with his bath.”

Dean’s actually pretty serious about that, but Cas practically falls over laughing.

“I hope you realize that I am telling him you said that the next time I see him,” he says with a smile, his blue eyes practically sparkling. Dean shrugs.

“I figure I’m not wrong then.”

“Not entirely. Though Gabriel, I think, is definitely giving Balthazar a run for his money as far as pack womanizer goes. Or whatever you call it when both genders are involved.”

Dean laughs at that. “So a womanizer and a maneater. Gabe got an indoor bath tub too?”

“Even better,” Castiel says, almost conspiratorially, like he knows some kind of secret. “If you believe what he says, of course. Apparently Gabriel has located some kind of hot springs with, well, aphrodisiacal properties.”

Dean licks his lips slowly, trying to decide if he heard that right and if that word means what he thinks it means. He’s pretty sure it does.

“So. Councilmember Gabriel, head honcho, found a big ol’ nature hot tub that makes you want to get it on?”

Cas smiles and huffs a laugh. “Gabriel tends not to take life too seriously. Besides, our animals aren't monogamous by nature. It's the human half that tells us to mate. Even so, it isn’t so uncommon for us to have several partners that last only a number of days before parting ways.”

“Huh,” Dean breathes. These leopards make less and less sense to him the more he learns. “Dude. Why aren’t we there right now?”

Cas furrows his eyebrows and presses his lips into a line, like he’s really trying to work up a good reason. It’s unfairly appealing.

“Truthfully, I’m not sure the aphrodisiac would affect me much, considering how I already feel around you, Dean.”

Dean freezes, then actually laughs out loud.
"Get over here."

Dean reaches out for him, and is about to pull him in to kiss him silly when his radio crackles.

"Dean?...Dean you there?...C’mon man I need you to answer right now."

Dean swears and leaps out of the river, scrambling to get the radio on.

"Sammy? You there?"

"Thank god," his brother sighs. "You need to get back here. Now. Dad’s already looking for you, and he’s not happy."

Shit.

"What’d you tell him?"

"That you were out for a run and that I’d go find you. You don’t have a lot of time."

"What’s going on?"

Sam hesitates. "No idea. Pretty sure Dad is going to rip into the next person that asks."

"Be there soon," he says, clicking off the radio. When he turns Cas is out of the water, standing with a towel around his shoulders as he pulls his pants on and a worried expression on his face.

"You don’t know what happened?" he says, his eyebrows drawing together.

"Nope," Dean says, patting the water on his skin. He’s about to shift when something occurs to him.

"Cas, you should—I mean why don’t you—I want you to come with me."

Cas freezes. "I’m sorry. What?"

This could be good. Just tear off the band-aid. And then Cas could tell the Council all about the kidnappings and convince them to help. With the added benefit that Dean wouldn’t have to worry about whether or not Cas was okay. His confidence grows a little bit at the thought.

"Yeah. I mean. Why not? We could do this now, ya know? Change their minds. I’m tired of this being a secret."

"Dean, I’m not sure that’s a good idea. Obviously something has happened, and—"

"Something always happens," Dean sighs, trying to be convincing. He doesn’t exactly have a ton of time to do it, though. "Don’t tell me you’re not tired of this."

Cas blinks at him, a tiny frown on his lips. Dean can see the indecision playing across his face.

"Little couple’s dispute, eh?" a voice says, somewhere off to Dean’s left. They both practically jump out of their skin, because neither of them heard that guy coming. "How sad," he says with a put on sad face, sticking out a pouty lip.

"Who are you?" Dean growls, stepping between the stranger and his cat. He’s an alpha, Dean’s almost sure of that. His scent is sharp and damp, and immediately irritating to Dean’s senses. He’s got tousled blonde hair and broad shoulders, along with some stubble on his cheeks that’s probably
meant to look unintentional. His voice is accented, and the relaxedness of his posture annoys the wolf.

“Do control your beast, Cassie. Honestly.” He says it with a wink towards Cas, offering Dean an arrogant smirk.

“Don’t antagonize him,” Cas says, putting a hand on Dean’s chest and stepping between them again. “Dean, this is Balthazar.”

The guy smiles flashily, and Dean puts that name together with the face in front of him. And…oh. So this is Balthazar.

Dean doesn’t like him.

“Dean,” Balthazar says, like he’s tasting each letter. Dean grits his teeth and clenches his jaw. “What a delicious little specimen you are. Quite pretty for an alpha, aren’t you?”

“Sorry,” Dean says, his entire body strung tight. “You’re not my type.”

Balthazar laughs.

“I do like this one, Cassie. Even if he does smell like wet dog.”

“I’ll fucki—”

Cas stops him with a hand on his chest and a sharp look. Dean glares right back at him.

“Get to your point, Balthazar.”

The other leopard rolls his eyes and sighs, mumbling something about the two of them not being any fun. Dean couldn’t care less.

“The Arch respectfully requests your presence,” he says, his tone serious and slightly mocking. He glances at Dean and smirks again, winking at him this time. “Pack business.”

“Why me?” Cas asks, tension bleeding across his shoulders, showing in the crease between his eyebrow. Dean wants to push it away. Balthazar hesitates to answer, his gaze flicking to Dean briefly. So whatever it is, he doesn’t want to say it in front of Dean. Fucking great.

“Michael would prefer not to involve Anna.”

Silence stretches between them. So the Arch is in need of an omega, specifically. Dean doesn’t like the feeling in his gut, the creeping sensation up the back of his neck.

“Cas—”

Cas turns to him and kisses him quiet, threading their fingers together for a brief moment before stepping away.

“I have to go, Dean. Come back when you can.”

He looks so fucking blank, a mask pulled over his face so Dean can’t read anything underneath. It unnerves him, to be so separated, to not be able to tell what Cas is thinking.

“I’m telling them, as soon as I get home. No more of this shit. Okay?”
Cas’ expression softens, just marginally, before hardening once more.

“I imagine I'll see you soon then.”

With that he’s gone, disappearing with Balthazar. The look on the other leopard’s face was…not promising. But Dean shoves it out of his mind, because he doesn’t know what it means anyway.

He’ll be back soon. He knows he will.

***

Predictably, Sam is standing right outside the main doors waiting when Dean arrives. His eyes widen immediately, and Dean already knows what he’s going to say.

“Dean—”

“I know, Sammy,” Dean grunts, brushing past him. He didn’t bother to wash away the scent of Cas, besides just rinsing off in the stream, because he’s fucking tired of this game they’re playing. It ends now.

There’s a bustle of activity right inside the main doors, a huddle of people that looks to be the five Council members, the five Hunters, and several soldiers. Dean freezes, feeling the weight of all their gazes on him. He knew something happened, but…this is serious. His anger gets shoved aside to make room for the focus that he needs to figure out just what the hell is happening here. John steps past Ruby and Garth to face him, his nose wrinkling automatically. He grabs Dean’s chin between his thumb and forefinger, turning his head to get a better look at the side of his neck. Dean hasn’t seen himself, but if Cas’ attentions are anything to go by then he’s got one hell of a shiner there. John grunts, and it almost sounds like he wants to laugh.

“Not even gonna ask who the hell is all over you, ‘cause I know it ain’t that girl.”

“Uh, about that. Dad, I—”

“Not now,” he says distractedly, holding up a hand. Dean snaps his jaw shut. His dad should be able to tell that there’s something off about the smell. From the looks he’s getting from the other Hunters and soldiers, they sure as hell can tell. Even Mary is wide-eyed and staring, her expression too close to horror for Dean’s liking. But his dad hasn’t said a word. Because something else is going on.

Something bigger.

And Dean is panicking.

“Dad, what’s going on?”

The muscles in his jaw tick, rolling waves of pure alpha wafting off of him. “Helluva lot. Right now, we’re meetin’ with the cats. Shouldn’t take long.” He claps a hand on Dean’s shoulder, looking him in the eyes. “Then you and me, we gotta talk. There’s shit you need to know.”

Dean couldn’t agree more. He doesn’t have a clue what happened to freak his dad out so much, but the whole Council seems to be feeling it. Whatever it is, it can’t be good. And the fact that they are meeting with the leopards in person adds a whole nother layer to it. He wants to confront them about the kidnappings, about their stubbornness about getting involved, but the meeting is a good sign. Maybe they’ve changed their minds. So Dean snaps into Hunter mode, putting that conversation aside for the moment.

“Yes, sir. You want me with you?”
John gives a curt nod. “You, Sam, Bobby, and your mom. Might need her.”

They move out less than a minute later, the five of them. It isn’t until they’re walking towards the territory line that Dean’s slow-ass brain puts the pieces together. Why Cas got called away at the exact same time as him, why the leopards needed an omega, why Michael wouldn’t want to involve his mate.

This isn’t going to be a “we’ll help you” kind of meeting. And Cas is going to be there.

Dean’s prediction is confirmed minutes later. Standing at the territory line, just on the other side of the sensors, are five leopards. In the center is a dark haired male, obviously an alpha, an aged look about him despite the youth of his body. One of the Arch, Dean guesses, but he’s not sure which one. He’s flanked on either side by two other alphas. On the one side is a tall, lighter-haired man who looks like he’s seriously trying not to snarl and go full animal on them. On the other side is a shorter man with longer hair, a bored sort of look on his face like he could be doing something much more interesting right now.

Behind them, situated where Dean and Sam are currently, are two more leopards. One a woman, with short, wavy brown hair and bangs across her forehead, her stance stiff and militaristic. The other, unsurprisingly, is Cas. His eyes are dark and stormy, his jaw clenched and his mask firmly in place.

Dean swears internally and tries not to react. If the increased tension in Cas’ shoulders is anything to go by, his mate is attempting to do the same. All Dean can do now is thank the fucking gods that the leopards are downwind.

One of the leopards, the short one in the front, seems to notice. He glances back at Castiel, then at Dean, a knowing smirk spreading across his face. Dean grits his teeth.

“This meeting needs to be over quickly.”

“Thank you for meeting with us,” the dark haired guy says calmly, which Dean thinks is impressive.

“Michael,” Bobby grunts.

The dark haired guy—Michael—nods. “This is Hannah, and Castiel. Two of our Seraphs.” He meets Dean’s eyes briefly before glancing at Sam. When he speaks, it’s clearly for their benefit. “Lucifer, and Gabriel. The other members of the Arch.”

Cas and Hannah both bow their heads briefly at the recognition, as do the other two. So that’s Gabriel.

“Enough formalities,” John says, not bothering to introduce Sam or Dean. “What do you want?”

Straight to the point then.

“You might show us some respect, wolf,” Lucifer says in a low voice. Dean’s wolf automatically perks up, growling in warning. “We have been patient.”

Dean gets a whiff of his dad’s anger before his mom steps in, her soothing scent bringing the intensity down a few notches.

“We mean only to expedite this meeting, if possible.”

Michael nods diplomatically. “There has been a fourth. We are dropping like so many flies.”
Dean tenses. Another kidnapping. Someone else has gone missing. His wolf howls and urges him towards their mate, chanting that they should take their cat in their arms and protect him until these people are caught. So that he is safe.

“That’s not our problem,” John says, his voice unwavering.

Dean’s brain screeches to a halt. They really, truly, don’t give a shit. None of them even batted an eye.

“This will keep happening—” Michael starts, but he doesn’t get far.

“Happening to you,” John says. “Not us.”

Michael inhales deep, but it’s Gabriel who speaks next.

“So you don’t care, then? That they are picking us off?”

“What, can’t handle a couple of humans?” John sneers, his voice condescending. Dean wants to throttle him.

Gabriel laughs bitterly and opens his mouth to say something, but Michael beats him to the punch.

“As I’ve said, we are better equipped to handle them together.”

It’s exactly what Cas had said. A united front. Stand together, so the humans don’t touch either of them. And they aren’t going for it. The Council isn’t going for it. It makes no fucking sense.

“We can’t help you.”

It’s his mom, that speaks. Her voice is so calm, and quiet, but carries none the less. It hits Dean like a punch to the gut. Even worse, she looks directly at him after. Stares right into his eyes, and all he sees in her’s is pity.

She’s speaking as much to the leopards as she is to Dean. Because she gets it now. And she can’t help him.

It’s all Dean can do not to collapse right then and there, not to run across the border and bury his nose in his mate’s throat and never let go. Fuck this. Fuck this pack. Fuck the Council for doing this, for letting the leopards get taken, for doing nothing. He doesn’t need any of them.

Dean looks up and meets Cas’ eyes. The space between them aches. He’s tired of this. So goddamn tired.

And right then, as if God just wants to throw them a big “fuck you”, the wind shifts, leaving the leopards up wind. Dean has about .02 seconds to enjoy the nose-full of Cas’ scent before he’s eating dirt.

Several things happen all at once. John’s eyes snap to Dean, and it’s clear that he’s figured out the source of the scent that Dean is carrying. Then he’s swearing and taking Dean’s feet out from under him before he can even make a sound. Dean gets a mouthful of dirt and a hard knee in the center of his back, his dad’s iron grip on his wrist twisting his arm back painfully. Somewhere far away he thinks he hears Cas yell, but he can’t be sure.

“This meeting is over,” John growls, and one of the leopards says something but Dean can’t hear it. All he hears is them leaving. He can hear Cas struggling, crunching of leaves and snapping of twigs.
under his feet, but he’s getting farther away. Good.

“A fucking *cat*?” John snarls into his ear. “All this time?”

Sam is yelling, and Mary is talking too, but John isn’t listening.

“Let me explain,” Dean says, spitting dirt out of his mouth and trying to twist his neck to speak. “Just let me, I—”

“That, is *over*.”

Then there’s pressure on his neck, and everything goes black.
Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

“And you will never see that cat again. I’ll make sure of it.”

Chapter Notes

Literally guys, I sat and cackled like a crazy person every time one of you commented on last chapter. This is why I gave you a chapter of fluff, cause without it?? I definitely would've gotten murdered already. It was lovely for me to watch you all freak out, not because I ENJOY hurting you or hurting our boys, but y'all are so invested in this story and it truly truly warms my tiny little heart and makes me want to cry from happiness and gratefulness. The comments were basically "fuk u John" and "Dean gtfo and run away with Cas jfc" which was so entertaining.

I don't promise a fix quite yet, but remember. Happy ending.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Everything happens almost too quickly for Castiel to react. The wolf in front—he presumes Dean’s father—whirls on his mate, gets him on the ground and knocks him out in seconds. Gabriel’s hands are holding him back before Castiel even realizes that he’d moved. The other younger alpha, a tall wolf with shaggy hair, snarls and leaps forward only to be momentarily detained by an older alpha with a thick beard.

The wolf omega, a beautiful blonde woman, tends to the shaggy haired alpha first, taking some of the fire out of his eyes. She steps over Dean’s limp form, and that’s almost enough for Castiel to lose it.

The real test, though, is from Dean’s father. The alpha stalks toward the group of leopards, stopping with a few feet between him and Michael. The alpha leopard hasn’t budged, has barely even reacted to the scene in front of him. Lucifer is the same.

“You know about this?” the wolf snarls, baring his teeth. Michael gives him a curt nod. The wild animal gaze of Dean’s father lands on Castiel, even as he struggles to get out of Gabriel’s grasp. “You stay the hell away from my son.”

The panther bares its teeth. “And if I don’t?”

The wolf takes a step forward, dragging a growl out of both Lucifer and Michael.

“I’ll kill you. And I’ll make Dean watch.”

Castiel loses it.

It takes both Hannah and Gabriel to drag Castiel away from his mate. He snarls at both of them, and
they almost let him go. Their instincts tell them to make him happy, to make their omega happy, but the need to keep him safe seems to win out. Damn them.

All Castiel can think is that they are hurting his mate and Dean needs him. His mate needs him. He struggles the entire walk back, tugging his arms and trying to wriggle out of their grasp. Lucifer has to help a few times, but they keep a good grip on him.

They take him back to the cave where the Arch meets, closing the heavy metal doors and blocking his way.

“What the hell was that?” Gabriel snaps at him, smacking the back of his head and sounding annoyed.

“They hurt him,” Castiel growls. He doesn’t care about their treaty, or peace. He cares about Dean. “I need to help him.”

“I know you are protective of your little puppy dog,” Gabriel says, making brief eye contact with Michael before the latter disappears. “But big boy can handle himself.”

“You don’t know them,” Castiel says, pacing around the room. The memory of Dean’s father threatening to put him down circles around his brain. He hated seeing Dean like that, unconscious with his chest in the dirt.

“Neither do you. ”

Castiel continues to pace. He has to get out of here. Has to get back to the wolves. Has to—

“Castiel?”

The sound of Anna’s voice drags him from his thoughts.

“Anna.”

She touches her palm to his cheek.

“Is everything alright?”

“No,” he growls, pushing her hand away and trying not to inhale her scent. He doesn’t want to be calm right now. He wants to feel this anger, this rage, he wants to channel it so that next time he sees those wolves, he can let them taste it.

That molten, fiery desperation only lasts so long. Anna knows what she’s doing, how to deal with a pissed off leopard. How to deal with a pissed off Castiel.

“They hurt him,” Castiel says quietly, slumping down on the floor, all the fight gone out of him. Anna kneels at his side, her arms coming around his shoulders.

“I know. But Dean is strong. Isn’t your mate strong?”

Castiel laughs. He can imagine Dean grinning and wiggling his eyebrows at the compliment.

“He is.”

“What do you think Dean would do if you got hurt, by one of his pack no less, trying to help him?”

Dean would be furious. Dean would cup Castiel’s face in his gentle hands and yell at him and ask
how he could be so stupid. And Castiel would climb into his lap and kiss his worries away, because they have each other.

Except they don't have each other. Castiel should have gone with him this morning, should have held him closer, should have kissed him longer before he left.

“This is my fault. If we weren’t mates, then—”

“Shhh,” Anna says quietly, placing a finger over his lips. “This isn’t easy, and neither is it your fault. But it will work out in the end.”

Castiel isn’t sure anymore that that is true.

“I think I’ll go home,” he sighs, dragging himself to his feet. If Dean comes looking for him, he wants to be sure that he is easily found. And Anna is right. Castiel cannot put himself in the line of fire for the sake of Dean’s safety. That won’t help anyone, if Dean’s father is true to his promise.

Anna smiles and pets his hair. “I’ll bring you something to eat. Go, Castiel. Try to rest.”

He wants to laugh. That isn’t going to happen any time soon.

***

Dean is in his room when he wakes up, and his body aches something fierce. He groans and stretches, sitting up and looking around. No one else is present, and he’d bet that the door is bolted from the outside. He tries it anyway.

When it doesn’t open Dean flops back onto his bed and contemplates the mess of shit that is his life right now. This was worst case scenario for his dad finding out about Cas, which is ironic as hell considering his good intentions when he’d gotten home. But there’s that whole thing about hell and good intentions, so maybe he should have known better.

He doesn’t even want to think about Cas right now. His skin already feels itchy and too warm, and thoughts of his mate don’t help when said mate is out of his reach. Luckily, the wolf is too busy deciding whether or not they could break down the door with the lock in place. He’s pretty sure they can. Dean envies his confidence. They use solitary for emergencies, like when someone’s mate passes away and they go off the rails for a little bit. Dean isn’t some raging, out of control alpha—at least not yet—so the chances of him getting through that lock are slim at best.

He’s been staring at the ceiling for god knows how long when the lock slides open and someone walks in. He knows it’s Sam without even looking.

“Hey little brother. Think I fucked up royally enough?”

Sam doesn't laugh or respond, which is a huge red flag. Dean sits up and eyes his brother, furrowing his eyebrows. Sam’s shoulders are tight, his eyes tired and brimming with worry. He tosses a plastic wrapped sandwich onto Dean’s bed and frowns, crossing his arms.

“What’s wrong?”

“Wish I knew. Something bad.”

Dean’s stomach drops.
“Cas, is he—”

“No idea. His pack dragged him away. I’m not talking about Cas. Though I could go for some explanation about what the hell happened at that meeting.”

Dean shoves his worry aside, trying to speak through his pacing wolf whose only focus is whoever is taking the leopards and the location of their mate. He quickly explains about the kidnappings, the scent blockers, the Council’s unwillingness to help out. If Sam’s expression is anything to go by, he’s as angry as Dean is about it.

“When’d we turn into a bunch of fucking cowards?”

Dean huffs a laugh. “When I figure that out, I’ll let you know. What’s going on out there?”

Sam sighs and rubs his hand over his jaw. “The Council isn’t talking. They’ve been locked away with Kevin all day. Patrols are cancelled, and they have sentries posted at all the entrances and exits and soldiers patrolling the halls. Whatever’s going on, they’re spooked.”

Dean’s mouth is hanging open. In all his years, he’s never seen the emergency protocols. He knows them, yeah, but he’s never seen them enforced. They’re an extreme measure, for serious threats to the Bunker and the Pack.

“Defcon one?” he says wryly, despite himself. He’s spooked too.

Sam grunts. “Pretty much. You fucked something up, but nobody knows what.”

“So they’re just gonna keep me in here?”

“Guess so. Orders are to stay out.”

“How’s that allowed?” Dean growls, frustrated. They’ve got rules, yeah, but the punishment doesn’t fit the crime here. Not in his book. And since there definitely aren’t any formal rules against fraternizing with the leopards, they shouldn’t be able to lock him up.

“They’re saying you’re dangerous to the Pack. Mom seems unhappy about it, but nobody is fighting it much. You haven’t exactly been on your best behavior.”

Doesn’t he know it. Like Charlie said, he’s been smelling like he’s going to rip somebody’s head off. He can’t blame the Pack for believing the Council when they say he’s dangerous. Just feels pretty shitty that they all buy it. Especially his mom.

“So how’d you get in?”

Sam shrugs. “Pulled some strings. Krissy’s on guard watch, so. She likes us, and she doesn’t like rules. Perfect combo.”

Dean snorts and shakes his head. He never thought he’d see the day that he’d be thankful for Krissy’s terrible habits. “This is bullshit.”

“You got me there.” Sam hesitates, and Dean waits for the second shoe to drop. “Dad’s gonna stop by.”

Dean growls unhappily. “Awesome. What for?”

His brother gets that kicked puppy look, his eyebrows pinching up in the middle. Dean tries not to roll his eyes, because Sam really does mean well. But god it’s hot in this room, and he feels like he’s
about to crawl out of his goddamn skin. Sam’s scent, which is normally comforting, feels like its scratching the back of his throat it’s so irritating.

“You know what.”

Yeah. He does. John is going to try to change his mind, to drive some kind of wedge between him and Cas. Permanent or no. He’s pretty sure that Bela wouldn't be opposed to working some more of her magic on him. Dean just knows that John is going to have some kind of a plan.

He sighs and lays back on his bed, tossing an arm over his face.

“Fuck.”

Sam is quiet for a couple of seconds.

“If there’s anything I can do…”

“Nah,” Dean sighs. “Worry about Jess. Your big bro can handle his shit.”

Sam laughs, but it sounds bitter. “Yeah, Dean. Okay. Any requests for dinner?”

“Pie, dude,” Dean mumbles. “Gimme some damn pie.”

***

It’s thirteen hours before John arrives. Dean is counting, because he sure as hell ain’t sleeping. Sam keeps to his word and brings pie, though he isn’t the one that delivers it. That honor goes to Adam, who doesn’t say a word the whole time. Dean has got a bad feeling in the pit of his stomach for the entire wait, which only gets worse when the lock slides open.

Alpha aggression absolutely soaks his entire room, like a thick layer of slime. Dean’s hackles raise automatically, his wolf baring its teeth and growling low and defensively.

John slams the door behind him, his eyes wild and his cheeks flushed. He doesn’t look like he’s been sleeping either.

“Tell me about this fucking cat,” he spits, the sound of the word almost making Dean flinch.

Dean stands up to meet his gaze, rolling his shoulders back. “What do you want me to say?”

“I want you to explain to me,” John growls, shoving Dean’s chest, “how you could betray your pack for him. How you could lie and deceive us for him. How you could endanger all of us. I want you to explain what in the hell you were thinking.”

Dean takes a step back to steady himself.

“He’s my mate. That’s all I was thinking.”

John actually laughs.

“Oh, he’s your mate? How fucking precious. So tell me, Dean, was it worth it? Were the lives of your pack worth this mate of yours?”

“I haven’t hurt anyone,” Dean growls. “Not a single person. Because of him. You couldn't figure out a single way to help me and he fucking did it, no problem. I would be dead right now, without him. My blood on your goddamn hands. So you tell me, Dad. Was it worth it?”
“You don’t know anything,” John says, pacing around the room and rubbing at his jaw with the palm of his hand. “You think this little mating of yours doesn’t have consequences?”

“So what if it fucking does? Worst case scenario, we help them? For fuck’s sake, Dad, we should be helping them anyway. How can you guys just stand by when—”

John’s snarl is so animalistic, Dean doesn’t even know how he managed it with a human mouth. He turns on Dean in the blink of an eye, the volume of his voice rattling Dean’s bones.


Backing down would’ve been the smart thing to do. But Dean has never been very smart.

“Then fucking tell me! Quit being a fucking coward and let us he—”

Dean hears the crunch of his dad’s fist as it connects with the side of his jaw and feels his body hit the floor before he even feels any pain. Then John’s knee is on his throat, and he’s trying to breathe and tasting blood in his mouth.

“No son of mine talks to me that way,” he spits, just barely letting up on Dean’s windpipe so he doesn’t pass out. “You forfeited the right to know anything when you turned on your pack for a cat. You are stupid, and selfish, and you may have cost us our lives.”

With one hard shove and a quick roll Dean gets back on his feet, spitting blood on the floor. John stumbles back and before he can right himself Dean—or the wolf, he’s not sure—throws a punch that cracks his dad’s nose. The wolf scents blood in the air and rumbles happily, baring its teeth.

“Fuck you,” he spits, his chest heaving. When his dad turns on him next it’s with wolf eyes and sharpened wolf teeth. John is barely holding back a shift, and Dean’s pretty sure he won’t survive it if his dad loses that battle. Not locked in this goddamn room.

Dean ducks out of the way of his first swing, but his dad is fast. Especially when he’s pissed off. His elbow swings back and catches Dean’s chin, just as Dean manages to twist out of his grasp. The crack in his dad’s shoulder is more satisfying than it should be.

“I don’t know what that cat did to you,” John breathes, “but you are not the Dean I know.”

Dean laughs.

“And what Dean is that? The one that follows your goddamn orders all the time? The good little wolf who does what he’s told?”

Yeah, he let his attitude get ahead of him. And yeah, he should’ve seen that hit coming. A sucker punch to the gut and the air rushes out of him, in time for him to gasp for air before John’s right fist connects with his cheekbone, followed shortly by the left one.

“The one that I could trust. Now, I’m going to fix your mess.” He backs up then, and the look of disappointment on his face is one that Dean will never forget. “And you will never see that cat again. I’ll make sure of it.”

Black spots dance across Dean’s vision with the rush of air in his lungs as he finally manages to inhale but he ignores it, ignores the throbbing pain in his jaw, pulling himself to his feet. He doesn’t remember falling to his knees.

“You hurt him, we’ll kill you,” Dean rasps, a low growl in his chest.
“And you actually think he helped you,” John snarls, shaking his head. “That cat can’t fix you. But I will.”

Dean’s stomach curls in on itself as the door slams shut with a thud. His body temperature jacks up about fifty degrees, and a thin film of sweat forms over his entire body. His rut has, apparently, decided to start. He doesn’t even have time to process what just happened before he collapses to the floor and his body is flushed with need.

“Motherfucker,” he snarls, slamming his fists on the ground painfully. He hopes they bleed. There’s definitely blood in his mouth. He spits it out.

He knows why he’s been feeling so itchy the hot the past couple of days. Early signs of his rut. And he deserves to suffer through this alone. He deserves a lot worse, but this is a start. So Dean just keeps laying on the cold, hard, floor, letting the arousal turn to pain and letting it burn through his body. He gives in eventually, though. Dean palms half-heartedly at his erection through his jeans, and luckily it won’t take much. Later on he’ll need more, and the need will be back soon, but it’s fine for now. He thinks about Cas, and ignores the pathetic whimper he makes.

It’s only afterward that his mind drifts, to what his dad said, to what’s going on in the Pack, to what the hell he’s going to have to do so that he can see his mate again.

He’ll do it. Whatever it is, he’ll do it. He has to.

***

Three hours finds Dean sprawled out on the bed, groaning in a mixture of pleasure and pain. His palm feels like fucking heaven, pulling at his straining erection, but it also feels like goddamn sandpaper on his skin. Luckily his body wants release more than anything, and it’s so early in his rut that it comes easily.

Seven hours finds Dean passed out in the bed, spread out over the comforter with his limbs flung in all different directions in an effort to cool himself down. It’s the one good thing about being in a rut, the biological need to sleep so that he can mate is stronger than his wolf’s insistence that they stay awake and find a way out. So it’s something. Charlie stops in with some cold juice and jerky, but Dean doesn’t wake up to notice.

Fifteen hours finds Dean in an ice cold shower, something he usually doesn’t do until the last day of his rut. It slakes some of the heat from his skin, though, so he’s pleased. For now.

Dean lets his mind wander, but the moments of clarity during which he can think about anything other than sex are few and far between, and getting fewer and farther between with every passing hour.

His desperate wolf has convinced him that they can get out, but Dean has already thrown himself against the metal door a few times and it hasn’t budged. Probably not doing much for his reputation, either.

So Dean lays on the cool floor, trying to escape the heat of his own skin and the bubbling, burning need inside of him that he is incapable of satisfying.

Twenty hours in, and he stops being able to pass out between bouts of rut. His body is tired of him denying himself. It’s poetic justice, really, that he has to suffer through every second of this. He shouldn’t get to escape in sleep for a few hours.

Dean knew it was going to be bad. His body knows that his mate is close, and it wants his mate right
NOW. It’s punishing him for Cas not being around. That’s not even touching on how fucking worried Dean is, when his mind is clear enough to process the emotion. John is a scary bastard, who doesn’t make idle threats. Some part of Dean can feel Cas’ presence, he thinks. Dean doesn’t know what state he’s in, but he’s breathing. Maybe.

When morning rolls around, at least according to his clock, after tugging at his dick and wiping the come off of his torso, Dean starts to wonder if his dad has any kind of plan at all for him. Nobody has come into Dean’s room, save some beta that brought him dinner last night and stunk up the place like grass and lilacs. That had actually helped take the edge off for a little while. His dad hasn’t tried to reason with him any more, so he must consider Dean a lost cause.

Dean doesn’t have long to think about it, though, not before his rut smacks him in the chest like a fucking bulldozer. He groans and falls onto his back, knowing this is going to be a bad one.

“Shit,” Dean groans, gripping the base of his cock and applying some pressure while he digs around his nightstand with his other hand, looking for some lotion or lube or anything to make this go away. Pain shoots down his spine, his body demanding that he do something. That he mate something. His wolf is bouncing around chanting breedbreedbreedbreedbreed, its eyes wild and glazed with lust. Dean is pretty sure that’s going to be him by tomorrow.

In the drawer he finds a small glass container, something Benny got for him when they were younger. He’s never used it, always thought it was kind of weird, but the synthetic slick sounds more appealing now than it ever has. His mind helpfully provides him with the feelings of Cas’ slick, the taste of it on his tongue, the sweet scent of it in the air, the slide against his dick. His hand suddenly feels too dry, too loose, not enough not nearly enough.

Dean gets some of the synthetic slick on his palm, wrapping his hand around his erection. It takes one twisting squeeze, and Dean’s conscious thought goes flying out the window. The slick warms up in his palm as it moves over his cock, and oh god the smell. It’s sweet and intoxicating and he smells pine trees, everything fucking smells like pine trees and bark and honey and warm like mate.

“Fuck, Cas,” Dean groans, squeezing his eyes shut and bucking up into his fist. Heat is tearing through his skin, and it feels so fucking good but it’s not enough. He needs— “Cas,” Dean whines again, knowing its useless and not caring. He can pretend like Cas is on his lap, that the heat he feels around his cock is his mate, that his cat is riding him and taking care of him. Like he promised.

“I can’t—” he groans, desperation setting in. “Shit Cas,” another moan as he fucks up into the tight, wet heat of his hand, “I need you, Cas, fuck I need you.”

Dean repeats those words like a prayer, speaks his mate’s name with reverence and desperation. It’s enough. He hates it, and it hurts, but it’s enough. The come spilled across his torso his a sign of that, the swollen knot at the base of his dick. He gathers some more slick on his palm and works the purpling swell, squeezing how he knows he likes. The subsequent orgasms feel better than the first, his body and mind too blissed out to process. All he smells is pine and bark, all he feels are waves of pleasure.

That is, until his body crashes from that high. Because there’s no warm body pressed against him, and it doesn’t smell like pine trees and bark. The slick smells like berries, sweet and plasticky. It’s slime on his skin, fake shit that covers him where his mate belongs.

“What the fuck,” Dean growls, scrambling up. With every passing second his mind clears, and he realizes how far gone he was. Nothing smells like Cas, he’s not here, he’ll never be here. Dean is alone.
Dean grips the container of synthetic slick, the smell of it making him nauseous, and flings it at the metal door. It shatters, and the stink only spreads more. Dean doesn’t care. The small amount of food he’s eaten threatens to crawl back up his throat. His body is revolting against him in every way possible, and he can only be thankful that his wolf is still laying in a sated heap.

He slumps onto the ground and pulls his knees against his chest, dropping his head into his hands. He reeks. Like sweat and come and the fake slick. It’s disgusting.

“I’m sorry,” Dean mumbles, exhaustion and confusion overtaking his brain. “I’m so fucking sorry.”

Dean doesn’t even hear the lock slide open.

“What are you talking to?”

A growl tears out of his chest and he whips his head up, before he can even process the figure standing in front of him. No one should be near him right now, for any reason.

“Relax, big guy,” she says, holding up her hands but maintaining eye contact. “You know me.”

Dean blinks, the wolf stalking away and Dean’s brain desperately playing catch up. She’s right, he does know who she is. The soft curves of her body, the dark waves of hair, the pretty floral scent drifting towards him. He knows her, that’s for fucking sure.

“Lisa?” he rasps, his voice foreign sounding. She smiles at him.

“Hi, Dean. It’s good to see you again.”

Chapter End Notes

I’ll explain the scent thing with the slick soon, so be patient if you’re confused. Also the end of this and the next one might feel slightly jumbled, which is intended to sort of reflect Dean’s state of being. Hopefully it isn’t too confusing.
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

“That was a long time ago.”

Chapter Notes

First order of business. Guys. GUYSSSSSSSSS. WE HAVE A HEADER. We have a header, and we have fanart. Never in my life have I felt so legit EVER. This is like, a real thing isn't it???? If you haven't seen it yet, go take a peek at Chapter 1 and marvel at the gorgeous header that I've been staring at for like DAYS now. One million hugs and chocolate strawberries for the lovely mimibee who made this wonderful header. You guys honestly all make this story so REAL for me every single day and it just. Blows my mind. Thank you for being incredible.

Second order of business. This chapter is a huge jumble of some pretty shitty stuff happening to Dean. There's a small amount of dubious consent going on, since Dean is in a pretty bad head space for all of it. Nothing happens, it just might leave you feeling a little slimy until the end. At least that's how I felt writing it, but maybe that's me being an overly protective Dean!girl. There is also no infidelity, for anyone who is worried about that. Just STICK WITH IT until the end. I promise it's worth it. Here's your warning.

Also, GOOD NEWS. I am no longer the target of your angry mob!! That honor belongs to John, who I think has several targets on his back judging from all the "pls KILL JOHN" comments I got last chapter. In related good news, I now have several very good ideas of HOW to go about murdering him, varying from a simple bullet to the brain to my personal favorite, shipping him off to a planet filled with cacti for him to go fuck himself on. I swear, y'all guys kill me.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lisa sits on the ground next to him. Close. Too close. Her fingers feel cool against Dean's skin as they card through his hair, her knuckles soft against his cheek. Dean closes his eyes and forces his dry throat to swallow.

“I wanted to come sooner,” she says, her thumb stroking across the bruise Dean is sure is fading on his jawline. He doesn’t shrug her off. “But your father…”

Dean laughs humorlessly. “Bastard wanted me to suffer.”

Lisa sighs, a familiar exasperated sound. Dean is having a hard time believing how familiar it still is. “Maybe.”

It takes a few more moments for Dean to reopen his eyes and look at her. She gazes right back, pupils wide and dilated and almost invisible in the deep brown of her irises. Dean inhales carefully, scenting the air at the back of his tongue. He can taste Lisa’s arousal, can feel his wolf stir at its
presence. His animal likes this beta, more than the others.

“Smell something you like?” he scoffs, breaking eye contact and staring at the ceiling. Her fingers continue to move across his skin, wonderfully cool as they press into the tightened muscles of his neck and shoulders.

“You know I do. Don’t be an asshole.”

Dean laughs, only slightly less bitter. Lisa always did see through most of his shit. Most of it.

They are quiet for another few minutes, but Dean is restless. His rut is stirring under his skin, his body picking up on the presence of a potential mate. Dean growls at the thought.

“What’s going on with you?” Lisa asks, genuine concern in her voice.

“Nothing,” Dean grunts. One of her hands cups his stubbled jaw, and he can’t help but lean into it.

“Oh? Because your scent and the shattered jar of slick says differently. Did it personally offend you?”

Dean glares at the shattered glass, the wolf rumbles and stamps its feet. The plasticky scent is still strong in his room, but his stomach has stopped trying to empty itself because of it.

“No,” he grits out, but Lisa clearly doesn’t believe him.

“Most alphas are crazy about it, but some hate it. Guess you’re one of the latter.” She sounds unconcerned.

“Good to know I’m not a fuckin’ weirdo.”

“Arguable,” Lisa says with a small smile. Dean huffs and rolls his eyes. “Scent manipulation isn’t everyone’s cup of tea.”

Dean raises an eyebrow. “Scent manipu-what-a?”

“Scent manipulation. Part of the synthetic slick experience. Didn’t you read the box?”

“You think I bought that shit for myself?”

Lisa laughs. “No, I guess you wouldn’t. All it does is trigger your scent receptors, tricks your brain into thinking you’re smelling something different.”

Dean frowns. “What’s it make you smell?”

Lisa just shrugs and licks her lips. “I’m not sure. It doesn’t work on betas. People say it smells like your ideal mate. Your true mate, if you believe in that kind of stuff. Your brain makes up the perfection concoction and serves it to you.”

Dean laughs, actually fucking laughs. Lisa looks confused and concerned, but Dean doesn’t care. All he can think is that his brain tried to make up the perfect scent combination, the perfect mate, and all it could come up with was Cas. If that’s not goddamn hilarious, he doesn’t know what is.

“Why are you here, Lisa?” Dean says with one last chuckle. He’s wishing now that he wouldn’t have destroyed the container of slick, but whatever.

Her hand finds its way into Dean’s hair again, and he lets her. The touch is comforting, not sexual,
so there’s no reason to shove her away. Lisa knows his boundaries.

“A very old friend of mine is looking for a mate,” she says with a sad smile, all of a sudden feeling far closer to him than a couple of seconds previous. “How could I resist?”

Everything clicks. This is his dad’s plan. Send Lisa in here, a girl he has history with, someone his wolf likes and that he won’t hurt, while he’s in a rut, and let their instincts take over. Because if he’s not desperate already, he will be by tomorrow. Or the next day. And eventually he’ll forget why he had said no in the first place.

Dean snarls and pulls away from her, shoving her hands away.

“I’m not looking,” he grits out, glaring at her and letting his alpha out. He sees her waver, but her gaze doesn’t drop to the floor.

“Your Council says differently.”

That’s fucking it.

“I. Have. A. Mate.”

With that he storms into the shower, determined to wash some of the grime away. Dean just hopes that Lisa will be gone when he gets out.

Which is, admittedly, kind of a long time. Another bout of rut hits him while he’s in the shower, and he ends up sitting on the floor under the cold spray for a while. The release that time is way harder to achieve.

Thankfully, Lisa doesn’t return until the next day, early afternoon sometime. Dean doesn’t really know. He thinks he glanced at a clock a little bit ago, but that could’ve been 18 minutes ago or 18 hours ago. Time doesn’t really mean anything to him right now. Not so thankfully, it’s the worst day, half a day, whatever, of his life. A beta that smelled like rain brought him breakfast, and he managed to force it down his throat. It only stayed down for a little bit before it ended up on the floor next to his bed. His hand has stopped working, but he managed the last round with a pillow under his hips like a fucking fourteen year old. Still fire burns under his skin, his stomach roiling and his head clouded and throbbing. Exhaustion pricks at the backs of his eyes, but that’s actually the least of his concerns.

Dean knows what this is, why he can’t eat or sleep, if he lets himself think about it. It’s withdrawal, and pretty fucking bad at that. His body basically shutting down in the absence of its mate. It doesn’t want food, it doesn’t want sleep, it doesn’t want sex, it wants its cat. Which is confusing, because his rut is screaming at him to fuckbreedmate anything remotely nice smelling in his vicinity. He’s heard about withdrawal ruts before, learned about them in sex-ed when he was younger, but nobody takes it that seriously. He wishes he had, because he sure as hell is taking it seriously now that he’s actually living it. Most shifters survive them, though, which is a good thing. Only time they become an actual serious problem is in, like, really strong bonds. So not even having a complete bond is probably working in their favor. Still, he’s probably got a day or two left. And it’s gonna be hell.

Fucking fantastic.

When Lisa arrives this time, Dean is actually fairly lucid. Sprawled across his bed on his stomach feeling angry and miserable, but all there.

“She’s back,” he grumbles, burying his face in his pillow. It fucking stinks like sex.
“You’re in a good mood,” she says with a soft laugh, making room for herself on his bed. He grunts and makes a small effort to take up less space.

“I got every reason to be,” Dean says sarcastically, dragging himself up on his elbows and running a hand through his hair. “Why are you here?”

“I thought you might want to talk,” Lisa says, offering him a plate with a juicy looking cheeseburger on it. His mouth waters, and he resists the urge to shove it into his mouth.

“Yeah last time I tried that, didn’t go so well.”

Lisa rolls her eyes at him.

“You need protein, Dean.”

God she’s like his goddamn mother.

“Fine. But when you gotta watch me yak it up in a few minutes you remember I warned you.”

He sits up and picks at the burger slowly, testing his stomach’s willingness to keep food down. All seems to go well after the first few bites, so he digs in a little more vigorously. His rut is holding off for now, along with the withdrawal symptoms thank fucking god, so his stomach might have some time to digest this shit before his body spits it back out again. Dean definitely doesn’t want to deal with that when Lisa is here. His wolf, on the other hand, keeps shuffling towards her, huffing happily under her cool fingers. Dean isn’t really surprised.

“It’s good to know that your food tastes, at least, haven’t changed,” Lisa smiles knowingly. Dean glares at her.

“Bacon cheeseburgers are a treasure.”

Lisa laughs. “Yeah, maybe you just haven’t changed much.”

“You think I would’ve?” Dean asks, raising an eyebrow.

Lisa shrugs. “I didn’t know what to expect. You weren’t a Hunter last time I saw you.”

"I was a soldier."

"With fewer years and fewer responsibilities to carry."

“Yeah,” Dean sighs. “I was a scrawny little shit back then.”

“You have grown into yourself.” He feels Lisa’s gaze rake appreciatively over his body. He can’t help but roll his shoulders back and sit a little taller. He’s an attractive guy, he knows that. No harm in showing it off. “But you’ve always been easy on the eyes.”

Dean winks at her and takes a particularly large bite of burger, chewing louder than necessary.

“Cute.”

They’re both quiet for a few moments, and Dean at least is acutely aware of the lost time sitting between them.

“What about you? Are you different?”
Lisa eyes him, tilting her head just barely to the side. It reminds him of Cas, in an eerie sort of way.

“I grew up, Dean. Of course I’m different.”

Dean nods. He doesn’t know what he expected her to say.

“And you never found anybody? Not in your new pack?”

Lisa looks at him for a long time. “Not yet.”

Guilt aches in his chest. She deserves better than this.

“What’d you want to talk about,” he grumbles around a mouthful of food, pretty sure that the conversation is going to go down the same path they’re already on.

“Us.”

Dean huffs a laugh. “Ain’t no us, sweetheart. Not anymore.”

Lisa blinks slowly and smiles at him. “There used to be. Maybe there could be again.”

She’s not totally wrong. If he’d never met Cas, she’d actually probably be right. But that’s a huge if, and Cas is all too real and all too important to him to even entertain it.

“That was a long time ago,” Dean says, his voice low and quiet.

“Too long?” Her voice is laced with hope, her fingers on his jaw soft and begging. Dean recoils away from it.

The wolf tilts its head and waits for Dean to answer.

“Yeah,” he grunts, shifting away from her. “Too long.”

***

Dean isn’t so clear minded the next time she comes to his room. That hour or two of clarity ended a long time ago.

“Get out,” he growls, baring his teeth at her. He can’t think, his body is on fire and he is burning from the inside out. He needs some kind of release and his body isn’t going to give it to him.

He smells it the second that Lisa reacts. The scent in the room is pretty gross to him, all bitter alpha arousal and sex and sweat and frustration and the easily identifiable male musk underlying it all. Lisa seems to have a different opinion. Her scent blossoms, floral and minty and the damp, earthy beta scent curling around him. Dean rolls his neck and tries to ignore it.

“Dean…”

Dean stomps across the room, standing mere centimeters away from her, his breathing heavy. Her lips part and she bares her throat.

“I said get, out.” He doesn’t touch her. The wolf wants to, but Dean refuses to go there.

“No.”

Dean snarls and spins away, stalking over to sit at the edge of his bed. Lisa stares at him with hungry
eyes.

“Let me help you.”

“I don’t need your help.”

Lisa stretches her back and walks over slowly, climbing onto his lap. He can’t find it in himself to fight her. He’s so tired. Dean doesn’t notice how his hands settle on her hips. She leans into his chest, putting her lips to his ear.

“I was good to you. Tell me you remember how good I was to you.”

The scent of his rut is affecting her, he can sure as hell tell that just by the huskiness of her voice, not to mention the pheromones practically melting off of her skin. And Dean’s brain supplies those memories with no trouble at all. “Course I remember.”

“Then you remember that I know your body like I know my own,” her breath ghosts across his skin, followed by a barely there press of lips underneath his jaw. He shivers and arches his back.

Except—no. He doesn’t want this. This is wrong.

“You don’t know me anymore,” he growls, pushing her away. She sighs and traces a finger down his chest.

“Are you sure about that?”

“Yes,” he says through gritted teeth. “It was ten fucking years ago. I was a kid.”

“So was I,” Lisa says, nuzzling his throat. “Seventeen and so in love with you. What we had was good.”

Dean almost laughs, but it comes out more like some kind of snarly, unhappy whine.

“What we had was fine, not good. Don’t fucking act like you were happy.”

Lisa looks at him with sad eyes, deep brown filled with so much misplaced hope.

“Didn’t you love me back then, Dean?”

He growls at her. “You know I did.”

She leans back in, carding her fingers through his hair and speaking softly into his ear. “Then what’s the matter?”

“You left,” he snarls, pushing her back, though she’s still straddling his thighs. “You walked out on me. You did that, Lis. Not me.”

“You know why.” Her voice is gentler, softer, but it doesn’t soften the blow.

“Of course I know why,” Dean growls, and Lisa drops her gaze to her lap. “You wanted a mate, and a family, and a life. I was a goddamn eighteen year old kid. Sorry for not being ready for it.”

It’s an old wound, one that hasn’t reopened or stung in a hell of a long time, but it did sting once. He’d been young, and the heartbreak had been visceral.

Pain shoots down his spine, his rut hitting him full force.
“Fuck,” he groans, his head dropping to Lisa’s shoulder. It’s a bad one. His thoughts fog over with pain and need, his body telling him that he needs to take. Whatever he can get. Petty things like who and where and when don’t matter. The body on top of him smells perfect to his rut clouded instincts, but the withdrawal pumping poison through his veins is urging him to shove her away. His body is screaming no and yes at the same time and it’s tearing him in half.

He wants her, he wants her so bad. He wants to taste her skin and bury himself in her until it stops. Until the pain stops. Until everything just. fucking. stops. But Dean wants her off of him. Wants Lisa to stop touching him like he is hers. He isn’t.

Lisa’s hands touch his face, but he doesn’t feel them. She pries his eyelids open, but he just sags and lets her handle him like a puppet.

“Dean,” she sounds worried, but she sounds so far away and Dean can’t reach her, can’t tell her. “Are you okay? Dean…”

“No,” he groans, weak hands shoving her fingers away from his skin no matter how gloriously cold they feel. “I need him. I need Cas. Please Lisa I need him.”

She freezes on his lap, her hands flying back to his face. He tries again to push her away but she swats at his hands.

"Hey, come on focus, Dean. You don't actually...I mean...oh my god something’s wrong..."

She’s talking too much. Too many words, too many feathers in Dean's brain. He can't think. He can't even sit up straight, or keep his eyes open. The wolf is whining and writhing on the floor. Everything hurts.

"...do you? Have a mate?"

The wolf perks up. "Yes," he whines, pleading with the lovely beta on their lap. "Our mate, where is our mate? Our cat should be here, our cat should..." the wolf’s train of thought is rapidly derailed as everything in him burns out like candles in the wind. They just need somewhere warm to put their knot, right? But they need...they need...what do they need?

Lisa's voice sounds like it's under water. The wolf wishes she wouldn't talk so much.

“Oh god. Oh my god. Dean, stay awake. Please stay awake. For...uh, Cas? Is that...”

The wolf snuffles, satisfied. Their cat. Cas is their cat. Their cat is what they need. Dean nods. For Cas. He can do anything for Cas.

“This isn’t just a bad rut, is it?” Lisa asks. Dean shakes his head. “You’re in withdrawal. Oh my god you’re in withdrawal. I’m so stupid. I am so stupid, I’m—they said, they told me—stay here. And stay awake.”

Then she’s gone. Dean is happy, because she isn’t touching him. He wants to die alone, and at peace. Dean doesn’t get peace. He gets pain.

Hours pass. Maybe. Minutes pass, seconds. At some point it ends. Dean lays shivering in his sweat and come covered sheets waiting for the next wave to hit.

He’s pretty sure it’s night time when his door opens. Though it could be 2 o’clock in the afternoon.

“Dean?” Lisa says quietly. “Are you awake?”
Dean grumbles some kind of affirmative, right before he feels Lisa’s cold hands dragging him to his feet. He slumps against her, confident that there are no muscles in his legs willing to hold him up right now.

“Wha…?”

Lisa turns him towards the door, which is hanging wide open. Fresh air from the hallway blows across his cheeks.

“Go find your mate. Use the back exit.”

Dean looks at her. She smells upset. Her dark eyes are watery. The wolf doesn't like seeing her like this. But...

"Go," she says with a weak smile, pushing him lightly on the shoulder.

And Dean doesn’t need to be told again. He has to dig deep into his muscles, straight down into his bones, to find the strength to walk, but everything is waiting for him at the end of it. Far away in his brain he thinks about the sentries, thinks about getting caught, but none of it really registers. He stumbles out the back doors and out into the forest, tripping over more than one set of roots on the way. His eyes feel glazed over, his nose numb to all the scents around him. He’s looking for one, in particular, the only one that matters.

Dean finds the scent as soon as he gets out of wolf territory. He almost collapses where he stands, because it is so perfect. Crisp and wet, like the forest and like home and like his.

Cas drops down to the base of his tree just as Dean arrives, chest heaving and distress wafting off of him in heavy waves. It takes everything in Dean not to fall to his knees.

“Cas?” Dean says, his voice pathetically scratchy and weak.

“Dean.”

His mate practically launches himself into Dean’s arms. His legs come around Dean’s waist automatically, his hands digging into Dean’s hair. Cas licks into his mouth and Dean nibbles at his bottom lip. He’s never held Cas tighter or closer than he does right then, but Cas does the same.

“You’re okay.” Dean says into Cas’ skin, dropping to his knees and laying his mate out on the forest floor. Dean tears the cotton of his cat’s clothes, removing them from his body without a thought. He can physically feel his body calming right under Cas' fingertips. He doesn't feel good, or okay, but he feels better. And he's goddamn relieved. “You’re okay and you’re here…oh god you’re here…”

“I’m here,” Cas groans, baring his neck and arching his back. “I’m here, Dean. You’re here. Everything is okay.”

Dean breathes him in, tastes his skin, memorizes his mouth. A wave of rut sizzles its way to the surface of his skin and evaporates under Cas’ fingers.

“Up,” Cas moans, loud enough that Dean is sure that the entire forest hears. “The tree.”

Dean bites the corner of his jaw and growls, licking over the reddened skin. “Here.”

“You are not going to knot me in the middle of the forest on the ground.”

Dean growls again and shifts Cas’ hips, pressing his cock against the slick between his cheeks. “You
Cas whines and pushes against him. “You bastard. Fine. Just fuck me, please.”

In one sure thrust Dean slides all the way in. A snarl tears almost painfully out of his chest and Cas cries out, clinging to him with everything he has. Dean’s brain got it so wrong, when he tried to imagine this. Cas smells a million times better, feels a million times tighter, is a million times hotter. Everything is more, all of it too much. Dean claims Cas’ mouth and kisses him hard until his lips are pink and swollen, all the while snapping his hips with a pounding rhythm. Cas’ keening whines and scrabbling fingers tell him he’s hitting the right spot with each thrust.

Dean barely even notices the babbling, but most of the words disappear into Cas’ mouth anyway.

"Fuck you are so hot kitten...I missed you...god I missed you...my mate, my mate, mine, my panther my goddamn perfect panther...you are so. fucking. gorgeous."

Cas moans and nods and groans yes yes yes in response and who the hell even knows everything that Dean says right then but he means every word of it.

Then he moves to Cas neck, growling low and possessive against his skin and sealing his lips over the steady pulse. Each beat reminding him that Cas, his cat, his mate, he’s okay. He’s alive and he’s okay. He is alive and perfect and okay and Dean is never, ever letting him go again. His wolf is chanting to matematemate, but Dean just needs a couple more seconds.

Dean keeps up the long strokes even when his knot starts to catch a little bit, letting it tug with each thrust. He might’ve worried about hurting Cas, but waves of slick are pouring out of him and with each catch of the barely swollen knot on his rim comes a whimpering, primal moan from Cas’ throat.

When his knot swells too much Dean grinds deep, capturing Cas lips one last time and staring at him out of fevered eyes.

“I’m going to mate you.”

Cas grins and claims his mouth right back.

“Finally.”

The best orgasm of Dean’s life explodes out of him, followed by Cas’ pained and pleased cry as Dean’s teeth sink into the meat of his neck.

It feels like being taken apart, then put back together again piece by piece. Except he’s fundamentally different, this time. There’s a new part of him, a part made of Cas. A part that is them. Bound and Unbreakable.

Dean’s mate tastes like rain, like the sun in the sky and the wind in his fur. The press of Cas’ consciousness is a welcome weight at the back of his mind, and goddamn if Dean doesn't feel like just about everything is right in the world. The wolf curls around the bond and rumbles happily, almost purring with contentedness. Dean has never seen his animal so at peace.

He unhinges his jaw, and hears Cas let out a pained gasp.

“I’m sorry,” he murmurs, licking at the wound as one hand strokes Cas’ side. Dean closes his lips over the bite, right where Cas’ neck meets his shoulder, and groans as another incredible orgasm pours through him. Cas whimpers and pulls him closer.
“It’s okay.” He bares his neck even more, encouraging Dean to continue his attentions. Dean does, licking and kissing and admiring his mark on his cat. His *mate*. “You can be sorry for not letting us go up first.”

“Poor puddy tat,” Dean mumbles, grinding his hips and making Cas hum happily underneath him.

“You aren’t the one laying in the dirt.”

A fierce wave of protectiveness washes over him, and Dean growls at himself for being so absentminded. He wraps Cas in his arms and rolls over immediately, putting Cas on top of his chest and his own back in the rough dirt.

“Better, kitten?” he says, smiling when Cas purrs and seals their lips together, licking slowly and sleepily into his mouth.

“Much.” Cas pauses and rests their foreheads together, bright blue eyes staring straight into him. “I love you so much, puppy. Whatever they did to you, I am so sorry.”

Dean tugs him down with a hand at his nape, running a thumb over the bite on his neck and licking at his bottom lip.

“Let’s talk about it later. Or never.”

Cas sighs and tucks his nose under Dean’s chin, apparently deciding for a nap. Dean just happily strokes his fingers through Cas’ messy hair and holds him close.

“Later. Can you keep watch?” Cas says with a yawn. The wolf scoffs that their mate would even *ask*.

“I got you, baby. You don’t have to worry.”

Dean feels Cas smile against his chest. “There's my alpha.”

It’s a few minutes later, probably after Cas is asleep, that Dean speaks.

“I’ll burn it all to the ground,” he says, burying his fingers in Cas’ messy hair. “If I have to. Whatever it is I have to do. But *never* again. They will never take you from me again.”

Cas drags his head up and places one last sleepy, peacefully calming kiss on his lips. It’s slow and lingering and warms him from the inside out.

“Let’s hope that you don’t have to.”

Chapter End Notes

I think you guys waited long enough for that. Now for those of you who were worried Dean wouldn't get to spend any of his rut with Cas....let's get to the fun part, shall we?? :)

Until next Sunday........
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

“Your knot, Dean. Now.”

Chapter Notes

This is, I kid you not, 3.4k words of filthy rut sex. There isn't a drop of plot in here, unless you consider the deepening of their mating bond to be plot. If smut isn't your thing, maybe stop by next chapter.

Peace and blessingssss

The peace doesn’t last long. Dean drags his exhausted body through the door to the treehouse, convinced that he was only able to climb the tree because Cas is already up here.

“Cas,” he growls, gritting his teeth at the fire in his veins. He sees his cat’s head appear at the top of the stairs, a glint in his eye.

“Well? Get up here already.”

Dean takes the stairs three at a time and tackles his mate into the cushions of their nest.

“Your scent,” Cas groans, his lips finding their way to Dean’s neck as he nuzzles and scents the skin there. “Oh god, Dean you smell incredible.”

“Bet you smell better,” Dean rumbles, making his way down Cas’ chest with big, open-mouthed kisses. He flicks his tongue across each nipple, slipping an arm under the small of his back when it arches up to greet his touch.

“You smell like you’re mine,” Cas says, his voice reverent and his pupils dilated so wide that the blue is almost swallowed completely. Dean growls and slides back up his body, closing their lips together and pressing his entire body down against Cas’.

“I am yours,” he says, low and possessive. His lips cover the clean bite on Cas’ neck, where the skin is already starting to knit together. Cas whimpers, and that’s just about all Dean’s self control can take.

In one smooth motion Dean flips Cas over onto his stomach, laying out along the length of his body. Cas makes a surprised noise and twists his neck to one side, bracing his hands under his shoulders.

“You got me, alpha,” Cas breathes, a challenge in his voice. Dean growls and fits his teeth over the exposed bite on his neck. He feels the rush of slick that time. “Big rut. Okay.”

Words feel too far away from Dean at the moment. He doesn’t need to speak, anyway. He needs to fuck his mate.
Dean uses his knees to spread Cas’ thighs further, fitting himself between them. Cas squirms and
whines at the weight of Dean’s cock between his legs. He tries to push his hips back, but Dean has
him pinned. Each hand wraps around one of Cas’ wrists, stretching his arms above his head. With
one hand he pins both wrists to the ground, sliding the other down the entire length of Cas’ arm and
the side of his torso, settling on a sharp hip bone. Cas shivers underneath him.

Dean hears a muffled “please”, and whatever control was left crumbles to dust. Keeping Cas’ wrists
pinned down and using his free hand, Dean shifts his hips and sheathes himself fully inside his mate.
Cas cries out and arches his back, but Dean pins him back down. The thrusts of his hips are small,
circular and grinding as deep as he can manage while his hand strokes up and down Cas’ side
soothingly. Dean’s lips and tongue circle each knob of his mate’s spine, his teeth scraping against
the sharp blades of his shoulders. Cas’ whimpers and drawn out moans are muffled by the pillows
underneath him, his entire body pinned by Dean’s weight. Dean keeps his thighs spread with his
knees, keeps up his torturously slow pace.

“You are,” he mumbles, inhaling at Cas’ nape and picking apart his slightly different mated scent,
“so fucking perfect. Every inch of you. And now everybody knows you’re mine.”

He punctuates that with a flick of his tongue over the bite on Cas’ neck and a sharp snap of his hips.
Cas keens and clenches vice-like around Dean’s cock.

“Fuck,” he growls, squeezing tight on Cas’ hip and burying himself deep.

“Faster, Dean,” Cas growls, followed by a pleased groan. Dean nips at his ear and smiles.

“What was that?” Dean says, holding his entire body still. Cas half whines and half growls and Dean
loves it.

“You stupid wolf,” Cas squirms underneath him, but Dean holds still. “I said faster!”

Dean growls through his smile. “You got it, babe.”

Dean pulls back, pulls almost all the way out, before slamming back in. He keeps Cas pinned down,
a stream of curses and moans and Dean’s name flying out of his mouth with each thrust. It isn’t
careful or gentle in any sense of the word, but Dean buries his nose at the base of Cas’ neck and
listens for any sounds of pain or displeasure, scents for any insecurities amongst his own raging
storm of lust. All he hears are his mate’s pleasured cries, all he smells is mate and lust and
contentment.

The animal part of Dean’s brain steps to the forefront of his mind, in the face of the primal way he
needs to take and claim and please his mate. His. But Dean never feels out of control, not for a
second.

“Dean,” Cas moans, his name on his cat’s lips like a prayer. “Dean, I’m—Dean, Dean, I’m…
ahhh…k-keep go—oh god, oh…Dean—”

Dean feels it when Cas comes. Feels the way his orgasm rocks his body from the tension in his
fingers down to the curling of his toes. Feels the air go out of him in one labored breath only to be
drawn shakily back in in panting gasps. Feels the way he tightens around Dean’s swelling knot. But
more than that, Dean feels it, like a firework in the back of his mind. Like an electric current down
his spine.

It’s somewhat without his permission—though he’s aware it’s going to happen—that his teeth find
their way back to Cas’ neck and bite down again, in the same place as before. Cas cries out again,
and Dean is sure that the whimpering is as much from his own throat as it is Cas’. His knot swells and his orgasm blasts through him, locking them together. As if they would separate even if they could. Cas’ pulse flutters under Dean’s tongue, his heart racing fast and beating strong. Dean’s hand strokes soothingly down Cas’ side as he lets go, which doesn’t do much to distract Cas from the soreness of it. Still he tilts his head, making room for Dean to admire the impressive bite.

Gently Dean releases his wrists, carding his fingers carefully through his cat’s sweaty hair. Cas purrs low in his chest.

“You okay?” Dean breathes, the fire gone from his skin, as he carefully slides his arms under Cas’ shoulders to prop himself up and keep the weight off of Cas’ back.

“More than,” Cas hums happily, pulling Dean’s arms further up so that he can rest his cheek on the back of Dean’s palms. Dean smiles and nuzzles closer, mouthing at the fresh bite and circling his hips carefully. Cas’ lips part and a quiet moan escapes them, Dean following right behind as a second release shivers its way through his bones.

“I can feel that,” Cas says tiredly, pulling his thighs into a more comfortable position and hooking his feet over the backs of Dean’s ankles. “I can feel so much of you.”

“Me too,” Dean sighs, still lavishing the bite with attention. He can’t get over the fact that this is real, that they are really, actually, completely mates now. It doesn’t seem to escape Cas’ notice.

“You can’t bite me every time, you know that, right?” he says, even as he tilts his head a little more and a quiet gasp interrupts his sentence.

That doesn’t escape Dean’s notice, either.

“I think you’ll want me to,” he says with a grin. A tiny smile plays at the corner of Cas’ lips.

“Oh I know I’ll want you to. I’m afraid I don’t have the surface area, though.”

“Oh?” Dean laughs, nipping at his ear.

“I plan on having quite a lot of sex with you, Dean.”

Dean full on laughs then, but Cas stoically keeps his eyes closed and doesn’t let the smile escape the corner of his mouth.

“Kitten, I love you.”

If Dean expected some sappy response, he doesn’t get it. Cas just yawns and nuzzles the backs of his hands, sniffing lightly and licking his lips.

“I expect you do, especially with the promise of sex on the table.”

Dean growls and squishes him tighter, still careful to keep most of his weight off of him.

“ Fucking cat.”

Cas doesn’t respond, and Dean guesses he’s already asleep. How appropriate.

***

The sun is up when Dean wakes up next, but his vision and thoughts both feel hazy and clouded. He can’t think about anything except the smell of Cas all around him. Dean doesn’t have to reach far for
his mate, automatically flipping Cas onto his stomach and laying out along his back.

“Wake up, kitty,” Dean rumbles, nipping at the back of his neck. Cas groans and arches his back as he wakes up.

“Already?” he mumbles, sounding tired. Dean just hums and sits back on his heels, waiting for Cas’ permission. His mate is already wet and still thoroughly debauched from the night before, which was realistically no more than three hours ago, but Dean wants to be clear that he has a choice in this. No matter how good he smells.

“How polite,” Cas says, the smile apparent in his voice. He keeps his chest low, carefully drawing his knees up underneath him and spreading them wide, presenting right in front of Dean’s face.

The wolf goes fucking nuts.

Dean has no clue how he doesn’t fucking black out. A pleased snarl tears from his chest, and his hands are on Cas’ hips in an instant. He had intended to be gentler this time, but that isn’t happening. Cas, for his part, doesn’t seem to mind.

Dean slides into him in one thrust, relishing in how warm and wet and wonderful he feels. It’s quick and dirty and the only sounds exchanged between them are moans and grunts and jumbled swears. A careful glide of Dean’s hand over Cas’ cock sends his mate over the edge, and Dean follows him right over as fireworks go off in his brain.

When they’re locked together again Dean turns them onto their sides, tucking an arm under Cas’ head and a leg over his hip.

“Back to sleep,” Cas mumbles, already drifting off. Dean nods, stroking a hand low over Cas’ belly.

His cat wakes up about an hour later, dragging Dean out of his own light doze when he starts to pull away. His knot has shrunk enough, almost all the way, but no way in hell does he want his mate out of his arms.

“Wha…?”

“Need to clean up,” Cas yawns, rolling away. Dean pulls him right back and pins him down, staring into his blue eyes.

“No way.”

“Dean…”

Dean kisses him quiet, sliding his own tongue against Cas’ and cupping his jaw for a second before sliding his arm down to wrap around his waist.

“Nuh uh. No clean-up.”

“We’re disgusting,” Cas says between kisses, but there’s another tiny smile at the corner of his mouth and Dean can feel it on his own lips.

“You…” he rumbles, sliding a hand down between their bodies, between Cas’ legs, “are perfect.”

Dean slips two fingers into Cas’ hole, wet with slick and come. Cas whines, his hips automatically pushing against Dean’s fingers.

“You really want to go clean up?”
“Not anymore,” Cas growls, grabbing the back of Dean’s neck and tugging their lips together. Cas bites at Dean’s bottom lip, and Dean can smell a tiny trace of annoyance that makes his smile grow. “Your knot, Dean. Now.”

“Bossy,” Dean says with a grin, admiring Cas’ blown pupils. Everything about him is irresistible. Dean’s dick isn’t totally hard yet, his knot having just barely shrunk, but it’s giving a valiant effort to get on board. In the mean time, half-staff will do. Dean hooks a hand under the back of Cas’ thigh, hitching it up over his hip. Cas lets out a shivering moan as Dean slides into him, and Dean watches how his cheeks flush and how his eyes flutter closed.

This round is lazy and slow, in contrast with the last one. Dean’s thrusts are short and slow, and their mouths stay latched together the entire time. Cas’ fingers card through Dean’s hair, Dean’s arms holding his cat close. They move together, their hips rocking at a steady, calm rhythm.

Dean strokes Cas’ cock with the same slow rhythm. It’s barely enough to push them both towards an orgasm, but they get there. Easily and comfortably and together, they get there.

After, Dean buries his nose in Cas’ throat and blissfully, peacefully, passes the fuck out.

***

There’s another rough, quick round when Dean wakes up, his rut rearing its ugly head and telling him to breedbreedbreed. He doesn’t bite Cas again, even though the wolf desperately wants to, so he considers that progress.

When they separate, Cas hisses in pain and the wolf and Dean both snap right to attention.

“I hurt you,” Dean says, stomach plummeting. Cas smiles and a wave of calm passes over him.

“No, but I am sore. It’s been less than twenty-four hours.”

Dean huffs and urges Cas onto his stomach, determined to take care of his mate.

“Dean…”

“Let me,” he says gently, running a hand down Cas’ side. His cat sighs and relaxes under his touch.

“Okay. But I’m fine. Honestly.”

Cas doesn’t look fine, not to Dean’s eye, anyway. His hole is puckered and pink, looking sore and abused. Part of Dean knows that’s just part of getting through a rut, that it happens, but he hasn’t exactly been helping.

Dean settles himself between Cas’s legs, lifting his hips slightly off the cushioned floor and getting to work. He starts carefully licking along the edge of his rim, testing out the sensitive spots. Cas hisses the first few flicks, but gentle sweeps of his tongue draw a softer sigh out of him. There is slick and come all over, so Dean cleans that away too.

“More,” Cas groans, his hips rocking back as he apparently gets tired of the teasing touches of Dean’s tongue.

Dean obliges, pressing closer. With wide palms Dean spreads him open, dipping his tongue into Cas’ hole and tasting fresh slick as Cas moans at the sensation. Dean tastes his perfect mate, Dean tastes himself, growling and burying himself deeper. Cas cries out and presses back, Dean’s tongue
swirling inside him.

“Holy shit, Dean,” Cas pleads, his hips rocking against Dean’s tongue. Dean’s thumb slides down, finding that spot behind Cas’ balls and pressing down, and that’s all it takes. Cas collapses, and its only Dean’s hands that keep him from flopping completely down onto his stomach. Dean works him through the whole thing, sliding his tongue along his rim and pressing inside of him, massaging the sensitive patch of skin.

And Dean isn’t nearly done with him yet.

When that orgasm subsides, and Cas is still panting from the effects, Dean pulls away and lies on his back still between Cas’ legs, fitting his head between his spread knees. The pillows under his head are wet, but Dean doesn’t care.

Before Cas can even ask what Dean is up to he lifts his head and closes his mouth over Cas’ now soft dick.

“Wha—ahhhhhh…” Cas moans, thrusting down into Dean’s mouth before he realizes what he’s doing. Dean rumbles happily, the vibration making Cas whimper. Dean loosens his throat, encouraging Cas to push down.

Cas finally manages to get a handle on himself and sits back on Dean’s chest, his cock resting in Dean’s mouth as his blood scrambles to head south. They make heated eye contact, Cas’ eyes hungry. While he’s looking Dean slides a hand up his leg and around back, slipping two fingers into him easily. Cas throws his head back, and all inhibition goes out the window.

Cas’ fingers grip tight in Dean’s hair, his hips split between pushing forward into Dean’s mouth and pushing back onto his fingers. Dean’s name spills from his lips over and over, and the second orgasm is even more satisfying for Dean to watch than the first. Come shoots down his throat, and Dean watches the awe spread across Cas’ face as he swallow’s it down.

It takes a matter of seconds for Cas to gather Dean’s face in his hands, for him to smash their lips together as he tastes himself on Dean’s tongue.

“Fucking wolf,” he growls, panting and tugging roughly on Dean’s hair. “I can’t believe you.”

“Do you love me?” Dean grins, admiring the fire in Cas’ eyes and matching the neediness of his lips.

“Of course I love you,” Cas snaps at him, pulling Dean up into a sitting position and straddling his lap. “Will you please fuck me now?”

Dean smiles. “Gladly.”

***

Morning brings what Dean hopes—prays, really—will be the last round of his rut. If there’s a God, and if he’s at all merciful, Dean will be right.

His body fucking hurts. Everywhere. Every muscle, every bone, every cell that makes up Dean hurts. He’s used to this kind of achy-ness at the end of a rut, but never to this extent. He guesses those first few days did more of a number on him that he’d thought. Not a surprise, really.

“Cas,” he rasps when he wakes up, his throat dry and raw. Cas has been doing his best to get food and water into Dean’s system now that his body is willing to keep it down, but the dehydration is
setting in slowly.

His mate is draped across his chest, breathing slowly and probably trying to catch some sleep. The bouts of Dean’s rut have been getting further apart, but he knows Cas is feeling the exhaustion. Neither of them has gotten more than two or three hours of sleep in a row since Dean got here.

“What do you need?” Cas says gently, lifting his head and nuzzling Dean’s cheek with his nose.

“Nothin’ yet,” Dean sighs, the rest of the sentence falling unspoken between them. The lust is creeping sluggishly up his spine, but it’s satisfied for now by the expanse of bare skin under his palms.

“Alright.” Still Cas’ lips touch the underside of his jaw, damp kisses along his exposed throat. Dean closes his eyes and lets his head fall to the side, focusing on the sharp scrape of Cas’ teeth instead of the deep-seated ache in his bones.

They have a few minutes of quiet peace. Dean carding his fingers through Cas’ absolutely wrecked hair, Cas’ thumb stroking along his jaw as his mouth lazily works at Dean’s neck. A brief thought passes through his hazy mind, and he wishes that Cas would bite. Claim him like he is claimed. It fizzles out quickly under the crashing waves of lust.

“Cas…”

His mate shifts automatically, straddling Dean’s hips and looking down at him with hooded, tired eyes.

“I know.”

In all honesty, Cas does all of the work. Dean can barely get his fingers to hold on to Cas’ hips, let alone lift his own to help out. Cas doesn’t seem to mind too terribly much. He rocks back and forth, swiveling his hips and lifting up and sliding back down. It isn’t the best sex they’ve ever had together, even if Dean’s rut clouded mind is trying to convince him otherwise. Still, it gets the job done. Dean manages to wrap his fist loosely around Cas’ dick, his mate parting his lips in pleasure. Careful touches draw out quiet moans, and Cas tumbles over the edge after Dean is knotted inside him. Cas is panting heavily and collapses almost immediately on Dean’s chest, but Dean knows that was it.

“That was the last one,” he mumbles, his eyelids already falling shut.

“You sure?”

“Yeah.”

Cas huffs. “Good. Don’t wake me up.”

“Wouldn’t dream of it, kitten,” Dean says with a bleary smile, so fucking happy that the fire is going out of his veins.

His mate snuffles and nuzzles into his chest, and then nothing else matters except the dark, warm blanket of sleep wrapped all around him.
Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

“It feels good to see the night sometimes.”

Chapter Notes

So, I am going to offer a brief apology here. I know you all are eager to get back to the Pack (and John) to see everyone's reactions (mostly John's) but we just aren't there quite yet. The plot here is moving a bit slower than originally intended, and the boys have some stuff to work out before the inevitable shitstorm that is going to be their return to the Bunker. This one is slightly more plotty than the last, and hopefully you'll have just a bit more patience with me while we work through some stuff that needs to happen before they make their way back. A lot of stuff happens really quickly once they are back, and we can't get there too soon.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“They just…locked you up?”

Dean nods, dumping a double handful of water onto Cas’ head and smoothing his unruly hair back. The lust is gone from his veins, but his post-rut instincts have him itching to care for his mate in every way.

“You didn’t even get to plead my case.”

Cas’ blue eyes look dark and stormy.

“That’s ridiculous. We’ll have to change their minds.”

Dean raises his eyebrows. “You want to go back?”

“You don’t?”

“No, I just…” Dean hesitates, studying the tilt of Cas’ head and the slight frown on his lips. He scoops some water onto his shoulder and massages the muscles in his hand to give his eyes something else to focus on. “Course I do. Want to go back. Just thought I’d have to convince you.”

Cas’ finger touches his chin, forcing Dean’s gaze up.

“They are your family. I would not give up on them so easily.”

Dean leans in and kisses him, slow and warm. He missed this, easy touches with no instinctive need behind them.

“They don’t deserve that.”
His mate sighs and climbs into his lap, and Dean takes the opportunity to wash his back and massage circles into the muscles on either side of his spine. The cool water laps at his back and sides, lazy drips rolling down his skin.

“Perhaps you’ll feel differently once you’ve spoken with them,” Cas says, running his own wet hands through Dean’s short hair. Dean exhales against his lips as Cas kisses him slowly, sliding their tongues together and pressing as close to Dean’s chest as he can manage.

“Maybe. Dad said he was gonna fix my mess, whatever that means. Kinda feels like there’s something else going on, you know?”

Cas nods, a small frown appearing on his lips.

“I do. I wish we had more information.”

“We’ll get more,” Dean says firmly. “I’m tired of being in the dark.”

“Agreed,” Cas hums with a small yawn.

“Tired?”

“Incredibly.”

Dean laughs. “We can go back, if you want.”

Cas leans his cheek against Dean’s shoulder and nuzzles his neck, purring quietly.


Dean can’t disagree with him there. After days of feeling sweaty and sticky and too hot, some cool, fresh water on his skin is heavenly. Even better with Cas in his arms. So Dean just nods and scoops some water onto the nape of his neck, tracing gentle fingers across the mating bite.

“What happened after I conked out?” Dean asks. Cas takes a moment to respond.

“You mean after your father forcefully knocked you unconscious?”

His voice is bitter. Dean tries his best to brush it off with a grunt. “Whatever.”

“Your father said some choice words, your mother calmed him down enough to convince him to walk away. I was being…restrained.”

Dean raises his eyebrows, a bad feeling curdling in his stomach. “What choice words, exactly? And what’d you try to do?”

“It doesn’t matter,” Cas says calmly. “We were both angry, and acting on instincts. It’s over, and everyone is okay.”

A growl rumbles in Dean’s chest. He’ll have to ask Sam what his dad said, because from the tone of Cas’ voice he isn’t budging. Dean needs to know what his asshole of a father said to his mate.

The rumbling subsides and is replaced by the gentle purring emanating from Cas’ chest. Dean doesn’t even realize he’s being soothed until his heart rate is back to normal and his teeth are unclenched. He opens his mouth to complain, but decides better of it. Cas is right. His anger isn’t needed here.
“Can I ask something?” Cas says, sitting up to meet his gaze. Dean just nods slowly. “The scent that was on you when you arrived…who was that?”

“Don’t be mad,” Dean says preemptively. He can’t handle a fight with Cas right now. Luckily his mate just smiles.

“I’m not,” his knuckles brush over the scruff on Dean’s jawline, and Dean leans into the touch. “But something happened and I’d like to know what.”

Dean heaves a heavy sigh. Damn him and his logic. “A girl. Lisa.”

Cas frowns slightly and tilts his head to the side, studying Dean’s expression.

“You have history.”

“Yeah,” Dean says, even though it isn’t a question.

Cas hums and settles his hands on either side of Dean’s neck, placing a slow kiss on his lips. Dean chases it, even as Cas pulls away with a tiny smile playing at the corner of his mouth.

“Tell me about her.”

It doesn’t even occur to Dean to skim over the details. Cas deserves to know.

“We met when I was sixteen. I was drawn to her right away, my wolf liked her. Her wolf liked me. We’d go hunting together, run together on the full moon. Stayed with her for two years.”

“You loved her?” Cas says, but the expression on his face is one of curiosity.

“Yeah,” Dean breathes. It’s odd talking to Cas about this, but some part of him is relieved. “But I think…I duno. We weren’t really happy, you know?” Dean pauses, but Cas just tilts his head and waits for more. “We should’ve been perfect for each other. She ticked all the boxes on my list, or whatever. My wolf was a fickle bastard back then, but he accepted her. I should’ve been all hands on deck when she said she wanted to mate. And I just wasn’t.”

“Do you know why?”

Dean shrugs. “I think I was too young. And then there’s the part of me that knows that neither of us was really that happy. I think we just convinced ourselves that we were. I’d told myself a million times that she was what I should want. That she was the perfect girl for me.”

He stops short. It’d taken him a while to come to that conclusion, to puzzle out what had been going on, and he’s damn sure he’s never said it out loud before. Cas just makes him want to spill his fucking guts, no matter how bloody.

“So you said no,” Cas prompts, when the silence hangs too long.

Dean huffs a laugh. “That’s probably too kind. I freaked, said fuck no. We got in a helluva fight after that.”

“And she left,” Cas says. His eyes are sad now, his pink lips turned slightly down. Dean can see the pity in his blue eyes.

“Yeah, well,” Dean clears his throat, offering Cas a smile, “everybody gets their heart broken once, right? Wouldn’t’a worked out anyway. She was never gonna be you.”
Cas holds his face in both hands while he kisses him. Dean lets his arms around Cas’ waist pull his mate closer, feeling a pressure in his chest like a balloon expanding. It’s almost comical talking about his relationship with Lisa, because their burning candle isn’t even visible next to the blazing torch he carries for Cas. He’s never been more thankful than he is right now that he’d said no to Lisa ten years ago.

“I would have liked to know you at that age,” Cas says with a sneaky smile. “I imagine you were quite gangly.”

Dean growls against his lips. “I wasn’t gangly. I was eighteen, not fourteen.”

Cas nods in mock seriousness. “Of course. I’m sure you were very tough and scary at eighteen, too.”

Dean grips his nape and kisses him hard. “You asshole. Like you were so tough and scary.”

“Mm,” Cas hums. “I believe we were talking about you, not me.”

“That so?” Dean grins his lips traveling along the length of Cas’ neck. Cas isn’t having it.

“Yes. So tell me what happened.”

Dean sighs grumpily and drops his head to Cas’ shoulder.

“Nothing happened. She wanted me to mate her. Think my dad assumed that since I was in a rut, I wouldn’t be able to resist somebody compatible.”

“Instead?”

“Instead I went into crazy withdrawal,” Dean sighs. “Not sure how much Lisa knew coming in, but I think as soon as she realized what was happening she let me go.”

Cas is looking at him with that tiny little frown again, the one that makes Dean feel all twisted up inside. His mate’s palm settles on his cheek, and Dean leans into it automatically.

“It sounds like she didn’t know,” Cas says gently. Dean wants to think that too, because the girl he used to know wouldn’t have put him in that position on purpose.

“Yeah. Maybe.”

Dean would be lying if he said he wasn't worried about her. Who knows the shitstorm of trouble that Lisa could be in right now, because of him. But she's not actually a member of the Pack, so that'll help her out. Ultimately John and the rest of the Council will have to yield to her alpha when it comes to punishment, and that would mean airing some of the Pack’s dirty laundry.

They sit in silence for a few moments, both of their fingers pruning from the water. Cas breaks the silence first, his voice quiet and soft.

“Please try not to show up on my doorstep on your death bed ever again, okay?”

“Deathbed might be kinda dramatic,” Dean huffs, but Cas silences him with a look.

“I had to watch you get knocked unconscious, only for you to arrive several days later malnourished, dehydrated, stinking of rut and in full blown withdrawal. Never again, Dean.”

Cas’ voice wavers as it forms Dean’s name. The wolf whines and paces in circles, feeling guilt for
putting their mate through this. Dean pulls Cas close and tangles his fingers in his damp, dark hair, breathing out steadily and covering his cat in his scent. Cas shivers and purrs quietly, curling closer. It isn’t the pleased kind of purr, and Dean can tell the difference.

“I’m sorry, Cas.”

His mate just sniffs and doesn’t respond.

“Let’s go home.”

***

There’s a sneaky smile on Cas’ face when they get back to the treehouse and up into their nest. They’d cleared away the…well…soiled pillows and blankets and stashed them in a pile downstairs, with a promise from Cas that yes, he does have a way to wash them. Dean is skeptical. Still, it’s helped clear out some of the rut stink.

Stink, at least, in Dean’s opinion. Cas’ reaction—in the form of a slight shiver and overly dilated pupils—is decidedly more positive. Dean has no objections to Cas sticking his nose against Dean’s throat and inhaling though, so it isn’t a problem.

“What are you planning?” Dean asks suspiciously, in response to the glint in Cas’ eye. His mate smiles very slightly and tugging him down and kissing him quick and eagerly.

“Let’s shift,” he says. “I’d like to wear my fur. And your wolf is beautiful.”

The wolf swaggers around with its tongue hanging out, leaping at the opportunity to show off to their mate. Dean rolls his eyes, even as he feels his own burst of pride.

“Sure thing, kitty. But we gotta climb down.”

“Up here,” Cas hums, sidling close to Dean again and nosing at the underside of his jaw. Dean laughs.

“You know wolves can’t climb, right? No way. Nuh uh. Not happening.”

“Dean…”

“Nope. Sorry, Cas. I’d be happy to run around or nap down on solid ground.”

Cas honest to god pouts, crossing his arms and glaring at Dean with pressed lips and furrowed eyebrows.

“I want to nap up here. Where it’s soft, and warm.”

“Cool,” Dean shrugs. “I’ll just stay people.”

Cas glares at him before a thought visibly crosses his mind, cooling his features until they’ve shifted from annoyance to resignation.

“Fine.”

Cas slips out of his clothes as the shift ripples down his spine, the audible crack of his joints and tearing of his skin grating on Dean’s ears. The really weird part, though, is what he feels through the bond. It’s not comprehensive in the sense that he can hear Cas’ thoughts, or know how he’s feeling, or anything like that. It’s more of a low level buzz, a pressure, a kind of presence in his mind that
isn’t him or the wolf. It doesn’t really feel like anything, except for comfort and warmth and like a wire that hadn’t been plugged in but now that it is the whole circuit is running without a hitch.

Then Cas shifts, and a sort of...wave ripples through the bond. Not painful, just a gentle shift. The bond takes on a wilder flavor, like a drop of dye in a glass of water.

Dean just stares while it happens, trying to puzzle out what’s happening. The bond settles when the shift finishes, but it feels different still.

In front of him Cas arches his back to stretch, flexing his claws in the cushions under his paws before flopping down and rolling onto his back. His tail twitches and he snuffles quietly, staring up at Dean with big blue eyes.

“Hey kitten,” Dean sighs, laying on his back next to the giant panther and scratching gently under his chin, rubbing a flat palm over his broad chest. Cas starts to purr, but there’s something about this one. It isn’t the slow one, or the sad one from earlier, or his normal contented kitty cat one. Dean just doesn’t know what it is.

Cas nudges at Dean’s cheek with his nose, grunting and rolling to stand up. He flicks his tail against Dean’s face as he walks away, an all too familiar gesture. Dean watches while his mate pads around the room, mouth open while he clearly looks for something. Over in the corner Cas digs at a couple of pillows before walking in a tight circle and laying down. Dean is about to complain when he stands back up, looks at Dean, and starts purring again. Some instinct in Dean stirs, probably some late after effect of his rut.

“I dunno what you want,” Dean says with a shrug, watching his cat carefully. The cat pads around for a few more minutes before repeating the process. “This nest not comfy enough for you?” Dean says, only half kidding. Because if it actually isn’t comfy enough, he’s gotta fix that.

Cas digs at the blankets again, then stares at Dean and tilts his head.

“I’m not doing it.”

The purring starts again, and it’s like his wolf is in a goddamn trance.

“Nope. Not happening.”

Cas’ eyebrows pitch up in the middle, his shoulders slumping a little bit. Dean folds. This is his mate, and it’s his job as alpha to make him happy. Cas deserves the world.

“Fine. Bastard.”

The bond sizzles while Dean shifts, which is a nice distraction from the pain in his bones and the cracking of his joints as they pop into place. He shakes himself out when he’s done, grunting at the self-satisfied look in the panther’s eyes.

The wolf stretches and steps forward, and Dean lets him trot around for a few minutes. The pillows under their paws feel strange, where they are used to rough forest floor or the cool stone of the den. The smell of their mate is all around though, which is pleasing. Their nest smells like the two of them, smells the way the bond smells. The wolf snuffles along the outside wall of the nest while Cas looks on with an amused expression on his face. He is sure to subtly rub his scent onto the walls, though that certainly doesn’t escape Cas’ attention.

Then that purring starts again. The wolf hears it, feels it even more keenly than Dean had when he was human. His ears twitch and he immediately rumbles a growl and heads straight for Cas where
he’s curled up in the middle of the nest.

Dean maybe wouldn’t say that the wolf is running the show completely. But it is definitely his instincts carrying him when he walks over to curl himself around his mate, using his teeth to pile up blankets on and around them. A *proper* nest.

The warmth and smell all around him lulls them both, Dean and his wolf.

Dean uses his teeth to nibble lightly at Cas’ ears, smiling internally when they twitch in response. The urgent purring stops, too, replaced by that slow, hypnotic one that makes Dean want to curl closer and never leave. He uses his rough tongue on Cas’ fur to groom him carefully, from the top of his head to between his ears to the back of his neck and under his chin. Cas’ tail bends up and curls around his back, his breathing slowing with every careful lick.

It satisfies every instinct in him to lay like this, to care for Cas like he cares for his pack. It’s been too long since him and his packmates piled up together, and he’s missed it. He even forgets that he’s in a goddamn tree, god knows how far off the ground.

When he’s (mostly) satisfied Cas takes over, blinking open sleepy blue eyes and squinting happily at Dean. Cas touches their noses together for a brief moment before nudging at Dean’s muzzle.

Cas’ tongue licks across Dean’s rough fur with the same patience and care that Dean had tried to show, maybe even more. Dean hears a happy rumble escape his chest when Cas reaches his ears, and it’s definitely intentional that his mate spends a few more minutes there. The desire to sleep bleeds through him, until he can’t even hold his head up anymore.

Dean finally gives in, resting his chin on the back of Cas’ neck and closing his eyes. They’re safe up here together, Dean’s mate is safe curled up next to him. So he falls asleep calmer than ever, soothed by the rumbling purr vibrating through his bones.

***

It’s pitch black outside when Dean wakes up. He feels fingers scratching behind his ears, his mate’s rumbling voice in his ear.

“Little wolf, wake up.”

Dean huffs and buries his muzzle under his paws.

“I know you’re awake.”

Dean still ignores him. The sun is down, probably has been down for a while. This is *not* the time to be waking up. This is the time to be going back to sleep.

He feels Cas lay down next to him, one hand tugging on one of his ears while the other shifts his paws off his nose. Cas nuzzles at his muzzle, human lips on his coarse fur.

“Dean.”

He turns his head very slightly to the side and licks Cas’ mouth before snuffling and settling back down with his eyes closed.

“You are a disgusting animal,” Cas scoffs. Dean glares at him out of one eye. “I’m hungry,” he states, pushing Dean’s lip up and exposing his sharp wolf teeth. Dean lets out a low growl, pleased at the amused sound Cas makes. “Big, bad, wolf.”
The wolf rumbles happily. Their mate smells wonderful, sounds so content. Dean presses a wet nose against his cheek.

“I want something to eat. And to see my pack. Are you going to come with me, or am I leaving you here?”

Dean sighs and stands, shaking out his fur. He can’t exactly say no to that, and his wolf urges him to go hunt something down for their mate. No way he’s about to fucking do that, but he can make sure Cas finds his way to food. He lets his body pull itself through the shift at its own pace, his human brain still not sure that he wants to be up when it’s so obviously the middle of the night.

When he’s finished ripping his body apart and putting it back together he cracks his knuckles and rolls his neck, looking at Cas with an exasperated expression.

“Kitty, it’s the middle of the night.”

Cas’ lips twitch and he hums, standing up and fitting himself into Dean’s arms. “Puppy, I’m aware that the sun is down.”

“So why are we going to see your pack right now?”

Cas kisses underneath his jaw, lips trailing down his neck while his teeth nibble insistently along the way.

“Need I remind you that leopards are nocturnal?” Cas sighs, pulling back and running both hands down Dean’s chest. “It feels good to see the night sometimes.”

He wants to continue protesting, but they’ve been asleep for a while and now that he’s actually fully roused he doesn’t feel that tired. His sleep schedule is going to get fucked, but whatever. Dean cups the back of Cas’ neck and presses a chaste kiss to his lips before glancing around for some clothes to throw on. He finds a pair of sweats and a t-shirt, and they both climb out of the tree barefooted to head towards Anna’s place.

Somehow, Dean doesn’t expect there to be much activity. It had been quiet last time, and even knowing that this is their pack center he expects it to be quiet again.

That is definitely not the case.

The first thing Dean notices are the lanterns scattered around the open area of grass in front of Anna’s cabin. The second thing is that the lanterns aren’t the only things scattered around. Anna is there, her pup—or, cub probably—on her lap in leopard form chewing on her fingers. Next to her is Michael, still looking stoic and serious. Though he does look more relaxed, probably something to do with the fact that his mate is tucked under his arm.

Gabriel is a few feet away, talking animatedly with two girls. One looks amused, but one just looks exasperated. Behind him is a pinched looking blonde, leaning back against a huge leopard with its eyes closed and it’s tail flicking up every so often. Dean recognizes Balthazar too, the irritating blond laying on his back and pointing up at the stars while the girl—Hannah, he thinks, though it’s hard to tell with Balthazar mostly blocking his view—following the direction he’s pointing with her eyes.

That other Seraph—Dean knows he’s met him, but he doesn’t remember the name—is also sitting next to Balthazar, though his focus is on the grass he seems to be tearing up with his fingers. Another leopard is curled up off to the side, his belly round and his fur looking sort of…frazzled. Dean gets the impression that this might be the elder that Cas has mentioned.
Dean hovers back behind the line of trees, hesitating. Cas takes two extra steps before pausing and looking back at him.

“Dean?”

His heart lurches, the need to wrap his cat up in his arms.

“You sure this is a good idea?”

Cas tilts his head carefully to the side. “What are you worried about?”

“That they’ll freak the fuck out? Like my pack did?”

His mate steps forward and takes his face in his gentle hands.

“Your father reacted poorly. We don’t know how your pack feels yet. They might appreciate you having more faith in them.”

Dean snorts. Faith didn’t get him out of that godforsaken room. Faith got his ass kicked and his pack believing that he’d hurt them.

“Besides,” Cas continues, “they’ve known about you the whole time.”

“No part of you thinks they’re gonna hold a grudge ‘cause I’m a wolf? Your healer wasn’t quite so friendly last time.”

Cas gives him a look. “We’ve been over that. Anna will behave.”

They stare at each other for a few more seconds, and Dean keeps waiting for Cas to say that he’s right, that this is a bad idea. That the leopards are going to freak out and attack or try to take Cas away or split them up and none of those are things that he’s willing to let happen.

Cas doesn’t budge.

“Fine,” Dean sighs. He lets Cas tug on his fingers and lead the way out of the trees.

All of the leopards are talking and laughing, snacking on what looks like barbecue skewers with chips and cups of what might actually be beer. The wolf salivates at the thought of fresh meat on their tongue.

As they approach, the conversations die down one by one as all of Cas’ pack turns to stare at them. Gabriel is the first to speak.

“Well, well, well,” he says with a giant shit-eating grin, still chewing a mouthful of something. “Look what the cat dragged in!”

He doesn’t want to, but damn Dean can’t not laugh at that. It seems to actually break some of the tension, even as Cas drags him forward and practically puts him on display in front of the whole group.

“This is Dean,” he says, his voice even and a little proud. “My mate.”

The group turns to face Michael, even as he glances over at Gabriel and the leopard laying behind him. Some silent communication seems to pass between them before Michael turns back to face Dean and Cas. His gaze seems pinched, but his voice when he speaks is warm.
“Dean. The Host welcomes you.”

Chapter End Notes

So if you haven't already noticed Dean's pack calls themselves the Pack. The Host is what the leopards call themselves. I tried to go with something more accurate for leopards, but "pride" didn't feel right and a group of leopards is called a "leap" and no way I was calling them that. So something angelic was in order!
Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

“They aren’t going to kidnap you and skin you, right?”

Chapter Notes

SOrry guys this is posted so late in the day, it's been a nutty 4th of July weekend here in the US of A. Also mostly just at my house. Stacking hangovers is not a good idea! Phew. The some of the events of this chapter were at least partially inspired by annamaymasters5319, who was drinking some delicious sounding drink with dubious origins that made me want to write about homemade alcohol that maybe doesn't taste so great. So thank you for your comments, it was a nice little burst of fun I got to add in this mess :))

Also, we have some gorgeous new fanart! Courtesy of the very very talented blackpearl888. I'm adding it to this chapter so that everyone can see it! marvel over how gorgeous it is (and the adorable heart on Dean I love it). I continued to be awed by the talent that you guys have, and I am endlessly flattered that I inspired anyone to make art.

See the end of the chapter for more notes
He turns his head to mouth the words at Cas, as subtly as he can while everyone stares at him. *The Host?*

Cas just smiles and nods discreetly. He turns his attention back to the group in front of him, where everyone with thumbs is holding up their cups at him. They all nod and take drinks, then return to their conversations. There’s no big fanfare, no violent outbreak, nothing. Just like that, they take him in. Even with how the Council has treated them. Even with the shit they are going through, how their pack is being torn apart. Just because he belongs to Cas.

“Shit,” he says quietly, following along in a daze while Cas leads him around the group to sit next to Gabriel. Cas doesn’t say anything, for which he’s grateful. He needs a fuckin’ minute to process how easy that was. How easy it *should’ve* been in his pack.

“The mystery wolf is finally here!” Gabriel practically cackles as they sit down, shifting so he’s facing them instead of the two girls. The brunette looks relieved. His gaze rakes over Dean’s body
slowly, like he’s a piece of meat. “Goddamn, Cassie. I approve.”

“Please stop looking at my mate like you’d like to eat him,” Cas says good-naturedly, leaning into Dean’s side. Gabriel just shrugs and goes back to his skewer.

“Your fault for bringing home this hunk. Especially an alpha.”

“Alphas are Gabriel’s…type,” Cas explains distractedly, twisting his neck to look around. “Where’s the food?”

Gabriel gestures at the house and Cas wanders away, presumably to load up a plate for them.

“Hold up,” Dean says, rubbing at his jaw. “You’re an alpha.”

Gabriel arches an eyebrow and smiles mischievously. “So?”

“And you’re into other alphas?”

“Absolutely,” he grins, punctuating it with a dramatic wink. Dean snorts and shakes his head.

“You guys are fuckin’ weird.”

“Puh-lease. Like you have any room to talk. Castiel over there isn’t much different from an alpha.”

Dean glances over to where his mate has disappeared into the cabin. Gabriel is kind of right. Cas doesn’t have any of that animal dominance that Dean has, or that any alpha has, but his mate sure as hell isn’t submissive. And when it comes down to it, Dean is pretty sure he knows a few alphas that would drop their eyes for Cas.

“Yeah. Whatever.”

Cas reappears a second later with two cups balanced in his hand and a plate overflowing with food. The wolf practically purrs. Cas settles back down and leans into him, handing him one of the cups. It definitely looks like beer, but it smells way stronger.

“Balthazar’s home brew,” Cas hums taking a small drink and nodding over at where the other leopard is still sprawled out on his back. Dean shrugs and takes a drink, immediately regretting the size of his sip.

“Th’fuck?” he winces, forcing himself to swallow around his cough. He glares at the cup in suspicion, fairly sure that whatever the hell is in it is not regular beer. Gabriel is cackling again, and Cas is definitely hiding a smile behind his cup. Dean can see it in his eyes.

“A little too hard for you, big guy?” Gabriel says with animated eyebrows. Dean glares at him. “Hey Balthy!” Gabriel calls out over the group, getting the blond’s attention. “Little puppy dog over here doesn’t like your beer!”

Balthazar sits up and laughs, raising his cup towards them.

“That ain’t beer,” Dean grumbles, turning his glare on Cas while his mate does an even worse job at hiding his laughter behind his fingers.

“Not everybody can handle it, darling. Don’t feel too bad,” Balthazar calls out, tossing Dean a wink.

“Bite me!” he snaps back, but it doesn’t exactly have the desired effect.
“Maybe later,” the leopard smiles, draining his cup and flopping back down on the grass. Dean rumbles and glares at Cas.

“Quit laughing.”

“Me?” Cas says, chewing his lip and looking far too innocent. “Puppy, I’m offended. I would never.”

Dean huffs and forces himself to take another drink, ignoring the way it lights up his throat on the way down. It really isn’t that bad, now that he’s prepared for straight up ethanol.

“What’s in this shit?”

“The usual stuff,” Cas shrugs. His eyes look unusually bright, and his cheeks even look a little bit pink despite the fresh air around them.

“Just way stronger,” Gabriel adds on. “Regular beer, no effect on us. This stuff?”

He doesn’t need to finish, Dean gets the idea. Back at the Bunker they don’t even bother with beer, except if you like the taste. There’s not enough alcohol content, and with the speed of their metabolisms it’s impossible to even get a buzz. No matter how fast you drink it. So they stick to the hard stuff. Dean is a whiskey guy himself, when he’s in the mood and got the time. Which, admittedly, isn’t often, but it happens.

“You break this out often?” he asks, smiling at the warmth in his cat’s cheeks and shifting so he can lean more heavily against Dean’s chest. His scent still clings to Cas’ skin in a permanent kind of way, and he can’t get enough of it.

“For special occasions,” Cas sighs, leaning his head back against Dean’s shoulder. Dean presses a kiss to the top of his head and breathes into his messy hair.

“What’s so special about tonight?” Dean asks, eyebrows furrowed. Sure as hell feels like the Host should be mourning right now, not getting drunk in the grass. Cas just sniffs and stays quiet against him.

It’s Gabriel who answers, with a surprisingly serious expression on his face.

“We’re all still here, at least,” Gabriel says with a long, heavy breath. “Drink to that.”

That hits Dean square in the chest.

“Yeah,” he says, inhaling the scent of mate and safe. “Okay.”

All three of them take a drink, and a moment of silence. Dean doesn’t think it’s intentional, but it feels right.

“Come on,” Cas leans forward, grabbing a skewer and handing it to Dean. “Eat.”

He does. And it’s fan-fucking-tastic. The first skewer has some kind of steak on it, along with some vegetables that he thinks are peppers and maybe some onions. He eats around them. The second one has spiced chicken that sets his mouth on fire, along with sweet pineapples. He actually eats those.

Cas looks and smells pleased the entire time, handing Dean a new skewer each time he finishes one. He rolls his eyes when Dean hands him back the first skewer with vegetables still on it.

“Really?”
“Rabbit food,” Dean shrugs. Then he adds on with a grin around a mouthful of steak, “I’m a predator.”

Cas doesn’t smile, but Dean can see it at the corner of his mate’s mouth.

“Tell the wolf he needs all six food groups, not just one of them.”

The wolf snuffles and ignores the comment.

He gives Dean a look each time, but he doesn’t comment again. Instead he picks the vegetables off and eats them himself, snagging chunks of meat off of Dean’s skewers. There’s ultimately plenty of food on that plate for both of them, and it definitely doesn’t escape Dean’s notice that Cas is choosing to accept food from him rather than having his own skewer. And it definitely doesn’t escape him that Cas is having him eat first.

It feels odd, but Cas looks so happy with himself and keeps fucking gazing at Dean with those big blue eyes, so it all seems okay.

They spend most of their time talking to Gabriel, and a couple other leopards that shuffle over to sniff out the new addition. Dean feels like he’s under a microscope, but no one is aggressive towards him even though he scents more than a few alphas all around him. It set his teeth on edge for the first little while, but he settles into it like he would with his own pack.

Cas spends a little bit of time pointing out the back members that Dean doesn’t know, or doesn’t recognize. The leopard sprawled out behind them is Lucifer, which he probably could’ve guessed. He keeps a wary eye on Dean almost the entire time, and it makes him feel agitated in his own skin. With him is his mate, a beta named Lilith. The girls who were talking with Gabriel are Hester and Naomi, one of them a beta and one a Seraph like Cas. The girl laying next to Balthazar turns out to be Hannah like he’d expected, and the Seraph next to them is Gadreel.

“I thought he was mated?” Dean asks, eyebrows furrowed.

“He is.”

“Where are they?”

Cas stares down at his lap for a few seconds before looking up at Dean with a sad expression. “A long story for another time.”

Dean nods, looking back over at the guy. He looks normal, if not a little down. He’s still tearing at the grass underneath his hands, no food or drink around him, and he doesn’t look like he has any interest in talking with anyone. Dean’s curiosity peaks, but he saves the questions for when Cas wants to tell the story.

“And over there,” he says, pointing at the sleeping leopard with the frazzled fur, “is Metatron. Pack elder.”

“This isn’t everybody is it?” Dean asks.

“No,” Cas says, sighing and looking around. “Our numbers are small, but not that small.”

Dean’s chest aches for him. Aches for this pack.

“Inias,” Gabriel says, swaying a little bit. “Samandriel. Rachel. Josiah. We shrink every day.”
He sounds frustrated, and Dean can smell it melting off of him. Cas lays a hand on his shoulder and takes a deep breath, and that seems to be enough to nail him back to the ground.

“This isn’t your fault, Gabriel.”


Cas sighs and gives him a look, and Dean gets the feeling that this is a conversation they’ve had before.

“What d’you guys know?” Dean asks, trying to shift Gabriel’s focus. The alpha takes a long drink.

“We know the humans are kidnapping our pack members. We don’t know how, we don’t know where they’re taking them, we don’t know why,” he says, his tone biting. The wolf stirs but stays down. “We don’t know who they’ll take next. We don’t know how to protect ourselves. How’s that for a wealth of knowledge, wolf?”

Dean opens his mouth to speak but Cas beats him to the punch.

“Do not take your frustrations out on him.”

“Dunno what the Council knows,” Dean adds on, “but it can’t be much more.”

“Yeah, no offense puppy dog, but those are a bunch of assholes running wolf camp over there.”

Dean snorts. “They aren’t that bad normally. Somethin’s going on.”

“Or you hope there is.”

Dean’s stomach sinks. It’s only Cas’ weight against him that keeps him settled and not pacing around like a lunatic.

The conversation moves on to lighter things, and they eat and drink until they are both full, until Dean at least has a warm buzz under his skin. He hasn’t been drunk since…god knows when, and he isn’t really drunk now, but he’s fucking relaxed. He somehow ends up sprawled in the grass between Cas’ spread legs with his arms flung over his thighs, his cheek pressed against the thick muscles as his eyes sag shut. He’s trying to stay awake, but he’s full and warm and Cas’ fingers are carding through his hair with such a slow, rhythmic pace. He can hear the rumble of his cat’s low voice as he talks with Gabriel, the rasp of his laughter. So really, it doesn’t take much to knock him out.

But Dean likes it here. He’s happy here. He loves his home and his family, but this pack feels like it could kinda be like home too.

***

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen anyone fall asleep that fast.”

Castiel laughs. “I have magic fingers.”

“Gross, keep that shit between you and your mate.”

Castiel rolls his eyes. He feels it when Dean actually falls asleep. The consciousness that warms him through their bond drifts further away, feels cloudier. He watches the rise and fall of Dean’s chest slow, feels how the weight of his body seems to grow heavier with sleep.

“How?”

“Nothing,” he says, running a hand through his longish hair. “I’ve just never seen you like this.”

Castiel tilts his head. “Like what?”

“All…” Gabriel gestures all around him, scrunching up his nose. “Mated.”

“Is that bad?” he says with raised eyebrows. He doesn’t feel any different, but then being with Dean feels so natural to him that he’s not sure he could tell.

“No way, kiddo,” Gabriel grins. “Guess we shouldn’t have given you so much shit at first, huh?”

“Perhaps not,” Castiel says with a smile. “But the Arch didn’t know.”

“When do you go see the Pack?”

Castiel winces. That’s not something he wants to think about.

“At daylight, I think. The longer we wait the worse it becomes, and I think we may have waited too long already.”

Gabriel seems to get it.

“They aren’t going to kidnap you and skin you, right?”

“Gee, Gabriel,” Castiel rolls his eyes. “I sure hope not.”

He feels Gabriel nudge his shoulder gently. “Kinda serious, Cassie. Should I be worried?”

Castiel tears his gaze away from Dean’s sleeping form to meet his gaze. “No, Gabriel. I’ll be fine.”

“You’re sure they won’t try anything?”

Now that is a funny idea. Castiel almost wants to laugh.

“I’m sure they will. As I am also sure that Dean won’t let them hurt me.” Castiel is still stroking his fingers through Dean’s hair, dragging them all the way down to his nape. His lips are parted and Castiel can hear him breathing, and he’s fairly certain that that’s drool he feels on his leg.

“Bet he’s a scary bastard,” Gabriel scoffs. Castiel smiles down at his sleeping wolf, the tension in his frame completely erased.

“He is,” he says with a smile. “But don’t let him hear you say that. His ego doesn’t need the boost.”

Gabriel chuckles and claps him on the back, standing up to stretch his back. The sun is starting to rise behind him, and Castiel can see the navy blue tint in the sky even if he can’t see the sun yet.

“I’mma go find myself a nice tree. Take your mate and do the same, and try not to die tomorrow. Capisce?”

“I capisce,” Castiel hums, smiling as Gabriel shakes his head and walks away. The rest of his pack as left as well, leaving Castiel and his mate alone outside Anna’s house with a sleeping Metatron curled up nearby.
“Baby,” Castiel says gently, touching Dean’s shoulder and trying to move him as little as possible while still rousing him. His wolf just grunts unhappily. “What is it going to take to convince you to get up and come home with me?”

Dean licks his lips and nuzzles Castiel’s thigh. “You know what I like.”

Castiel pretends to be exasperated, but his mate’s words send a thrill up his spine.

“You haven’t had enough sex recently?”

Dean sits up and grins sleepily, which is a stupidly attractive look for him. It does nothing for Castiel’s resolve, especially when Dean tugs him easily forward for a wet, open-mouthed kiss followed by a trail down his jaw and neck.

“Never get enough of you, kitten,” he mumbles against Castiel’s skin. He can’t help the smile that tugs on his lips.

“Then let’s get home, so you can have me. Hm?”

That idea, at least, Dean seems to like.

The walk is slow, because Dean is sleepy and distracted and Castiel can’t resist his lips. The removal of their clothes once they are inside the treehouse is slower.

They take their time teasing each other, Castiel with his mouth around Dean’s cock and Dean with his tongue against Castiel’s slick soaked hole. It feels, like it always does, like he’s gaining back his missing piece when he sinks down onto Dean’s erection, being filled to the brim. Dean answers his whimpering moan with one of his own, fingers gripping the sharp bones of Castiel’s hips tightly. Dean sits back and let’s Castiel set the pace for a moment, but it doesn’t last. He isn’t rung out and exhausted this time, and this is for them.

Dean sits up and pulls Cas close, groaning as he does.

“Jesus, Cas. Fuck.”

His hands come up Castiel’s bare back, only to drag his blunt nails back down along the skin. Castiel arches his back into the touch, breathing heavy against Dean’s mouth. He grabs his mate’s jaw on either side and surges forward, pressing hard against him and licking insistently into his mouth. The stretch and press of Dean’s cock inside of him urges him on, the head catching his prostate with every couple of thrusts and making him cry out on Dean’s lap.

“Dean…Dean, oh Dean…” he repeats, over and over, like a chorus, like a broken record skipping again and again. Dean Dean Dean DeanDeanDean….  

He doesn’t know where this is coming from but he’s clinging. He knows he’s clinging. But Dean is clutching right back and holding him just as tight, maybe tighter. They move together slowly, aware of each other in a way Castiel can’t comprehend.

“I love you,” he breathes out, the words too heavy in his lungs. His wolf kisses him, handing the words right back.

“Kitten,” he whines, “I’m here, I got you.”

It hits Castiel right where his fear lives, right where he stores the broken images of Dean that he doesn’t want to think about. Right where he keeps every terrible thought that keeps him awake at
night. It tears open all of them, leaves him bloody in Dean’s arms. He thinks about sitting outside Anna’s home, his pack around him, the space at his side empty. He’s tearing at the blades of grass that brush his fingertips. He thinks of Dean sitting in the grass, holding a drink with Gabriel at his side.

_We’re all still here, at least. Drink to that._

But right now they’re here, they’re _together_. Dean is stroking his hair and coaxing him into slow kisses. He starts to respond, and Dean sighs.

“Where’d you go?”

Castiel doesn’t want to talk about it. He opens his eyes to meet Dean’s green gaze.

“Nowhere.” His voice his hoarse, and rough. Dean rests their foreheads together and stills the rest of his body.

“What aren’t you telling me?”

Castiel keeps his mouth shut. He doesn’t want to vocalize his fears, like saying them will make them real. He doesn’t even know why his brain ran away like that but he wants to come back to this moment. He leans in to kiss up the side of Dean’s neck, pleased when his mate automatically bares his throat.

“Cas…”

“Just stay with me,” Castiel murmurs, and that’s the closest he’s going to get to the truth tonight. He rocks his hips in a figure-8, moaning in pleasure as he does. There’s nothing quite like his mate’s body to chase everything else away.

Castiel gets lost in the pool of scent at the juncture of Dean’s neck and shoulder, right where the mating bite is on his own neck. He gets lost in the way Dean moans his name, in the feeling of his short hair between Castiel’s fingers. Castiel moves faster, muffled moans against Dean’s skin at the slide of Dean’s cock past his rim.

Dean lets out a particularly load groan when Castiel puts his teeth on Dean’s neck, sucking and licking but not biting down. Dean’s nails drag down Castiel’s bare back and he whines, and Castiel prays to whatever gods are out there to give him the strength to resist. Alphas do _not_ take bites. Ever. It’s not normal. But with that fucking _whining_ Dean is practically _begging_ him to.

“Do it, Cas,” Dean pants. “Come on. Bite me.”

Castiel’s brain short circuits and his prayers ground to a halt. He practically jumps back, staring at Dean with wide eyes.

“Say that again.”

Dean grins and kisses him hard, whispering in his ear like its the filthiest thing he’s ever said. The chill down Castiel’s spine agrees.

_“Bite me. Claim me.”_

The loudest growl that Castiel has ever made tears out of his throat, much to Dean’s apparent amusement if the rumble in his chest is anything to go by. He wastes no time scenting out the perfect spot, flicking his tongue across the skin until Dean is panting and his knot is swelling inside Castiel.
“Do it!” he snarls, and easy as that he does.

The skin breaks easier than he thought it would, and blood floods his mouth faster. Dean makes a choked noise as he orgasms, the feel of it together with the electric spark down his spine practically shoving Castiel right over the edge with him.

Castiel hangs on, trying to calm his breathing, until Dean makes a pained noise.

“Kitten…”

At that he unhinges his jaw, cleaning the mark with his tongue. His mate lets out an audible sigh of relief, humming happily.

The bond doesn’t feel different, necessarily, as much as it just feels like more. Like it’s made of cable, instead of wire. The presence of it looms larger in Castiel’s mind, never pressuring or overbearing. Just there, solid and comforting.

“Was that—” Castiel starts, just in time for Dean to cut him off. He groans and leans into the kiss, his mouth opening for Dean’s tongue.

“Don’t you fuckin’ as if that was okay,” Dean growls, sounding suspiciously like his wolf. The scent of alpha is flooding the room, so Castiel wouldn’t be surprised. He just blinks and nips at his wolf’s lips.

“Okay.”

He knows that people will stare. He knows that it’s weird for Dean to carry his bite. But then, they were already weird even before that. So maybe it’s okay. Dean certainly doesn’t seem to mind.

“Think we can snooze an hour?” he asks, his green eyes hazy and sleepy as his body comes down from all the endorphins.

“An hour,” Castiel agrees. “Then we need to go back.”

Dean nods, settling onto his back and pulling Castiel down onto his chest. Castiel settles, careful not to tug on Dean’s knot and admiring his bite from where he lays. His wolf looks so good with Castiel’s teeth on his neck.

“This thing went nuclear soon as I left. A little more time won’t hurt.”

Castiel sure hopes he’s right.

They can’t afford to let this get any worse.

Chapter End Notes

Last one before the real drama starts. Promise. Buckle up for next time!
Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

Alright. Here it is. The big giant information dump. The Pack has a lot of stuff going on, so there’s a few things to be covered still in the next chapter, but this should answer a lot of the questions regarding what the hell the wolves have been thinking. That said, there’s a //lot// of timeline madness happening here, and I //think// it should all mesh up with the story so far. If something is confusing, or doesn't make sense, please let me know so that I can fix it or explain. I don't have a beta to help me keep track of this stuff, and sometimes things get lost or switched around in my head. Hopefully that doesn't happen, but forgive me if it does.

Here goes...

They walk through the sensors without pause, fully aware that they’re notifying the Pack of their presence. Dean had no intentions of sneaking in anyway. It’s only a matter of minutes before they’re surrounded, several soldiers circling them in a rotation. By Dean’s count there’s seven of them, which he finds probably inappropriately funny. Seven soldiers would be nothing for him and his cat, if they wanted to get through. Although the lack of any Hunters suggests that this is an escort, not a threat, the Council has gotta be pretty pissed.

When they reach the main entrance Dean pauses, turning to face Cas and search his eyes for any hesitation.

“You ready?”

“I believe so.”

Dean runs a thumb over the mating mark on his neck, rolling his shoulders back and settling into the hard earned calm of his wolf. The animal has eyes only for their mate right now, and Dean has a feeling he’s going to need that sense of peace to make it through this.

“Let’s do it then.”

Dean wants to sling an arm around his shoulders and keep him close, but he knows he can’t. Cas needs to walk tall on his own two feet, and if this is the Pack’s first impression of him then it can’t look like he’s holding on to Dean for support.

They enter the den like that, flanked in front and on both sides by soldiers still in wolf form. Dean recognizes Adam in front, Garth and Meg on the sides. None of them make eye contact with him. He knows they’re just doing their jobs, but it still sucks. Dean resists the urge to look over at Cas as they walk toward the Council chambers. Instead he holds his chin high, and doesn’t pause as people stop to gawk, trusting that Cas is doing the same. They can’t show weakness here, in front of the Pack. Now now.

The Council room is open when they make it down there, and John’s face is one shade away from purple. Even Mary looks pale and unhappy, though that’s definitely relief that flashes across her face when she sees him. Bobby just looks frustrated and tired, while Rufus looks like his usual pissy self
and Ellen has got that stern, motherly concern painted all over her face.

“Where the hell have you been?”

Awesome. Right to it then.

Dean crosses his arms and stares his dad down, holding his gaze.

“This is Castiel,” Dean says, his voice sure and confident. “My mate. I went to him after you guys locked me up.”

Mary flinches. “We had no other choice but to keep you separated, and once your rut hit—”

“Was for your own good,” John says, and Dean can’t help but roll his eyes.

“What about Lisa, Dad? She for my own good too?”

A flicker of anger flashes across Mary’s face, but she quickly reigns it in until Dean isn’t even sure he saw it in the first place. The other Council members glare at John in unison, and Dean starts to get the idea that maybe he isn’t so outnumbered here as he’d thought.

“Sit the fuck down,” John snarls, slamming a fist on the table. Dean feels Cas stiffen next to him.

“And listen.”

There’s boiling tension in this room, alpha aggression downplayed only by Mary’s presence. The wolf has its hackles raised and its teeth bared, ready for a fight.

“I’m not breaking this bond,” Dean says through gritted teeth, saying the words before anybody else can.

“And we ain’t gonna make ya,” Bobby grunts, crossing his arms.

Dean feels the air punch out of his lungs. What?

“This was handled poorly,” Ellen says, glancing angrily at John where he’s angrily hunched next to her. “You two need ‘ta know why.”

Dean’s eyes jump around, studying each Council member. This is a hell of a surprise. He’d expected them to be a united front against him, standing with his dad and trying to tear him away from his mate. Still, some spark of hope inside him leaps at the thought of there being another explanation for all of this. It won’t fix it, won’t make up for it, but at least he’ll have some faith in his pack once he knows.

At least, maybe he will.

“You gonna sit your asses down now?” Rufus growls at them, looking nearly as pissed off as John. Dean nods, shifting closer to Cas as they sit. His mate has been quiet, but he doesn’t smell like fear.

They sit side by side, angled towards each other as they face off against the Council. John starts pacing, and it’s Ellen that tosses a folder onto the table in front of them.

“What is it?”

“Open it,” she snaps, more strained than Dean has ever heard her.

There’s a stack of three pictures inside the folder. They are grainy and black and white, but it’s clear
what they are. The first photo is of the Council room. John and Mary are the only ones present, and they’re standing tense like they’re fighting about something. The next two are of all five of the Council members, one of them with Kevin too.

“What are these?” Dean says carefully, tension knotting in his chest. Cas’ fingers touch his shoulder lightly.

“First day Crowley was in office,” Bobby grunts, “he sent us those. Got a note, too.”

“A threat,” Cas says. John glares at him, but the others nod. Ellen drops a slip of paper onto the table. In neat, cursive writing is a short note.

_We’re confident that we can continue to be friends, aren’t you?_

Dean swallows thickly, anger bubbling in his chest. “Why would you keep this quiet?” he says, trying to keep the growl out of his voice. The wolf isn’t making it easy.

“They’re _humans_,” John scoffs, rolling his eyes. “We weren’t worried. Found their bug in the Council room, dismantled it, returned it to them in pieces. They were testing the water, and we reminded them where they stand. Nobody else needed to stick their noses in it.”

“No need?” Dean practically splutters, bowled over by their giant ego. “You’re the ones who always warned us how dangerous humans are. Now you think there wasn’t a need?”

“Dean,” his mom says gently. God she sounds fucking tired. “They offered us continued _peace_. The kind we’ve been living in for years. They took care of the humans who trespassed. We—”

“Peace on their terms.”

Cas’ voice is quiet, but it silences everyone else in the room. John snarls and steps up into Cas’ space, and Dean has to stand to put himself between them. He feels Cas rise to his feet at his back.

“Say that again, cat.”

Dean wants to intervene, but Cas speaks again, no hesitation.

“This isn’t a peace treaty, not anymore. They’re offering you peace, if you follow their rules.”

“They didn’t tell us to do nothin’,” Rufus says, and Dean can tell he’s on John’s side in this.

“They wouldn’t,” Cas continues. “Not at first. I imagine we’re about to see their first real threat?”

John grinds his teeth and starts back up with the pacing. Dean can see how close the animal is to the surface.

“Show them.”

Ellen drops another folder on the table. Inside of this one are more photos, slightly better quality than the first set. They’re of the dining quarters this time. Dean spots himself in two of them. Along with it is a note.

_Such a happy little pack. We all want to preserve this peace, don’t we?_

_And no need to frighten the herd. We can keep this nasty business between us adults._

“The next day came Crowley’s _suggestion_ that we not get involved with the cats,” Ellen sighs.
Dean’s brain clicks.

“That’s why you agreed,” he breathes. “You made it seem like they were on our side. Why didn’t you tell us?”

“The herd,” Mary repeats, her voice shaky. “That wording is intentional. It wasn’t worth the risk to tell all of you, not when they were already inside our den. So we sent you to agree to his terms while we cleared the den and came up with a plan. We may have exaggerated our relationship with the humans, but we needed the Hunters to stay calm. Panic spreads through a pack like wildfire. All it takes is one spark.”

Dean scoffs. “I was a distraction.”

“Only partially,” she says. “That was our safety net, until we could figure out how to take them out. At least, that’s what we thought.”

Silence hangs heavy.

“Until they raised the stakes.”

Dean glances at Cas before looking at the Council expectantly.

“The cats wanted help,” John rumbles, “we didn’t give it. But more leopards went missing, the cats got desperate, and Crowley decided to secure his position.”

Dean’s stomach drops.

A third folder gets dropped on the table. Dean flips it open and immediately feels the need to vomit all over the table. Only Cas’ hand on his nape keeps him steady.

All of the pictures are of the nursery. The pups are all there, playing, sleeping, watching Mary attentively while she reads to them. The attached note makes Dean see red.

_They say these old tunnels are prone to cave-ins. Stay away from your neighbors, or we might just find a reason to test that theory._

Dean leans into Cas’ hands on his back to stop from going full animal. *No one* threatens those pups and lives to tell about it. *No one.*

“We evac’ed the nursery. No tech, just the cameras,” Ellen says, her voice immeasurably distressed.

“This is why you freaked out about Cas,” Dean breathes. Mary automatically steps in, but Dean doesn’t want to hear it.

“Dean—”

“Have they said anything? Do they know?”

John practically sneers at him, a bitterly satisfied look on his face. “Sure as hell have. Show them.”

Ellen drops one more folder on the table. In this one are pictures of Dean, and of Cas. Dean standing at the base of the tree, waiting for Cas. Then the panther climbing down while Dean watches, then the two of them trotting off together after Dean has shifted.

There’s a note, too. Of fucking course there’s a note.
“Got that while you were locked up,” John snaps. “Still think this isn’t your fault?”

Dean drops his head into his hands. This explains the extra security, the emergency protocols. The Council is waiting for the humans to come after them. “You tried to keep us apart. So Crowley wouldn’t know. Jesus fuck. I didn’t know—”

“Of course you didn’t know!” John snarls. Dean’s shoulders tense and he stares hard at the floor. “You were too busy fucking a goddamn cat to care about the safety of your pack!”

“John, enough!” Mary snaps, pushing him back away from Dean.

“He’s right,” Dean growls right back, taking a step away from Cas. “I killed them. I should’ve—”

“Don’t you dare, boy—”

“Dean, honey—”

“No,” Mary says, her voice slicing through the other protests. “You cannot blame yourself for this.”

“There’s no blame,” Dean grinds out, studiously not looking at the hurt on Cas’ face. “It’s a goddamn fact. We were gonna get through this, ’til I fucked it up.”

“Get through it?” Cas says, his voice soft and low. “Is that all you want?”

Dean feels the room go quiet, feels the weight of his mate’s gaze, the press of their bond, and he can’t help but meet his eyes. He smells upset, his pink lips turned down and his eyebrows furrowed over sad eyes. God, Dean just wants to fucking wrap him up in his arms and never let go.

“You don’t get a say in this, cat,” John snarls, stepping right up into Cas’ space again. Dean isn’t close enough to get between them this time, but Cas rolls his shoulders back and holds his ground. “This isn’t our shit, it’s yours. If getting through means our pack survives, then that’s all we goddamn want.”

“And what happens when they come after you next? Once we’re gone?” Cas says evenly, still holding John’s gaze. His dad snorts.

“You don’t get a say in this, cat,” John snarls, stepping right up into Cas’ space again. Dean isn’t close enough to get between them this time, but Cas rolls his shoulders back and holds his ground. “This isn’t our shit, it’s yours. If getting through means our pack survives, then that’s all we goddamn want.”

“No?” Cas says, eyebrows raised. He haphazardly picks up the photos on the table, holding them in his hands. “These say differently. While you were busy underestimating and misunderstanding your enemy, they have been picking us off and sizing you up.”

“Don’t you dare question our—”

“They know exactly where to hit,” Cas continues, “how to hit, and I bet you don’t even know how they got in. But they don’t have teeth, or claws, so you don’t have to be scared of them. Am I right?”

John’s control breaks.

“You insubordinate little shit, I’ll—”

John looks like he’s about to take a fist to Cas’ face, and in one fluid motion Dean pulls Cas behind him and shoves his dad back, getting his mate out of harm’s way. Mary gets between them, before
John can come at him again. Cas seems unaffected.

“Am. I. Right.”

John’s chest is heaving, and Dean can see his lengthened incisors behind his snarling lips. Mary’s hand touches his nape, and Dean feels the soothing waves of her scent wash over him. He knows his dad well enough to know that it’s not support that she’s offering. John is about to explode, and Mary is jumping on the grenade.

It works enough for John to speak.

“You’re right,” he says, a sickening grin on his face. “They don’t have teeth or claws. But I’d guess you’re next on their list, kitty cat, so you tell me: you scared?”

Dean’s stomach drops and the entire room goes silent. He looks back at his cat, sees the tension in the line of his shoulders and in the hard line of his mouth.

“This isn’t about me.”

“What does he mean, Cas?” Dean interrupts, before anyone else can start in. He doesn’t fucking care. Cas won’t look at him.

“Dean, this isn’t—”

“Cas,” he growls, grinding his teeth. “What does he mean?”

Cas sighs and pinches the bridge of his nose, finally meeting Dean’s eyes.

“I’m an omega. Anna and I, we hold the pack together. This makes me a likely target. Scattered, we are easier to hunt. Manipulate.”

The wolf goes wild at the thought of someone hunting their mate, of taking their mate away from them, of hurting their mate. They won’t let that happen.

“No,” Dean growls, his vision edging red. Cas steps closer and puts a hand on the sides of Dean’s neck. His arm wraps protectively around Cas’ waist, holding him close and taking long, deep breaths to try to calm down. “They won’t touch you.”

“I know,” Cas says smoothly, with a small twitch of his lips. His voice his quiet, his best effort to keep this moment between them. “I have you. Can we finish this later?”

Dean wants to say no. The wolf wants to say fuck no. He’d rather haul Cas away until this shit is over. But he fucking can’t.

“Later,” he grunts, dragging his gaze away. Cas picks up one of the pictures and hands it to Dean, pointing to where the two of them stand.

“When do you notice about this?” Cas says.

“Uh,” Dean says, staring hard at the picture. He doesn’t see anything wrong with it, except—“This was taken more than a few days ago,” he says, remembering the day that Cas had been upset about something and needed the outlet. When they’d played in the river and just fucking been together, easy as that.

This is, apparently, news to the Council.
“Ain’t from before that meeting?” Bobby adjusts his crossed arms. He looks skeptical.

“No,” Cas answers. “These are older than that. The humans have been holding on to this information, waiting for the right moment. They’ve known Dean and I are together, and they forced you to hang yourselves. They want you to screw up the deal.”

“Motherfucker,” Dean drags fingers through his hair, sighing. Cas turns to him and leans into his chest.

“This is not your fault. We were just their scapegoat."

Somehow, that doesn’t make Dean feel any better.

“I guess. What’s the plan?” he asks.

“We work together, and we find them,” Mary says, “we rescue whoever’s alive, and we wipe them out.”

"We’ll help them?" Dean says, more than a little bit surprised.

"Don't have a choice, thanks to you," John spits. "We're in this now. Only way out is straight through."

***

Unsurprisingly, both Mary and John want to have private words with Dean after the Council is done with them. Dean is already strung out and exhausted, despite the relatively early hour of the day, but he doesn’t exactly have an option. He leads Cas down to his room, where John and Mary are going to meet him once they wrap up with the rest of the Council.

“So that’s the nursery, and that’s where we eat,” he points out as they go, gritting his teeth at all the fucking staring that’s happening. At least nobody has the guts to look him in the eye. “Down here’s where all the rooms are.”

Dean opens the door to his own room, catching traces of the stench that had permeated the air still hanging around.

“This is it, home sweet home.”

Cas steps into his room, and it settles the wolf to have their mate in this space with them. He’s frowning though, his nose wrinkled and his eyebrows furrowed. Dean huffs a laugh.

“Sorry about the smell, should fade soon.”

Instead of responding Cas folds himself into Dean’s chest, wrapping his arms around his waist and leaning his cheek against his chest where his heart is. Dean’s arms come around him, one hand resting at his nape.

“I’m sorry.”

Dean sighs. “S’okay, Cas. You’re here now, right?”

Cas just nods, his eyes slipping closed. Dean has a feeling that his mate is listening to his heartbeat. They stand like that for a few more minutes before Cas speaks again.

“Do you feel better or worse?”
“Worse, I think. Glad to know they weren’t just bein’ dicks, but…I wanna say I’ve handled it differently, but I dunno. They were in a shitty position.”

“Mmm,” Cas hums. “Everyone is in far more danger than we thought.”

“You can say that again. The hell are we supposed to do?” Dean is trying not to flip the fuck out. He really is. But nobody is safe here, not really.

“I’ll speak with the Host soon. Explain what’s been going on. We are going to need each other to get out of this alive.”

“Don’t have much choice about bein’ friends anymore, huh?” Dean huffs, trying to keep it light before he explodes.

Before Cas can answer there’s a knock on Dean’s door, and Mary peeks her head inside. Dean nods at the question in her face, letting his arms fall and stepping back from his mate.

“Should I stay?” Cas asks, his blue eyes brimming with worry. Dean cups his jaw and kisses him thoroughly.

“I’m good, Cas. Go find yourself some lunch.”

“I’ll find us some lunch,” he corrects, tugging Dean down by the back of his neck for one last lingering kiss. “And I’ll be back.”

“Got it,” Dean smiles, watching him go. His shoulders slump and his face falls as soon as Cas is out of sight. “You guys coming in?” he sighs, sitting on the edge of his bed. Mary offers him a smile.

“I like him,” she says, taking a seat next to him. Her scent still calms him, even if he doesn’t want it to. John follows her in, looking pissed off as ever.

“You don’t know him,” Dean snaps before he can catch himself. It comes out harsher than intended.

John growls at him. “Do not talk to h—”

His mom silences him with a look. “It’s alright.” Her gaze falls back on Dean. “And I know. That’s my fault. But I would like to.”

Dean drags his hands over his face, leaning into his wolf for support. His animals straightens their spine and holds their chin up high. They can slump and be miserable when no one can see them.

“Yeah. Sure. Let’s talk.”

***

Castiel isn’t sure he likes this den. There are smells everywhere. There isn’t any airflow, and he feels like he’s burying himself in his own grave. A little too close to truth, unfortunately.

He backtracks the way that he came with Dean, finding the room that Dean had pointed out for food. Wolves are still staring at him as he goes, but he ignores them in favor of focusing on his destination. He’s an outlier here, and he’s following Dean’s lead in keeping up appearances. Neither of them can look weak.

When he arrives he can smell cooking oils and meat fat and onions and salt, so he must be in the right place. The room itself is lined with large tables, with a self-serve area off to the side. It’s filled with wolves, all staring at him with varying degrees of interest and shock and confusion on their
faces. No one looks angry though, even if the conversations do all die out to a hush when he enters, so he feels okay. All things considered, it’s a pretty good welcome.

Castiel is walking towards the food, his eyes focused on his target, when a smell catches his attention. It’s familiar to him, even if it drags up bad memories. The smell belongs to someone nearby…a brunette, two tables away. She’s really beautiful, all olive skin and dark hair and dark eyes. She looks sad, though. And she’s sitting alone.

“You’re Lisa,” Castiel says, sitting across from her at her table. She starts, blinking at him with unadulterated surprise.

“Um, yes. Hi.”

“I’m Castiel, Dean’s—”

“Mate,” she adds on. “I know.”

She visually hesitates, and Castiel feels like he’s watching the thoughts race through her mind.

“Is he…?”

“He’s quite fine,” Castiel says gently, tilting his head with a small smile on his lips. “Unhappy with his family and with his pack, but that will pass.”

She seems relieved to hear it. Castiel likes her.

“Listen, if you hate me I get that, but I feel terrible enough as it is and—”

Lisa smells terrible. Acrid fear and salty loneliness. Without a thought Castiel moves to the other side of the table and hugs her. Physical contact is a big thing for these wolves, and Castiel may not be pack to her but he can offer something.

“I don’t hate you,” he says, trying to encourage her to loosen up.

“You should,” she sniffs, even as her arms come around his waist. “What I did to Dean…”

Ah. There it is. Castiel suspects that she’s been punishing herself for this for a while now.

“I came to thank you. You saved him, and without you I think he may have been lost to me. That’s not something I like to think about.”

Lisa stiffens and pulls back to look at him.

“You’re thanking me? For trying to sleep with him and mate him against his will?”

Castiel sighs, wondering if guilt is a wolf-trait. “I find it hard to believe that you would have done any of that truly against his will. I’m fairly sure that you care for Dean a great deal.”

Her face falls. “Yes, I do.”

“Then we’re on the same team here. And I am in your debt for helping my mate.” She seems to accept that, at least partially, so Castiel pushes on. “Did you get in trouble?”

Lisa shrugs. “John was angry, but he doesn’t have power over me. Not unless I officially join the Pack. Mary, and Sam, and the rest of the Council, they protected me. None of them knew that John had sent me in there until after.”
Castiel tries not to breathe an audible sigh of relief. He’d been hoping that was the case.

“I’m glad to hear it. We had been hoping—Dean and I—that you were safe. He’ll be happy to know.”

A smile almost makes its way onto her lips before her face falls again.

“I didn’t know about you, Castiel. I need you to know that.”

He smiles and nods, hugging her again. Her arms come around him immediately that time, gripping much tighter than before.

“Now,” Castiel says, clearing his throat and trying to lighten the mood. “I’ve been sent for lunch. Any idea what he likes?”

Castiel hates to admit it, but there are some things he just doesn’t know about his mate. His favorite meal, how he takes his coffee. Small things that he has every intention of learning. Lisa just laughs at his question.

“I think if you ask the cooks nicely, you can get your hands on a bacon cheeseburger that he’ll die for,” she says with a genuine smile. “And you’re lucky, there’s pecan pie today. Bring him some of that, and I swear you’ll get to see Dean fall in love right in front of your eyes.”

"What a sight to see," Castiel laughs and makes a mental note of everything she’s said. “I’ll do that. Thank you.”

“I get it,” she says, a soft smile on her face. “The two of you. Why he loves you so much.”

Castiel’s heart flutters and his panther purrs. He rubs the back of his neck and stares down at the table, feeling inappropriately happy at her words. Hearing Dean say it will never cease to amaze him, but hearing it from someone else makes his heart jump in a different way.

“I’m not sure what I’ve done to deserve him, but I love him more every day. Even when he’s being an ass.”

Lisa outright laughs, her cheeks growing pink. She smells much better now, and Castiel feels like he’s been successful here.

“I like you, Castiel. I think we could be friends.”

“I like you too, Lisa,” he smiles. “Will you stay here? Or will you return to your pack?”

She shrugs. “I’ll stay for a while. There is definitely no one for me there, maybe I’ll have better luck here.”

“Good,” Castiel hums. “Now, I’m starving. What’s good around here?”

Lisa laughs again, looping their arms together and walking him towards the food.

“Come on. I’ll show you.”
Chapter Summary

“I spotted two lizards, seven spiders, and a very tiny mouse that didn’t look too pleased to find himself inside a wolf den.”

Chapter Notes

Alright guys. BIG NEWS. This chapter was wonderfully and perfectly beta-ed by the AMAZINGLY TALENTED Astrophilla! She is so lovely to work with, and I feel so awesome about this chapter. Thank you for your input, and I SO look forward to working on more chapters together. She has also graciously agreed to go through the already posted chapters, looking for grammar and clarity stuff. I hate to retroedit, but none of the story will change it might just //flow// more nicely with some extra editing.

Also, if you guys haven't read her work //please// go check it out. She is crazy talented and you can bet I'm subscribed to "Two Out Of Three" because it's fantastic even though I'm just waiting for her to break my heart. So check her out, and thank you again :))

Last bit, so sorry that this is late! I had a busy weekend, and didn't want to post at like, 3am last night. I will make every effort not to let it happen again!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It takes monumental effort on Dean’s part not to squirm under his dad’s scrutiny. He sets his jaw and tries not to glare, but he’s not sure how successful he is. Dean’s dad walks straight over to him and grabs his chin between his thumb and forefinger, forcing his head to the side to get a good look at what Dean assumes is the bite mark on his neck.

“You gotta be fuckin’ kidding me, Dean.”

Dean growls at him and shoves his hand away. The wolf pulls them to their feet, an effort to stand their ground in their territory.

“Fuck off,” he snarls through gritted teeth. John’s lip curls with a snarl of his own, his stance widening as he does his very best to make Dean feel small.

“Not much of an alpha, are you? Lettin’ your omega claim you like that?”

“I don’t give a shit about any of that stuff,” Dean snaps, his blood absolutely boiling. “Cas is my mate, and he can bite me if he wants to. It’s between us.”

John opens his mouth to speak again but Mary shuts him up, grabbing his chin and forcing him to look at her.
“You can be calm, and we can talk as a family, or you can leave.”

Dean’s jaw hits the floor. He’s never heard his mom talk to his dad like that. John looks pissed, but he keeps his mouth shut. When Mary is sure he isn’t going to say anything more, she turns back to Dean.

“We’re sorry,” she says, voice ringing with sincerity. John scoffs, making it painfully clear that she’s not speaking for both of them, and Mary closes her eyes for a second before restarting. “I’m sorry. I wish that this had gone in so many different ways.”

Dean snorts. She can sure as hell say that again.

“We had to protect the Pack, from them. I never expected to find you in our crosshairs. You have to know that.”

“You wouldn’t have, if you had told us what was going on,” Dean says, struggling to unclench his fists. “Before any of the threats, before the entire situation got out of control.”

“You think we don’t know that, boy?” John snaps.

“Hindsight is twenty-twenty,” Mary continues, tossing a sharp, annoyed look at John for his tone. “We thought we were doing the right thing, at the time. But Castiel is right. They have the advantage, and we don’t even know how they’ve been getting inside.”

Dean feels a chill down his spine, the thought of something dangerous lurking the halls of their home without anyone knowing it. That is a problem, and probably the thing they should be focused on first. Their den should be impenetrable. The scent-blockers must be helping the humans slip by right under the Pack’s noses, but other than that Dean’s got no fucking clue how a couple of humans could get in there with no one noticing.

He flexes his fingers and sniffs, trying to maintain his calm.

“So, what’s next?”

“We cozy up to the fuckin’ enemy,” John grumbles, only to get another glare from Mary. Dean opens his mouth to make him swallow those words, but his mom beats him to the punch.

“These leopards are not our enemy.”

“No?” his father scoffs. “Because from where I’m standing, it seems like they used our son to drag our pack into their goddamn mess.”

“They aren’t using me,” Dean growls. He feels his hackles raise at the thought, his wolf flexing its claws. His dad doesn’t know jack about him and Cas, hasn’t even given it a chance. He’s got no right to talk. “But you wanna throw around blame? How about the ones actually sending the threats? Don’t you think the humans were the ones who dragged us into this?”

Before the words have fully left his mouth, John is in his face, staring him down with wild eyes and bared teeth.

“I think you did that. Maybe the humans fired the gun, but you gave them the bullets. I hope your conscience can handle that.”

Dean wants to laugh. He wants to fucking laugh. “Fuck you,” he breathes, rubbing a hand over his jaw. Of all the things he needs, more guilt from his goddamn father is not one of them.
“I’m gettin’ real tired of you talking to me like that.”

“Too fuckin’ bad.”

John’s arms are trembling like he’s about to take a swing, when Mary calmly steps between them. Dean wants to tell her not to bother, that he’s a bullheaded asshole who won’t listen to a word she says, but he doesn’t get the chance. He watches with wide eyes as she puts her back to him, and stares John down head on.

“I’m not going to stand by this time. You will not touch him again,” Mary says, her voice firm. “He is our son, and we will support him no matter his decisions. Until you can commit to that, you can get out.”

John’s eyebrows shoot up. “You’re picking them?”

“I’m picking our son, John. You might consider doing the same.”

His dad snarls and storms out of the room, slamming the door behind him. Dean flinches, and it takes his mom a second to turn and face him.

“I’m sorry,” is the first thing he says. Mary lays a gentle hand on his cheek.

“Your father and I have our faults.” Her voice is sad, and Dean can only think of the grainy, black and white photo of the two of them in the middle of what seemed like an argument. “But this is the burden of our position. If the Pack becomes aware of our cracks, it all comes crumbling down. When we break, it happens behind closed doors, and then we put ourselves back together. We always do.”

Dean gets it. It’s why they don’t contradict each other in public, why they never fight where anyone else can hear it. He’d heard it all as a kid, but doubts others ever have. It’s an illusion of unity, as fucking stupid as that is, because the Pack needs it. They need a pair to look to. Even if the human halves know the entire Council is in charge, their wolf counterparts look for an alpha pair to follow. For them, that’s Mary and John.

“The same will be expected of Castiel and you, I think. Even now. And it won’t be easy on the two of you.”

Dean huffs a laugh, humorless and bitter. He wishes she wasn’t right.

“Yeah. I know.”

They stand together in strained silence for a few seconds, minutes maybe, Dean isn’t sure. He stares at the floor without really registering it, trying to shake the exhausting feeling that he’s just waiting for the next bomb to drop.

“This afternoon the Council will be addressing the Pack,” Mary says, her voice heavy. “It’s time that everyone knows everything. They will look to you, as they always do.”

And there it is, he sighs to himself. The weight on Dean’s shoulders is threatening to flatten him.

“Got it. I’ll be there.”

Mary hugs him tightly, and Dean can’t help but hug her back. As angry as he is, she still smells like home and mom and the little kid inside of him wants to cling to her for comfort. She fits under his chin now, instead of the other way around, but she still feels safe.
“We don’t blame you,” she breathes into his ear, her voice wavering. “I never wanted you to feel as though we did. None of this is your fault, no matter what your father says. You have nothing to feel guilty for.”

Dean wants to respond, but he can’t. His voice hangs thick in his throat, stuck behind all the words he can’t bring himself to say. At least his mom seems to understand, letting that thread drop until Dean is ready to deal with it.

“And your mate is pack, now,” she says sternly, all but shaking her finger at him, "so don’t hide him away in here. Give everyone the chance to get to know him.”

Dean can’t help the tiny smile on his lips. “Sheesh, Ma’, I know. Let Cas out to play with the wolves.”

She smiles back at him and strokes his hair in that motherly way of hers, and he sinks into the touch. His wolf is calm under her fingers, if not still stressed as all hell.

“I’ll speak with your father. I know he seems set in his ways, but he cares far more about your happiness than he lets on.”

Dean finds that fucking hard to believe, as much as he wants to, especially after the nightmare that was today. “Yeah. Sure.”

“Trust me, sweetheart.” She strokes his cheek with her knuckles, smiling sadly. She sees right through his sarcasm, and he knows it. “When we found out you were gone, I suggested that we give you time. Let you find your way back on your own. Your father could have fought it, but he didn’t.”

Dean furrows his eyebrows and searches her face for some kind of explanation, but he finds nothing. “Why’d he do that?”

His mom just offers him a small shrug and a smile. “All I ask is that you give him a chance to come around. Fair?”

“Yeah,” Dean sighs. “Fair.”

“Good,” she nods, pulling away with a final squeeze of her arms around him. “I’ll see you this afternoon.”

The door is barely shut for a second before Dean’s giant Sasquatch of a brother comes bursting in. “Dean?” he pants, eyes wide as he stares.

“Jesus, Sammy. You sprint here or somethin’?”

His brother frowns and hits him with that damn kicked puppy look, loping across the room and wrapping him up in a hug. Dean sighs and hugs him back, trying to pretend he’s put out by the whole spectacle, no matter how his chest tightens at the gesture.

“You’re okay,” he confirms with a small voice, in one moment reverting back to the nerdy little seven-year-old always worrying about his big brother.

“M’ fine, little brother,” Dean grunts, relenting and giving his brother a squeeze. “Practically good as new.”

Sam huffs a laugh and pulls back, clapping Dean on the shoulder. “I’m sorry we couldn’t get you
“Dude, it’s fine. Nothin’ you could’ve done.”

“Just want you to know we tried,” he continues, guilt marring his face. “Me, Jess, Jo, Charlie — even Ruby thought it was bullshit, but they kept a tight lockdown. Lisa’s the only one who had the key, and we didn’t even know that until, you know…after.”

Dean nods. He’d figured that Lisa had acted alone in getting him out, and he reminds himself to thank her when he can. Not that she doesn’t know he’s grateful, but he’s fully aware of the risk she took to help him when it would’ve been way easier not to.

“How’ve things been?” Dean asks, tired of talking about his shit after a whole damn morning of it, more interested in his pack is doing. The look on Sam’s face doesn’t particularly fill him with hope.

“Everybody’s scared. The young alphas have been fighting, a lot. Even Jo has been on edge. The submissives are even more spooked, with all these fucking pissed off alphas roaming around. Mom and Layla are doing what they can, but everybody can smell it in the air. The fear.”

Dean swallows thickly, his stomach in his throat. It’s his job to help keep their pack healthy, and right now, it’s anything but. He’s gotta do something about it, and he’s gotta do it soon. As if the weight on his back wasn’t close to breaking him already.

“We got our work cut out for us, huh?”

“Yeah,” Sam laughs humorlessly. “Jess and I have been around as much as we can, but she’s not doing well.”

“You talk to Pam yet?” Dean frowns, determined not to freak Sam out more with his own concern. She’s their pack doctor, and she specializes in this kind of stuff. If anybody knows what’s wrong with Jess, it’d be her.

“Yesterday,” Sam nods. “She said it’s stress. Jess’ wolf, it knows this pack isn’t a safe place to have pups.”

Dean feels like he’s gonna be sick. Sam doesn’t have to finish explaining. If Pam is right, the wolf is shutting the pregnancy down.

“Sammy…” he swallows thickly, lost for words.

His brother exhales and stares at the ceiling, chewing his lip and obviously trying to will away the wetness in his eyes.

“Thank god she’s only half wolf, right?” Sam tries to joke, but it’s too serious to do more than just fall flat. Dean can’t do anything but be there for him, so that’s what he’s going to do. Say what he always says, and hope that’s enough.

“She’s gonna be fine,” he declares confidently, wrapping his brother up in another hug. “‘Cause you need her.”

“Yeah, I do,” Sam mumbles into Dean’s shoulder, his voice shaky. “I really fucking do.”

His brother stays for a little bit longer, but Dean ushers him out when it becomes clear that Sam is itching to go check on his mate. Dean gets it, he really does. It’s all he can do to keep himself standing until his brother leaves, and as soon as the door is shut he collapses onto his bed, dropping out.”
his head into his hands and forcing himself to breathe deeply. Guilt is creeping up his spine, and no
matter how hard he tries not to feel it, it’s right fucking there.

Dean winces when the door opens again, only to relax when he sees Cas standing in the doorway. He
tries to raise his slumped shoulders to avoid looking so defeated, but his hands feel like they’re
shaking as they drop to his lap.

“Hey baby, how’s it goin’?” he plasters on a smirk, dragging a hand through his hair and attempting
to not look as pathetic as he feels. Cas closes the door behind him and sets down the two plates in his
hands, glancing at Dean with understanding in his eyes. There’s no pity, and for that Dean is
painfully grateful.

“Hello, Dean,” his mate smiles, striding across the room and straddling Dean’s lap. His arms come
around Cas’ waist, and he buries his nose in his cat’s throat while Cas strokes down his spine and
through the hair at his nape. “I’m well. The den is… interesting.”

“You hate it,” Dean laughs weakly, the shaking in his hands slowly subsiding with every scratch of
Cas’ fingers against his scalp. The scent of pine trees and tree bark curls around him, the smell of
content omega overtaking the worry coated on his mate’s skin.

“You hate is a strong word.” Cas stays pressed against him for a few minutes before pulling back and
pressing a kiss to his lips. Dean can’t help but sigh happily into the touch. “I spotted two lizards,
seven spiders, and a very tiny mouse that didn’t look too pleased to find himself inside a wolf den.”

“You have a little snack?” Dean chuckles, sliding his hands along Cas’ hips and sides. His mate
glares at him, but the affection in his blue irises is familiar and calming for his roiling stomach and
racing thoughts.

“No, I didn’t. I helped him reach freedom. And I didn’t murder any of the spiders either, before you
ask.

The thinly-veiled distaste in his voice brings a smile to Dean’s face, easy and comfortable.

“You’re tellin’ me that you live in a tree, in the forest, and you don’t like spiders?”

Cas crinkles up his nose and frowns, looking entirely feline in a way that’s unfairly adorable,
considering he’s a grown-ass adult.

“I find them to be very smug. Though they do keep the bugs out of my nest when it’s warm.”

A tiny smile tugs at the corner of his mouth, and Dean kisses it away. His mood is already lifted
somewhat, at least momentarily. It’s enough to give him time to get his head back on straight.

“I brought food,” Cas informs him with a nod towards the discarded plates. “You should eat.”

“What’d you get me?” Dean releases Cas from the circle of his arms, letting his mate get up and
retrieve them.

“A burger,” he answers, holding up one plate, then the other. “And pecan pie for dessert.”

Dean gapes, his mouth practically running dry. His cat literally could not have brought anything
more perfect.

“God, I fucking love you,” Dean breathes out in a rush, snatching the plates out of the way and
surging forward to meld their lips together, wasting no time in licking into his mate’s mouth. Cas
purrs and melts against him.

“Eat, please,” Cas mumbles against his lips after a moment, pulling back to rub their noses together before stepping away. Dean obeys eagerly, sitting on his bed and practically moaning at the taste of the burger on his tongue. It’s fucking delicious.

“I chose correctly, then?” Cas says with a tiny smile right at the corner of his mouth. Dean grins and nods, taking another huge bite. “I’ll admit I had help.”

“Jo?” Dean guesses, but Cas shakes his head.

“Lisa.”

Dean practically spits his food out. “I’m sorry, what? You talked to her?”

Cas nods, looking overwhelmingly pleased with himself and utterly unconcerned with the surprise splayed across Dean’s face. “I did. She said you would enjoy this.”

Several coughs later, and with an amused twitch of lips from Cas, Dean finally manages to swallow. He’s not sure what exactly he expected to happen between the two of them, but a conversation on Dean’s eating habits definitely wasn’t it. “Uh huh. And you’re both just… fine?”

His mate looks at him knowingly, brows raised. “Did you want us to fight over you? Perhaps we could have a tournament to win your affections.”

“Hah hah, smartass,” Dean grumbles, going back to his burger.

“It could be fun,” Cas hums thoughtfully. “I’m not sure jousting is my event, but I think I’d make a decent broadsword fighter.”

Dean glares at him, grumbling under his breath. “Shut up.”

Cas continues staring at him with that tiny little smile, the one that says he knows he won this round, so Dean just ignores him.

“She’s okay, by the way. She didn’t get in trouble.”

An ounce of stress lifts off his shoulders, and he is able to let out a breath he hadn’t known he was even holding. “That’s, uh, real good. I’m glad.”

While he eats, Dean recaps his conversations with his parents and his brother, and Cas looks as broken-hearted as he feels when he hears about Jess. They haven’t even met yet, and Cas is already worried for her.

“Will she be okay?” he asks with a pinched frown.

“Dunno,” Dean answers honestly, dragging a hand over his face and dropping his extra plates off on the floor next to his bed. He grabs Cas’ hand and pulls him closer, and Cas moves towards him easily. Cas fits himself between Dean’s spread thighs, settling his legs over Dean’s hips to hook his ankles behind his back, and cupping his jaw in both hands. Dean wraps his arms around Cas’ waist and tugs him closer so that their foreheads are resting together. Cas’ fingers skim lightly across his shoulders and down the tops of his arms, like he can feel the tension in Dean’s muscles with just his fingertips.

“You’re worried,” Cas observes, eyes assessing him.
“Of course I’m fucking worried,” Dean snaps, fingers clenching anxiously at Cas’ sides. “Were we gonna talk about the target on your chest, or did you plan on keeping that one to yourself?”

Cas sighs and dips his head to press their mouths together, overtly trying to kiss his anger away. It doesn’t work, but Dean can’t resist kissing him back, teeth nipping at his mate’s plump lower lip.

“I didn’t want to worry you,” Cas admits, rhythmically carding his fingers through Dean’s hair.

Dean rumbles unhappily, their foreheads touching once more. “You sound like them.”

Cas sighs heavily and closes his eyes for a brief moment, a small frown tugging on his lips.

“I know.”

Silence lingers before Dean speaks again. “I can’t protect you if I don’t know what I’m protecting you from.” He regrets his words as soon as they leave his mouth, and Cas tenses in his arms.

“I’m not a wilting flower, puppy,” Cas glares, and Dean’s lips pull into a frown.

“I know that, of course I do,” he hesitates, trying to get this right the first time. “But I can’t lose you, Cas. I will not survive it. Simple as that.”

“No. No but’s, Castiel. If I lose you, full well knowing that I should’ve kept you safe, I will. Not. Survive it. If you have to hate me for going all alpha on you then so be it, I’d rather you hate me than have to go looking for your body.”

Cas flinches at his words, but Dean can’t find it in himself to be sorry for saying them. He needs Cas to understand this, and the press of lips is a start. The way Cas kisses him, it feels like an apology, like reassurance. His lips, his eyelids, his nose, his temples, every freckle scattered across his cheeks.

“You will never lose me,” Cas swears, his low voice strong and his scent calming.

Dean looks away with a resigned shake of his head. “You can’t promise that.”

His mate silences him with an open-mouthed kiss as his hand strokes across the bite scar on Dean’s neck. “Yes, I can.”

Dean huffs, meeting Cas’ eyes. “And how’s that?”

Cas smiles, easy as anything. “Because I am yours, and you are mine. And we will figure this out together.”

So simple, everything sounds so simple when Cas says it in that low, rough voice of his. It strips Dean right open, exposes every raw and vulnerable part of him for Cas’ eyes to see, for Cas’ hands to soothe. But Dean has never been like that with words, never wielded them like Cas does, so he just kisses him, saying thank you in the best way he knows how. Cas inhales sharply, stroking his thumbs along Dean’s jawline.

“Promise me you’ll remember that,” he implores, words soft.

Dean sighs. He doesn’t feel any less guilty, or worried, or fucking freaked out, but he feels lighter, somehow. He just wishes he believed what Cas is preaching, that they’ll get through this together. Because right now, he absolutely fucking doesn’t.
“Yeah,” he breathes, bumping Cas’ nose with his own. “I promise.”

***

The Pack takes the news of their involvement with the humans just about as well as anyone expected. There’s a lot of panic, and crying, and even more anger. But there’s fear, more than anything else. They’re scared for their mates and their pups and their siblings and friends. The big question mark of the human’s intentions hanging over their heads doesn’t help, giving substance to every panicked thought.

With everyone gathered in the dining quarters it’s easy for the Council to field questions, answering to everyone at the same time. Luckily Layla and Mary are both there to tone things down, and Dean is pretty sure Cas is helping too, even if it’s not as obvious. His cat lingers towards the back while Dean takes his place towards the front, but Dean can’t blame him. There’s a lot of aggression in this room, which would be stressful for anyone who’s not new to all of the scents, so it almost definitely has Cas on edge.

The only real surprise is that none of the Council mentions Dean and Cas while explaining everything that’s going on. They don’t blame him, don’t even include him in the story. The whole thing is hard for him to swallow.

Dean can feel his pack weighing on him by the end. His shoulders want to slump, his body wants to curl up into itself. It’s only the knowledge that everyone is all eyes on him right now that keeps him standing. If this thing takes him to his knees, takes any of their dominants to their knees, the Pack will fall right behind them.

He just can’t thank whatever deities are out there enough for Cas’ arms coming around him as soon as the meeting is adjourned.

“Breathe,” Cas says quietly into his ear, inhaling slow and deep. Dean mimics him, tries to soak up the calming scent. The wolf is stalking around and snarling, itching for a hunt, dealing with the conflict the best way he knows how, and it’s putting Dean more on edge than he already was.

“I got it, I’m good,” he grunts, even as he holds on to his mate like a lifeline.

He’s not sure how long they stand there before Jo taps him on the shoulder and he’s forced to pull slightly away to look at her.

“Hey, kiddo,” he croaks, and he’s silently grateful for the support of Cas’ arms tightening around him.

Jo smacks him with the back of her hand, the same look she gives him every time he resorts to nicknames she’s convinced she’s grown out of. There’s not heat behind it though; there never is. “Serious pack bonding in order. We’re taking everybody up to the nursery, since it’s clean now. You coming?”

Dean’s eyes flick to Cas, and he thinks how overwhelming it would be for his mate to be surrounded by strange, stressed out wolves all huddled together. As much as his animal wants it, they’ll be happy with just their mate tonight.

“I can’t,” he says. “Not tonight.”

Jo looks at him sadly before wandering away to usher everyone up there. It’s only then that Dean notices Cas staring at him.
“What?” he frowns.

“What do you think you’re doing?” Cas asks pointedly, tilting his head.

“Oh,” Dean furrows his eyebrows, “going back to our room?”

Cas scoffs and rolls his eyes dramatically. “We are going up to that nursery, and we are going to cuddle with your pack because that’s what you need right now. Got it?”

Dean’s brows shoot up his forehead, a laugh bubbling out of his throat before he can stop it. “Damn, kitty. Never had somebody order me to cuddle before.”

He gets a glare for that, but it’s heatless and fond.

“Come on,” Cas says, threading their fingers together. “I’d like a good spot.”

They walk side by side to the nursery, where it seems most of the Pack is funneling inside. Jo’s face lights up when she sees them, and she squeezes Cas tight around the neck before leading them towards the middle. Ash is setting up something to watch, and Dean finds himself absolutely surrounded.

It’s hard to tell if it’s him or Cas that they’re drawn to, or both. Cas sits between Dean’s spread legs, Dean’s arms wrapped securely around his mate’s waist as his fingers skip like feathers across the skin of his stomach. Charlie appears at his side and introduces herself to Cas with a smile and a quip about him actually being real, thank god, and Dean rolls his eyes. She ends up on her back with her head pillowed on Cas’ calf. Jo bustles around for a minute before settling down a few feet away, four betas immediately curling around her.

Krissy shuffles over, sprawling across Dean’s thigh with her head resting on her hands. Adam comes up next to her, leaning into her back. Garth shows up with Bess, Benny with Andrea, and for the first time seeing all the mated pairs doesn’t make him feel like shit. He has his own mate in his arms. Finally.

Layla settles down on the other side of Krissy, saying hello and giving both him and Cas a smile. Lisa, when she comes up the stairs, takes a seat near Layla. Dean thinks it’s instinctual. She offers him a small wave, but the genuine smile goes to Cas. Bastard.

Dean does his best to introduce everyone as the room fills up, but by the fifteenth name or so Cas just shushes him with a lingering kiss. He doesn’t mind so much, deciding to just bury his nose behind Cas’ ear and squeeze his arms tighter around his waist. The rest of the Pack fans out around Dean and Layla, limbs tangled together in a big jumbled mess. Dean finds himself instinctively scenting everyone around him until he’s finally able to relax.

At the very last minute Sam shows up with Jess on his back. She looks tired and pale, but there’s that smile on her face like always. Everybody shifts automatically to make room for them next to Dean and Cas, while Sam gingerly helps Jess take a seat.

“Hey, Miss Jessica,” Dean says with a grin and a wink. “Looking beautiful as ever.”

He says it without a drop of sarcasm, but Jess still rolls her eyes.

“Shut it, Dean. I look like a drowned raccoon.”

“A beautiful drowned raccoon, then,” Cas chimes in, and that gets everyone laughing. Even Sam cracks a smile.
“I’m Jess, by the way,” she introduces herself, turning to face Cas. “Did you and Sam meet?”

“Not officially,” Sam jumps in, pulling Jess close and smiling at Cas. “Nice to finally meet you.”

“You too,” Cas nods, and he smells so content that it puts a smile on Dean’s face. They’re shushed a second later as Ash gets a movie started finally, joining the pile with Jo’s feet as a headrest. It doesn’t escape Dean’s notice that four of the five Council members slip in as the lights go off, and it’s pretty clear which one is missing.

“Everything okay?” Cas whispers, twisting just enough so that Dean knows he’s being addressed.

“Yeah,” he mumbles against the skin of Cas’ nape, enjoying how Cas’ chest expands when he inhales.

“Can you stop squeezing me then?” his mate murmurs, a smile in his tone.

“Sorry,” Dean mumbles, hooking his chin over Cas’ shoulder and burying his nose back behind his ear. “How d’you like it?”

“It’s kind of strange,” Cas hums quietly. “We did this as cubs, but there were only ever a handful of us. I think I like it though.”

“Yeah?” Dean huffs.

Cas presses back against him a little harder, nestling closer. “It’s easy for me to forget how important you are to them. It’s nice to feel like I’m a part of that.”

“You are,” Dean says, feather-light touches spreading out across his mate’s stomach. “You’re pack, now.”

“Does this mean I have to howl at the moon?” Cas says dryly, and Dean chuckles in response.

“I’m mated with a cat, does this mean I have to purr now?”

Cas snorts. “You act like you haven’t purred before.”

Dean growls at him in retaliation, even though he knows that his mate is totally right. But whatever.

“Sorry, sorry,” Cas shrugs sarcastically. “Big scary alphas like yourself don’t purr.”

“Damn straight,” he mumbles, trying to hide his smile in Cas’ neck.

Cas hums thoughtfully, a sly grin, barely visible to Dean, on his lips. “That is, of course, unless I make you.”

Dean chuckles quietly, tugging playfully on Cas’ earlobe with his teeth. “That a promise, kitten?”

“Why yes, puppy,” Cas purrs, warm and slow and enticing. “It is. Absolutely.”

Chapter End Notes

See you all next Sunday :))
Chapter 28

Chapter Summary

“Think he’ll remember when he wakes up?”

Chapter Notes

Another beautifully beta-ed chapter by the lovely Astrophilla! Your continued help and support means the world. As does the help and support from all of //you//, my gorgeous readers. I love you all dearly.

Crowley is a simple man, with simple needs. He needs a nice cup of tea to start his day. He needs his cuffs pressed just so. He needs his office clean and his pencils in straight lines. But most of all, he needs the scrambling ants beneath his feet to remember their place in his world.

Really, he’s not asking for a lot.

For the most part, everything in Crowley’s life works. If anything ceases to work for him, he removes it. It’s a simple system. His last bird, for example, that infernal, noisy Macaw. It didn’t work for him, so now he has a sharp-beaked, sleek looking, and most importantly quiet hawk in its place. He trained this one well.

So when Crowley’s assistant—one of them, at least—hands him the photo that is currently in his hands, pinched between his thumb and forefinger, he isn’t happy. That moronic werewolf and his even more idiotic mate. How utterly terrible.

“What should we do, sir?”

Crowley sighs. This one is an moron, above all the rest. He drops the pictures, tired of staring at them. It’s nauseating.

“Punish them.” He sounds bored. He is bored. Dealing with trivial issues like this is beneath him. He has more important business to attend to, more important sales to make.

“Both of them?”

He rolls his eyes so hard they almost get stuck that way. How this useless lump ended up in his office, he’ll never know.

“Yes, you bumbling idiot. Both of them.”

***

Dean isn’t even fully awake before he decides that this? This is the life. Cas is warm and snuggled against his chest, one arm flung across Dean’s hips and his mouth hanging open as he drools lightly on Dean’s bare skin. He definitely doesn’t think it’s cute.
Shifting as little as possible, his arms curl tighter around Cas, Dean’s hand smoothing down Cas’ spine. A grumbling noise starts up in Cas’ chest when Dean presses a kiss to his forehead, using his palm to push his unruly hair out of the way.

“Mornin’,” Dean chuckles, the grumpy pout on his mate’s face making his chest tight with happiness. Cas’ frown deepens and he tries his best to bury himself in the blankets.

“Not morning. Too early.”

Dean pries the blanket out of Cas’ clenched fingers, pulling it over both their heads. It’s still pitch black in his room, and he didn’t bother to glance at the clock, but the shelter of the blanket over them manages to coax Cas’ eyes open.

“You sure about that?” Dean murmurs, nosing at Cas’ jaw and scenting him lazily. He smells kind of annoyed, but Dean can also smell the warm curl of his arousal and slick in the heated air around them.

“I could possibly be convinced,” Cas sighs sleepily, dragging a hand across Dean’s ribs and tilting his chin up to allow Dean free access to his throat.

Dean takes it as the invitation that it is, mouthing at the tendons of Cas’ neck and licking his way across the sensitive skin. He feels the slightly raised bite scar with his tongue, grinning at the way Cas’ shivers when he fits his mouth over it.

“Am I convincing you?” Dean rumbles low in his throat, slotting their lips together and pushing a hand through Cas’ hair to cup the back of his neck. Cas lets out a quiet moan and rolls his hips against Dean’s body, showing off just how convincing Dean really is.

“It’s a start. You could try harder,” he hums calmly, but Dean can hear the challenge in his voice.

“You got it,” Dean smirks with a wolfish grin, capturing Cas’ lips one more time before moving away.

Dean kisses down his neck, across his collarbones, flicks his tongue over hardened nipples, even sucks gently when Cas arches into the touch. His teeth on Cas’ hipbones get his mate writhing, knowledge that Dean tucks away for later. Cas whines when Dean breathes hot and wet on his dick, where it lies hard and untouched on Cas’ stomach.

“Dean…” he groans when Dean’s hands slide over his thighs, hauling Cas’ knees over his shoulders.

“Shhh,” Dean speaks against the skin of his inner thigh, biting gently. “Patience.”

Slowly Dean trails his fingers down, feeling the dampness of the slick between Cas’ legs. He wants to taste it, wants his mate to come screaming on his tongue, wants—

The door to Dean’s bedroom opens and the lights click on, and a voice that sounds a lot like Charlie makes a disgusted noise.

“Ugh, I do not want to know what’s happening under there. Your ‘fuck me!’ smells are basically assaulting my nose,” she whines. Cas is shifting away, much to Dean’s displeasure, his skin hot with embarrassment.

A rush of cool air hits Dean as Cas pops out of the comforter, and despite the unsatisfied ache in his groin Dean would pay money to see both of their faces right then. Instead of joining the awkwardness Dean buries his face into the body part closest to him—the outside of Cas’ thigh, he
thinks—and prays that Charlie will give up and disappear.

“Um, hello,” Cas says uncertainly, tugging the comforter up to his chin. Dean groans unhappily, the wolf rumbling at Cas for even acknowledging her when she so rudely put a stop to their plans. He relents, because he doesn’t have much of a choice, crawling a few inches up the bed and reluctantly leaving behind the dark cocoon of warmth and mate and slick.

“What?” he snaps irritably, not taking well to someone interrupting his first morning with his sleepy, warm, aroused mate in his bed with him. Said mate is still sleepy, and warm, and even slightly aroused, judging from his smell. Dean glances at him, almost laughing out loud at his mess of dark hair and unhappily squinted eyes.

Maybe if he gets Charlie out of here quick, deals with whatever she needs, they can get back to where they were. That sounds goddamn awesome.

“I’d love to leave you to your newly mated bliss, I really would,” Charlie sighs, crossing her arms. “But no rest for the wicked. The Arch is here, said they wanted a word with Cas before they dig in with the Council.”

Well, Dean scowls. So much for that.

“Did they say anything more?” Cas asks, tilting his head. His shoulders tense and concern creases his brows, a trickle of worry找到 its way into Dean’s nose.

“’Fraid not,” Charlie shrugs, eagerly backing out of the room. “Just to meet them outside. Dean, Council wants you too. Like, ASAP.”

Dean drags his hands over his face and groans, flopping backwards into his pillows as soon as the door shuts again.

“I agree,” Cas sighs, dragging his fingers across Dean’s skin as he reluctantly pulls himself out of bed.

“Wonder if somethin’ happened,” Dean muses, staying in bed while he longingly watches Cas pull on clothes. He picks his own sweats, but roots around in Dean’s drawers until he finds a shirt that he deems suitable. Dean doesn’t love the fact that Cas is covering up all that wonderful skin, but he supposes that this is the next best thing. The ease with which his mate navigates his space makes Dean’s fingers itch with the need to touch, makes his chest tight simultaneously with want and satisfaction. That’s not even mentioning the possessive snarl from the wolf—and maybe Dean a little bit, too—who is all too pleased by the idea of their mate carrying their scent on his clothes along with their claim on his neck.

God he wants to drag his cat back into bed.

“Let’s hope not.” With one last back-popping stretch, Cas turns to go, planting a kiss on Dean’s lips before slipping out the door and shattering every one of Dean’s wandering fantasies.

Dean heaves a sigh and forces himself out of bed behind him, pulling on clothes and steeling himself for whatever he needs to face out there. The wolf shakes out its fur and stamps impatiently, ready to set their targets on something they can sink their teeth into.

***

Castiel keeps waiting for Gabriel to laugh and say “hah! Just kidding! Can’t believe you bought that!”
It hasn’t happened yet.

“How did this even happen?” his voice shakes as he speaks, his fingers clenched into fists at his sides. “And where is Michael?”

Lucifer and Gabriel exchange a look, one that sinks to the pit of Castiel’s gut like a rock.

“Michael is recovering.” Lucifer sniffs, like he doesn’t want to spill much more. Gabriel rolls his eyes, like he believes that Lucifer’s reticence is useless at this point.

Castiel raises his eyebrows. “From?”

“Heavy duty tranquilizers. Probably what they’ve been using all along,” Gabriel says with a heavy sigh. “Michael was taken out of commission.”

“And Sariel?” Castiel asks, no matter how much he fears the answer.

“He’s fine,” Lucifer answers, his words lifting the pressure off of Castiel’s chest long enough for him to exhale. “Thank the gods. Scared, but fine.”

“They didn’t take him?” Castiel’s eyebrows pinch up, the thought of the poor cub watching while his mom was dragged away gnawing at Castiel’s gut.

“You’d rather they did?”

“Of course not,” he clarifies with a barely restrained glare. “But…why didn’t they?”

Lucifer’s mouth pulls down into a frown, Gabriel chewing his lip so hard that Castiel is sure it’ll bleed any second now.

“The question of the hour, isn’t it?” Gabriel says lightly. Castiel grits his teeth at the unsatisfying answer, but he knows that there just isn’t anything more right now.

“And Michael?”

There’s a noticeable hesitation before Lucifer speaks.

“He’s holding it together. For now.”

Castiel nods, biting down on his lip and doing his best to relax his tense muscles. “Does he…?”

“Yeah,” Gabriel claps him on the shoulder, giving him a look that Castiel thinks is supposed to be an apology. “Get over there. We’ll talk with the wolves.”

Castiel sniffs and nods stiffly. He doesn’t want to do this. He doesn’t know how to do this. This was always Anna’s job. But now…

They have to find them. All of them. They have to.

***

It takes every single drop of Dean’s willpower not to sprint down to the infirmary on the lower level. Every single drop. But all it would really do is cause a panic, and that’s just about the last thing they need right now. So he walks alongside the Council, calmly holding his shoulders back and his chin up. He feels for the bond in the back of his mind, and even if it can’t actually help him, right now it’s an unparalleled source of comfort.
Pam and Garth are the only ones in the infirmary when they get down there, and it doesn’t look like Garth is awake yet.

“How is he?” Dean asks, trying to keep his cool as he walks to Garth’s side.

“Having a hell of a nap,” Pam says as she tinkers with his IV. “I’m trying to flush his system, get whatever they put in him out a little bit faster.”

Dean nods tightly, dragging his eyes away from Garth’s pale face. “Think he’ll remember when he wakes up?”

“Sure he will,” John answers, dragging his hand down his jaw and rubbing at the stubble there. “They left a witness on purpose.”

“Kevin never shoulda been outside,” Ellen says with a frustrated sigh, pinching the bridge of her nose, and Dean takes a steadying breath.

“Then why was he?” Dean asks, trying his best not to sound accusatory. He knows this isn’t anybody’s fault, except Crowley’s, but it’s hard to keep that in mind.

“We’ll have’ta wait n’see,” Bobby grunts. From the way his lips are pulled down into a frown, Dean’s pretty sure that whatever the reason, Kevin didn’t have permission to be out.

“We need to notify the rest of the Pack,” Mary says quietly, laying a hand on John’s shoulder. He nods solemnly. “Reiterate that no one is to go outside unless ordered to.”

The wolf hates the idea of being caged up, but they both know this is the right thing to do. No one else can get taken. One wolf is already too many.

“Dean?”

His dad’s voice breaks him out of his thoughts, dragging him back into the moment. There isn’t a bite to it, not like there’s been the last few times that John has addressed him directly. His face looks pinched, but he’s in better control than he has been lately. All it took was a kidnapping to whip him back into shape.

“Yeah?”

“The Arch is here. Talk to them, find out what’s going on.”

Dean nods sharply. Finally they’re letting him get involved.

“The spare quarters closest to the main hall have been cleared,” Ellen continues with a sigh, when it becomes clear that John isn’t going to. “The leopards are welcome, whichever ones are willing.”

Dean’s heart stops. “You’re letting them stay in here?”

“We ain’t standin’ by no more,” Rufus rumbles. “We’ll talk to the kid. Go with the Arch, get those cats to safety. Then we’ll talk strategy.”

“We’re countin’ on you,” John adds, his voice stern and his shoulders stiff. Dean sees it as the opportunity that it is, the Council giving him the lead on this.

“Yes, sir,” Dean agrees, dropping his eyes respectfully. “I’ll be back.”

He turns on his heel and exits quickly, trying not to dwell on Kevin or the danger that his pack is in.
They’ll get everybody back. Soon.

***

The Arch—or some of it, at least—is waiting just outside the main entryway. Adam is standing sentry, his eyes trained diligently on the ground while Gabriel smirks at him.

“No Mikey today?” Dean asks, clapping Adam on the shoulder as he passes by. Poor kid never stood a chance against Gabriel’s own impressive dominance. The leopard’s grin falters, however, and Lucifer’s already pinched frown only deepens.

“Michael is indisposed,” Gabriel says delicately, shooting Lucifer a look.

“Too busy for us?” Dean cocks an eyebrow as he glances between them, but judging by Lucifer’s snarl, it’s the wrong thing to say.

“He is mourning his mate, caring for his pup, and trying to overcome the effects of a powerful tranquilizer while maintaining his humanity,” Lucifer hisses, his growl feline but no less threatening than that of a wolf. “So yes, wolf. You might say he is too busy for you.”

Not for the first time that day, Dean’s stomach sinks to his feet. “What happened to Anna?”

“She was taken,” Gabriel explains, pain clear in his eyes. “Sometime last night.”

“How did that--” he starts, cutting himself off with a frustrated growl. “Why wasn’t Michael there?” Dean manages the second time, dragging his fingers through his hair. He knew she shouldn’t have been at that house by herself with a pup. They were too vulnerable. The wolf would never leave their mate like that, exposed and unprotected.

“Michael was there,” Lucifer snaps, looking like he wants to claw Dean’s face off. “Do not look so eager to fault him, he is far more of an alpha than you.”

The wolf leaps to its feet and snaps its teeth angrily, its hackles raising in a challenge. It wants to show this leopard what kind of alpha they really are. Dean only has slightly better control of his body, and his words come out through gritted teeth.

“How does that happen?” he says low and quiet, trying to keep calm. Panic is racing through his bones, especially since Cas isn’t here like he’d anticipated.

“Did you miss the heavy tranquilizer part, or were you too busy with your pissing match?” Gabriel says with a glare, eyes flicking angrily between them. “They knocked them both out, took her while he was unconscious.”

“Fucking cowards,” Dean spits, his fists clenching and unclenching without his permission. These humans are playing by a different set of rules, and neither Dean nor the wolf likes the new game they’re playing. “Where’s Cas?” he finally asks, no longer able to stash that worry.

“With Michael,” Lucifer explains, some of his rage having melted away. “He is the only other omega we have, and we cannot lose Michael to madness.”

Dean can’t even let that thought process all the way, because that means his mate is currently consoling a raging alpha and—yeah. No thanks.

It takes some effort but he drags his brain back to the actual reason he came out here.
“We had an event this morning too,” he grits out, teeth still clenched. “Our liaison, Kevin, was outside of the den with one of our soldiers, and the two were attacked. Same basic tactic. Tranq ‘em both, take one.”

“Leave behind a witness,” Gabriel adds, before Dean can finish. He nods back.

“Yeah. So red alert, full lockdown, whatever,” Dean grunts. “We can’t fuck around anymore.”

“Gotta agree with you there, Dean-o,” Gabriel grins darkly. “We invited along?”

Dean nods curtly. “Yeah. Everybody who wants in. Council wants to talk defense strategies tonight. For now, we get everybody inside the den and safe.”

Lucifer and Gabriel both nod, lips pressed tight together.

“Some may not agree,” Lucifer adds on, eyebrows furrowing.

“Then it’s your job to convince them,” Dean states, pushing between the two of them and heading off in the direction of Anna’s house. He’s pretty sure that’s where he’ll find Cas.

“You’ll make one hell of an alpha yet,” Gabriel chuckles under his breath, twigs snapping under his feet as he follows behind.

***

Dean has never actually been inside Anna’s house, but he is now. The furniture is oversized and overstuffed, and somehow makes perfect sense for a bunch of damn cats. It’s small, but it’s homey. Cas is curled up in one of the said giant chairs, Michael on the floor at his feet with his cub, Sariel, playing close by.

As soon as the door opens and Dean steps in he sees Cas’ blue eyes light up, sees how tight and sad they are. He turns to Gabriel, speaking quietly into his ear.

“I’m taking him outside,” he states. Not a question. Michael smells upset but okay, and especially with Sariel right there Dean is pretty sure that going rogue is out of the question. Gabriel tilts his head almost imperceptibly in agreement.

Two large steps across the room and Dean pulls a tense and dazed-looking Cas out of his chair and back out the front door. His mate curls into his chest and Dean wraps his arms tight around him, scenting at his neck and checking for any injuries. Cas seems okay, but he doesn’t smell like happy Cas and his thoughts seem to be a thousand miles away.

There aren’t any words to say, not any that matter, so Dean just holds him and waits until Cas is ready, until his fingers loosen on Dean’s back, until his shoulders don’t feel quite so tense.

“Thank you,” he says simply, placing a quiet, warm kiss on Dean’s lips.

“Batteries run a little low?” Dean smiles, trying to brighten up those baby blues again. It works a little bit, the corner of Cas’ mouth twitching suspiciously.

“An apt analogy, puppy,” Cas hums, leaning into him for a deeper kiss and sliding their tongues together. Dean rumbles happily and cups the side of his jaw, pleased at the feeling of stubble under his fingers.

“You fix him?” Dean asks quietly, his words hesitant. Cas doesn’t seem too eager to answer either.
“I’m not sure. But he’s under control now, so maybe.”

Dean bumps their noses together and nips his cat’s pink bottom lip, trying to usher the sadness out of Cas’ voice.

“You did good, kitten. M’ proud of you.”

And he is. There’s not a shred of sarcasm in the entire sentence, a fact that seems to catch Cas off guard. He blinks up at Dean a couple of times, like he’s waiting for Dean to laugh and make some kind of joke out of it.

“Thank you,” he says sincerely, a tiny smile tugging at the very edges of his lips. “I’ve never really needed to be an omega before. I suppose I underestimated the strength it takes, to carry the burdens of others.” Sadness and guilt permeates his muted voice, and Dean holds him tighter. “I’m not sure how Anna does it.”

“She has you, and she has her pack,” Dean adds on, pushing his fingers soothingly through Cas’ messy hair, dragging his nails down the nape of his neck. Cas exhales heavily and closes his eyes briefly, staring up at Dean through heavy eyelashes. “Guilt won’t do anything for her now.”

Cas nods in agreement. “We’ll find her.”

Dean smiles and kisses him quickly. “Hell yeah, we will. Humans won’t know what him ‘em.”

Cas seems to agree, but Dean knows how thinly spread his confidence is right now, how easily Cas can peer right through it—through him. Still they tip-toe around the doubts, around the nagging voices in their heads that are telling them that they might lose this fight. Dean can see the seed planted in Cas’ eye, can see the way the sanguine set of his shoulders threatens to waver. He’s sure Cas hears the crack in his voice, the overdone smile that he plasters on.

Neither of them mentions any of it. Naming the thing gives it power, or whatever, and Dean sure as hell isn’t eager to give power to the voice in his head that says they’re all gonna die.

No thank you.

“C’mon,” he says, a quick ruffle of Cas’ hair. “Let’s get the rest of your pack safe.”

Cas retaliates with a hair ruffle of his own, leading Dean back into the house, and back into the pit.
Michael, unfortunately, doesn’t have a whole lot to share. He speaks through a clenched jaw and gritted teeth, his fingers clenching periodically. Sariel is staring up at him from where he’s nestled on Michael’s lap with pinched brows, but luckily the cub doesn’t seem to really understand what’s happening.

Soothing waves emanate off of Cas the entire time, and by the end of their relatively short conversation Dean has a buzz in his head like he’s drunk. It fades quickly though, especially when he has to leave again.

“I’ll return to the den later,” Cas says quietly as he tugs Dean out of earshot of Gabriel, Lucifer, and Michael. “Hopefully with the remainder of the Host along with me.”

Dean grunts and pulls Cas in against his chest. His mate doesn’t resist, letting Dean bury his nose in the unruly hair atop his head. He doesn’t like it, the wolf doesn’t like it.

“I’ll see you soon,” he sighs, nudging Cas’ cheek with his nose. Cas’ lips twitch up in a tiny smile, lips brushing feather-light across Dean’s own.

“Yes, you will,” Cas hums quietly, a heated flicker in his blue eyes that gives Dean a pretty clear idea of what’s on Cas’ mind. “I believe we have some…activities to return to.”

“Yeah, activities,” Dean laughs, punctuating the words with a wink. “Pretty subtle.”

All that does is earn him a playful glare and a sharp poke to the center of his chest. “I’ve had an unpleasant morning. I’m in no mood for your sarcasm, alpha.”

The wolf rumbles happily at the name, at the affectionate ribbing in his mate’s tone, puffing up its chest in a self-satisfied way. Dean just laughs again, cupping both sides of Cas’ jaw and kissing him soundly. His cat hums happily against his lips, pressing his weight against Dean’s body like he can’t get close enough.

Cas makes a frustrated noise and pulls away all too soon, his heated gaze flicking up and down Dean’s body as he practically drags his own feet back a few clumsy steps.

“Get out of here,” Cas breathes, the words strained like they are physically painful to say. Dean can relate.

But Cas is right. He’s got all this pent up lust from that morning, and that combined with the scent of slick and skin, the flush in his mate’s cheeks, the want in his eyes—yeah. Dragging Cas off to someplace relatively secluded (or not, Dean isn’t picky) sounds like the perfect plan. And it is so not the time for that.

“Yeah, sure,” Dean mumbles, but they end up still staring at each other until Gabriel finally breaks them up and drags Dean away. Quite literally.
They’re both wary as they trudge through the forest back towards the den, leaving Cas, Michael, and Lucifer intentionally behind. Gabriel is blunt, but not as alien as Michael or Lucifer. He feels more like someone they can trust, and the Pack needs that right now.

“So, gimme the lowdown,” Gabriel says with a twitch of his nose as he scents the air around them. Not that they’ll catch any smells anyway, not if the humans are around.

Dean just glances at him, cocking an eyebrow and waiting further explanation. Gabriel rolls his eyes.

“You know. The totem pole. Who’s on top, who’s on bottom.” He exaggerates the sentence with a wink and a suggestive wiggle of his eyebrows. “Mates to know, who I should flirt with and who’s hands off. The important stuff.”

Dean huffs a laugh, staring off to his left for a moment when he hears a twig snap. The wolf’s ears perk up, but it settles down again when no other signs appear.

“You know the Council already,” Dean sighs, trying to decide on what’s important. “As far as Hunters go, you got me ’n Sammy—”

“Young brother, the tall drink of water from that delightful meeting?” Gabriel asks, a hopeful lilt to his tone that gives away the casualness of his question. Dean snorts.

“Yeah, sorry buddy, he’s happily mated. Two pups on the way.” Dean doesn’t mention the pregnancy troubles, because they should go away. They have to. Jess is gonna be fine.

“A tragedy,” Gabriel laments dramatically, fluttering his eyelashes and grasping at his heart through his shirt. “The good ones are always taken.”

Dean chuckles and shakes his head, thankful that his good one wasn’t taken when he finally did find him. “There’s Ellen’s daughter, Jo, but don’t hit on her ’cause she will reach down your throat and rip your balls off. Trust me.”

“You sound like you’re speaking from experience, Dean-o.”

“Yeah, no. Jo’s always been a little sister. I’d be the one to feed you your balls after she tore ’em off.” Gabriel whistles low, bouncing lightly on the balls of his feet as he walks.

“You wolves are a serious lot, aren’t you?” Gabriel comments, sarcasm only barely cloaking the truth to his words. Dean just shrugs.

“I never thought so. We’re just different, I guess.”

He doesn’t mention how much he’s learned from the leopards, from Cas. What pack really means, the kind of support he should’ve gotten from his own family.

“It’ll be interesting, shoving everybody into one big cave,” Gabriel sighs heavily. “With all of us in one spot like that…who knows.”

Who knows. Ain’t that just the motto of their lives right now.

***

Dean answers all of Gabriel’s questions as they walk, at least as many as he feels like he has to answer. He opts out of the ones about his sex life, what he plans to name his pups, and whether or
not Sam and Jess would be open to a threesome. No thank you.

When they finally, blessedly arrive back at the den they head straight to the infirmary to check on Garth. Knowing what they do about what happened to Michael and Anna, Dean isn’t hopeful that they’ll get anything new out of him.

Unfortunately his gut is right, and as expected Garth doesn’t have much to share. Kevin had wanted to go out that morning, something about a lead and “Garth just help me I’ll explain later.” Garth had felt the first three darts when they hit. The fourth was a dull sort of pinch, and he was out before the fifth. He does report what they already knew—that the humans don’t smell like anything. Friggin’ awesome.

Then everything really goes to hell in a handbasket. Dean had been locked away with Gabriel and the Council for what felt like two hours or so when Cas, Lucifer, and Michael all arrive back at the den with a cluster of leopards in tow. Some shifted, some not, but the line filing into the den makes for quite the show. Pack members line up along the main hall to watch the procession, a mixture of suspicion and fear and anger in their eyes.

Dean can’t really blame them. A lot of wolves want to blame the cats, a lot want to hate them just…because. It’s a goddamn mess.

He doesn’t even see Cas come in, he’s too caught up ushering leopards into empty rooms and snapping his teeth at any wolf who smells a little too aggressive. Balthazar—the bastard—makes eyes at just about every wolf he passes. Nobody is that amused, and Dean buries his laughter. The whole thing is tense and uncomfortable, and in the flurry Dean finds himself leading an entire brigade of Hunters and Seraphs off to the Council room to get to work.

Once everybody’s seated, Dean figures he might as well have drawn a fucking line down the center of the room with how segregated everybody is. He finally sees Cas at the back of the room, standing almost directly between the two groups. How friggin’ poetic.

Dean has been in charge of some shit—really in charge—more than a few times before. The patrol schedule? All him. Supply runs? Him. The new alpha’s training program, the shadowing with the experienced soldiers and Hunters? Coordinated by yours truly. Hell, he even convinced Ash to strap together the movie equipment in the nursery.

Still, he doesn’t have a goddamn idea what he’s supposed to do with this room full of expectant leopards and wolves all staring at him. He feels like a friggin’ fish out of water.

“So that’s where we’re at,” he says, clapping his hands together and glancing around, trying to gauge his audience. They’d all listened raptly as he explained the entire situation, including the info they’d gotten from Michael and Garth, but it’s a lot. He’d been expecting some outrage, or confusion, or just…something. Instead they’re just staring at him, like they’re waiting for something more.

“Questions?”

Nobody says anything, but the faint twitch of Cas’ lips from where stands with his arms crossed at the back of the room keeps Dean going.

“Uh, so plan. Nobody leaves this place, ‘cept us, and nobody strays far alone. Got that?”

Jumbled sounds of agreement filter up to him. It’s enough.

“We’re gonna canvass every square inch of these woods,” he says, intentionally meeting every pair of eyes in here. “If there’s anything, and I mean anything, to be found, we’ll find it.”
He sure as hell doesn’t feel as sure as he’s trying to sound, but from the determined set of Jo’s shoulders and the proud look on Sam’s face, he’s pulling it off. Saying all the right things, the stuff that’s going to get everyone believing in the cause, or whatever.

“Right here,” he continues smoothly, holding up the bags in his hands and addressing the wolves more than the cats, “we got scent tokens. They’re using scent blockers, but if you get a whiff of one of the missing shifters you need to recognize it. Leopards,” he says, shifting his focus to the other side of the room, “you see anything, you report it. Understood?”

Several people nod sharply at him, their fingers twitchy like they can’t wait to get started.

“Good,” Dean sniffs, nodding. “Awesome. So, teams. Wolves on the ground, leopards up high. I want everybody going full shift.”

Asking everybody to wear their fur here is, hopefully, going to make a difference. Their senses aren’t radically different, but Dean’s hoping that letting their animals out will lead to something.

“I want Sam and Ruby,” he points to each of them, waiting for confirmation, “with Balthazar and Hannah,” he finishes, doing the same with them. He pointedly does not look at Cas. “North side.”

“I propose we call ourselves Alpha Team,” Balthazar says with a grin, tossing an arm over Hannah’s shoulders. She rolls her eyes and shrugs him off.

“No way, blondie,” Jo snorts. “How about Team Ego?”

Dean is pretty sure he sees Hannah’s lips twitch. Cas’ eyes are smiling, and Dean can’t help himself.

“All right alright,” Dean huffs, shaking his head. “Claws away. Benny and Jo, you’re with Gadreel, Raphael, and Naomi. South side.”

He feels Cas’ shift in mood, and forces himself to ignore it. He knows what he’s doing here, not sending Cas out of the den. But Dean won’t do it, not when pack members had been kidnapped that morning. He’s not going to put his cat in danger.

“I’ll be out with Gabriel, Lucifer, and John. We’ll overlap your routes. I want updates sent to HQ every few hours, minimum. Everybody good?”

Dean finally raises his eyes enough to catch Cas’ gaze. His blue eyes are stormy and dark, his lips pulled into a tight line. It doesn’t take a lot of thought to figure out what that look means.

Dean passes around the scent tokens, letting the teams organize themselves. Cas doesn’t move an inch, and Dean does his best not to drop his gaze as he approaches the back of the room.

“Explain,” Cas says through gritted teeth, before Dean can even open his mouth.

“I’m not sending you out there,” Dean sniffs, his position firm. He hates doing this, but he has to.

“I’m a Seraph, Dean,” he snaps. Cas looks like he’s about two seconds from baring his teeth and snarling. “I should be out there with my pack, not hiding in here.”

“I need you in here, Cas,” Dean growls right back, his heart racing. “I’m—”

Cas takes a step forward, until the two of them are standing nose to nose. Dean can smell the frustration and anger wafting off of his mate in waves. He wants to cup Cas’ jaw and kiss the unhappiness away, but he can’t.
"When did this become about you?"

"It’s not," Dean sighs, trying to keep his voice down. He doesn’t need this to turn into a fight with all of these other people around to see it. Mary’s advice blares inside his ears, and he does his best to keep it between them. "If you’re running around out there, all I’ll do all day is fucking worry whether or not you’ll come home. I need to focus, kitten."

He tries to reach for Cas’ waist, but his mate is having none of it.

"I am capable of keeping myself safe, alpha," he spits, the nickname sounding sour on his tongue. The wolf shrinks away from their angry cat, from the stark contrast against his earlier warmth. "Let me go with you."

Dean’s stomach sinks. He’d been scared that Cas would ask for that. "I can’t do that."

Cas’ face falls. "You can’t keep me locked in here, Dean. Just because you’re afraid of what’s out there."

The wolf objects immediately, because they aren’t afraid of anything. They are protecting their mate, yes, but they aren’t afraid. Dean is too distracted to voice these complaints, because somehow Cas’ quiet, frustrated tone manages to cut way deeper than his outright anger. And yeah, the others are starting to stare at the quiet confrontation.

When Dean doesn’t respond Cas’ eyebrows pinch up, and angry flush coloring his cheeks. "You expect me to just sit around all day?"

"Course not," Dean breathes heavily. Maybe he’s being a dick right now—okay fine, he’s definitely being a dick right now—but he does have some logic behind this besides his overprotective wolf. "Get the Host settled in, they’re gonna need some soothing vibes. Mom can help, if they’ll let her. They need you in here."

Cas’ face hardens, his entire body stiffening.

"Be the omega," Cas says calmly, taking a step backwards. He tilts his chin in a way that is far too militaristic for Dean’s tastes, folding his hands behind his back. "Of course."

"Cas…" Dean says quietly, the wolf pacing around and whining nervously. It doesn’t like how their mate smells, how he steps away from them, how he puts distance between them.

"I understand, Dean." Cas’ gaze flicks around to the other occupants of the room, before settling back on Dean’s face. "I’ll see you this evening."

With that he’s gone. And Dean doesn’t follow him.

"Stop staring and get going," he snarls at the other shifters in the room, glaring at all of them until they drop their eyes.

***

The search routes go surprisingly smooth, and surprisingly according to plan. They don’t actually find anything, but it’s only day one. Dean is hopeful.

That, and spending most of the day with his claws flexing in the dirt, mud between his toes, the forest air in his nose, it’s calming for him. He tries not to worry about Cas, about their almost-fight, but he can feel the mating bond itching at the back of his skull. The wolf’s hackles raise when Dean
feels Cas shift, but he shifts back two hours or so later. The wolf wants to go home and check on him, or just see him; it wants to get their mate’s scent in their fur, wants to carry it around with them.

Dean ignores what the wolf wants, nudging him along through the forest on padded paws. It’s eerily quiet, the only scents and sounds those of the other shifters surveying the forest along with him.

It’s a long day.

Everyone takes a break around dinner time, resting up and stretching their human muscles for a long night out. The Bunker is absolute chaos, helped only by the fact that the leopards seem to dislike the dining quarters and are more likely to be seen carrying plates of food back to their rooms. Ultimately, a little separation is probably good for everybody.

Dean immediately looks around for Cas, his stomach sinking a little bit when he can’t immediately scent him out. Gabriel, of course, tells him not to worry so much.

“You told him to play omega, he’s playing omega,” Gabriel shrugs, shoving an apple into his mouth to make room for the five plates he’s attempting to carry. “’e’s pro’ably in a ‘oom,” he says around the fruit. “I’ll ‘ind ‘im.”

Dean figures Gabriel can handle at least that much, piling his own plates with food and taking a seat across from his dad. John doesn’t say anything at first, but Dean doesn’t need the glance from Mary to know that he’ll get something out of him if he just waits.

Surprisingly, it only takes a few minutes.

“Those cats,” John grunts, staring intently at the food on his plate. “They’re useful.”

Dean swallows his snort, covering up the aborted noise with a cough. “Uh, yeah. Definitely.”

John nods his agreement, and Dean has a feeling that might be all he’s going to get. If only he were so lucky.

“Where’s that mate of yours?” he asks, his voice still gruff and hard.

Dean bites back his retort, the one that says John knows that Cas is Dean’s mate, that he can call Castiel by name. It’s not any use here, and honestly Dean is impressed that John even bothered to ask after him.

“Cas,” Dean says deliberately, “was here today. Helping the host get settled in.”

John grunts, but it’s Mary’s frown and furrowed eyebrows that catch Dean’s attention.

“Castiel was…in the Bunker today?” she asks, speaking the words slowly and carefully. Dean’s brain is still playing catch-up.

“Yeah. Helping out,” he repeats, like that makes it more clear.

Mary’s eyes widen fractionally. “Michael was here, helping the Host get settled in. But Castiel…”

Her voice trails off, and Dean is out of his chair before she even finishes. Gabriel practically fucking appears behind him, not so much as blinking at the snarl that tears out of Dean’s chest.

“Calm down, puppy dog,” he says, his eyes firm as his hands on Dean’s shoulders.

“Where is he,” the wolf growls, shoving the cat’s hands off of them, their voice low and layered with
a growl. Gabriel hesitates.

“It appears our little Cassie went out for a stroll through the woods.”

The wolf loses it.

“When?” they snarl through bared fangs, when all they really hear is *Cas is gone, Cas is gone, Cas is gone.*

“He hasn’t been here all day, sweetheart,” Mary lays a hand on his arm, doing her best to calm him down. It doesn’t work, the anger and fear racing through his veins just too much.

Dean reaches for the bond at the back of his mind, feels how electric and alive it is. So wherever Cas is, he’s breathing. He’s also human, though he hadn’t been for a few hours earlier.

His body starts the shift before Dean really gives it permission. The others standing close to him—Mary, John, Gabriel—all step back, prepared for the beast that will emerge from the change.

Dean doesn’t care that his eyes are wild, that he’s probably scaring his pack as he races down the halls. It’s just one thought that consumes him.

*Cas is gone. Cas is gone.*

*Cas left.*
Chapter 30

Chapter Summary

“I was scared.”

Chapter Notes

Sorry for being the worst with the cliffhanger, but y'all were still the best. See you next Sunday :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

There were cameras in the Bunker, and it feels obvious that there should be cameras elsewhere. That, and it’s an excuse to get out. Castiel finds the first camera almost immediately, tucked away in the trees right outside the back entrance to the Bunker. He’s fairly certain that the search teams haven’t even left the Council room yet. It takes some effort not to roll his eyes.

The panther is restless, angry, tired of the bars on its cage. Or maybe that is how Castiel is feeling. He is certainly frustrated, and he can’t decide if the tightness in his chest is hurt or…something else. Guilt, perhaps.

Hurt sounds like the easier option. Because Dean was always supposed to stand next to him, not in front of him. His endlessly loving and protective mate, who fell victim to the stereotypes of Castiel’s designation. To Dean, Castiel isn’t—or wasn’t, maybe—just an omega. Never the weakest in the pack, and precious because he is Dean’s mate, not because the pack needs him. Castiel has always seen himself as a Seraph first, everything else second, and he’d thought Dean was on the same page.

To find out that he isn’t is…difficult.

As he slips between the trees, forcing himself to maintain his human form so as not to draw Dean’s attention through the bond, Castiel’s thoughts splinter into what feels like hundreds of different directions. He shoves aside the thoughts that go anywhere near the realm of maybe Dean is right and skips happily over the threads that head towards he wants me safe. Is that so bad?

Castiel’s mate has not earned his forgiveness. Not yet.

The second camera, or set of cameras, since there are several, are scattered along the border of the two territories. One points almost directly at their rock. Castiel disables it—and the others—and forces himself to pocket it instead of crushing it in his palm.

Their rock doesn’t smell like himself, and it doesn’t smell like his mate. It just smells like bare stone, and a little like the rain that must have fallen the night before. It digs at something in Castiel’s chest, and he does his best to ignore it.

It’s the last camera—the last one he finds, anyway—that obliterates any shred of self-control that Castiel has left. He’d already cleared the human tech around Anna and Michael’s home (only one
camera) and the one near the cave where the Arch meets. He’s sure there are others, but he’s satisfied with that much. Then he goes to his treehouse.

If someone had asked him his plans that morning, he might’ve said that he planned to scour what forest he could and return to the den before Dean returned. His wolf would know that Castiel had been out, of course, but Castiel had been certain that he could handle his alpha’s rage as long as Dean knew he was safe.

That plan flew out the window.

The first camera is the farthest away, and as much as he wants to Castiel can’t blame himself for not finding it. The number of times that he scours the trees around his home in search of tiny cameras is a hard zero. Still, it’s rage he feels boiling in his gut. The shift comes easily, his panther eager to tear into something and settling happily for Castiel’s own flesh. His bones pop and crack and his skin tears as his muscles stretch, but he doesn’t feel any of it.

The panther feels the anger in a way that’s more…pure. So Castiel leans into it, lets everything else fall away.

A second camera points into his living room. He crushes it in his teeth. A third, directed straight into his nest.

Bile crawls up Castiel’s throat, his vision blacking out momentarily. He doesn’t just destroy the camera; everything within reach suffers the punishment of his claws.

These humans, these monsters, they shared in his moments with Dean. They watched them move together, watched Dean take Castiel as his and Castiel claim Dean in turn. Most likely they watched Castiel writhe in heat, alone. They watched the quiet mornings he slept late with his mate, and he is thankful only that the words Dean spoke are for his ears and no one else’s.

Castiel doesn’t set foot inside the treehouse. It doesn’t feel like home, doesn’t feel like his anymore. He feels violated, like nothing of his is safe. And perhaps for the first time, Castiel feels like maybe he isn’t safe.

All he wants to do is run to his mate, curl himself in Dean’s arms and let his scent wash everything away. And he can’t, because his feet…why aren’t they working? Castiel can’t think straight, can’t sort out why his body won’t listen to him.

He just…needs a minute.

Castiel is on the ground, his back against a tree trunk. He isn’t sure how he got like that, doesn’t remember shifting. A small lizard skitters past his bare feet, the same kind he saw inside the Bunker. He wonders if the lizard has lost its home too.

Castiel is standing above himself, staring down at his own mussed hair, at his own slumped shoulders, at the way his eyes are trained resolutely on the ground. It takes a moment for it all to click.

I’m in shock. Oh.

***

Their legs aren’t moving fast enough. They snarl and run harder. Trees whip past on all sides, but they see nothing; they hear nothing. They have one destination.
They smell their mate’s distress before they see him, but their cat is here. There is no blood, but there is pain. Acrid fear, bitter sadness, a dull ache in Dean’s chest. The wolf whimpers and slinks away, dragging them through the fastest shift of Dean’s life. He doesn’t wait, walking towards his cat even as the fur melts off of his bones. He goes to his knees smoothly, wrapping his mate up in sure arms and holding him tightly. Cas clings to him, a dry sob wracking his body.

“Don’t fucking leave me again,” Dean growls, unable to keep the anger out of his voice. Because he’s fucking pissed, and so goddamn panicked he can feel it vibrating in his bones.

“Okay,” Cas says quietly, his voice dry and shaky. He doesn’t snap, doesn’t defend himself, doesn’t fight back, and the wind goes out of Dean’s sails so fast he gets whiplash.

His voice this time is softer, soothing, rumbling with the security of his wolf in an effort to settle his mate.

“What happened?”

“The cameras,” Cas says quietly, “I went looking for them. Disabled them so they couldn’t watch us.”

Dean sees the scattered tech debris on the ground, his brain slowly putting the pieces together. A sick feeling crawls up his throat, churning his stomach into knots.

“We belong to them,” Cas shudders, his voice cracking. “We have already lost. There is nothing they won’t take from us.”

“Tell me what they saw,” Dean says gently, shifting them as he speaks. Cas curls up eagerly in his lap, legs around his waist just like his arms wound tight around Dean’s neck, Cas’ nose pressed almost desperately against his throat. The wolf rumbles, in a soothing way that he thinks is meant to emanate a purr, and Dean lets his mate hear it.

“The nest,” Cas’ voice cracks, a shiver running through his body. Dean runs his hands up and down Cas’ back, does what he can with his scent and touch until he can convince Cas to hear what he’s saying. Thankfully the wolf has the scent part covered.

“Our nest,” Dean corrects, and it only makes Cas cling tighter. He starts to purr, but it’s sad and lonely and Dean hates it. “Baby…”

“It isn’t ours. Perhaps never was.” Cas’ voice shakes, muffled by Dean’s skin and the mix of emotions clouding his tone. “It has always been theirs. We have always been theirs.”

The wolf bares its teeth and snarls.

“No fuckin’ way,” Dean takes Cas’ face in his hands, forces his mate to look him in the eyes. Cas’ eyes look dark and bruised and far away, so friggin’ far away. “We don’t belong to them, Cas. We’ll never belong to them.”

“Dean,” Cas sighs softly, a multitude of things in that one word that Dean isn’t willing to parse through at the moment. Cas’ fingers barely brush Dean’s cheek, like he can’t help himself.

Dean shifts one of his hands to card through Cas’ hair, sliding a thumb across his bottom lip. God he smells so wrong, the stench of Cas’ fear tainting everything around them. Dean is pretty sure it’s the one thing he never wanted to smell on his cat, and the one he’ll remember the most vividly.

Remember?

Cas huffs a humorless laugh, one that only barely touches his eyes. “I want to believe you.”

“Then do,” Dean shrugs, his gaze dropping accidentally to Cas’ lips. Cas sighs and hesitates a moment, carefully selecting his words before he speaks.

“I’m sorry.”

“Me too,” Dean says quietly. “Uh, sorry, that is. I never should’a made you stay.”

“You shouldn’t have had to,” Cas exhales heavily, absentmindedly tracing his fingers over Dean’s face. “I think my place was there today, not out here.”

Dean doesn’t agree or disagree, just lets Cas get everything out of his system. And if that means being quiet for a few minutes while the shock leaves Cas’ system, then Dean can do that.

“I didn’t go up there,” Cas says quietly, his eyes downcast like he’s ashamed to say it. “I was scared.”

The words rattle Dean right to his core, like ice in his veins. The wolf tears around in a rage, furious that their mate was scared and they weren’t here for him sooner.

Dean touches a finger to Cas’ chin, urging his mate to meet his gaze. He almost wishes he hadn’t, because the wetness in Cas’ blue eyes is almost too much for him.

“What if I went up there,” Cas continues, his voice quivering. “What if I went, and…I don’t know. I built that treehouse with my own hands, and they took it from me. If I go up there, it’s real.”

“It’s real,” Dean says firmly, cupping Cas’ jaw so their eyes are forced to stay locked. “Whether you go up there or not. All you can do is take it back.”

This is apparently not what Cas wants to hear, but he sniffs and his spine straightens and some color spills onto his cheeks.

“I’m not going up there.” Cas’ voice sounds stronger, more sure, like he’s making sure that Dean understands that he will not waver on this.

“Will you go up there with me?” Dean asks, a hopeful lilt to his voice. He’s not sure that it’ll work, but he is hoping.

Cas blinks at him a few times, his expression shifting minutely like he can’t decide which emotion to settle on for right now. He decides on furrowed eyebrows and slightly parted lips, finished off with a slight tilt of his head.

“Why?”

Dean shrugs. “Old time’s sake.”

Cas’ lips press into a thin line, and it’s clear that he isn’t buying an ounce of Dean’s bullshit. Still, he thinks Cas might just let him get away with it.

Or not.

“Let’s just go home. Please.”
Dean should be happy that Cas is thinking of the Bunker as home, but the wolf is whining and his chest aches and he can’t think much beyond that.

“Cas…”

“Please, Dean.” His voice cracks, the rest of him compensating by rolling his shoulders back and setting his jaw firmly. “I want to go home.”


***

Dean glares at anyone who tries to talk to them as they re-enter the den, only offering his parents a short nod when he sees them. He doesn’t owe anybody else an explanation. The two of them go straight back to Dean’s room—their room—where it’s dark and they’re alone and it smells like mates and comfort.

Cas shuffles straight over to the bed, curling up beneath the blankets and not even bothering with the lights. Dean does the same, slipping into bed right beside him.

“You okay?” he whispers into Cas’ hair, feeling puffs of warm breath against his chest as he runs his palms down Cas’ spine.

“Not tonight,” Cas answers quietly, shifting to press his nose against Dean’s throat. “Perhaps tomorrow.”

It feels like a sucker punch to Dean’s gut, and he wishes he knew what to do, what he even could do to help.

“The night search will be starting soon,” Cas says after a few minutes of silence. “You need to go.”

“You kickin’ me out?” Dean tries to joke, feeling marginally successful when Cas hums softly in response. His mate pulls back the tiniest bit, and Dean’s eyes have adjusted enough that he can dimly see Cas’ face in the dark of their room. Cas stares for a few seconds before pressing their lips together, gently tracing Dean’s lower lip with his tongue while his fingers drag through the stubble on Dean’s cheeks.

Dean’s entire body flushes hot for his cat, the wolf flopping on its back and letting out a whimper that’s audible in Dean’s throat. Cas chuckles at that, a sound that finally warms Dean’s sunken chest. Cas flicks his tongue briefly against the top of Dean’s mouth before he pulls away, his lips lingering like they don’t want this to end.

“I am kicking you out, because our packs need you,” Cas breathes, his voice already huskier than before.

“You need me,” Dean grumbles, nipping lightly at Cas’ slick lower lip, sucking at the redness.

“I do,” Cas admits, his own tongue flicking out to lick his lower lip. “So you better come home tonight.”

Dean huffs a laugh, trying to ignore the guilt creeping up his spine. ‘Cause Cas is right. Their packs do need him.

“Think I can probably do that.” Dean drags his mate in for a long kiss, parting his lips and threading their tongues together. Cas sighs into his mouth, hips rolling against Dean’s stomach.
“I gotta…” he starts, panting into Cas’ mouth.

“I know,” he exhales heavily, prying himself away from Dean’s chest. “Go, please.”

Dean drags himself out of bed before he loses his nerve, pulling on sweats and walking backwards towards the door.

“I fuckin’ love you,” he says with a smile, the wolf doing its best to urge him back into bed with their mate.

“I know,” Cas’ lips twitch just barely. “Now get out.”

Dean steps backwards out the door, immediately leaning his entire body against it, his forehead pressed against the cool metal. God he wants to go back in.

“You reek.”

Dean practically jumps out of his skin, his gaze whipping over to the source of the sound and finding Sam and Jo standing in the hall waiting for him.

“Like what?” Dean scoffs, forcing himself away from the door and towards them.

“Like an alpha that didn’t quite get his rocks off, that’s what,” Jo snorts, shaking her head. “He okay?”

Dean glances back at the door, afraid he’ll run back in if he looks too long. “Will be. But he’s in one piece.”

“Small miracles, eh?” Sam claps him on the shoulder, directing him back towards the main hall. “Dad’s in the Council room, wanted to see you.”

“Got it,” Dean grunts. “Night search?”

“Ready to go,” Jo answers, fidgeting briefly with her ponytail. “Everybody’s rested and ready.”

“Awesome,” Dean exhales. “Roll out. We’ll join you in a bit.”

Sam and Jo both nod and peel off, heading down the hall in the opposite direction, towards the main entrance to the Bunker. Dean keeps going, tilting his chin up and trying to appear collected as he steps into the Council room.

Mary, John, Bobby, Ellen, Rufus, and Gabriel are in there, along with Lucifer. Michael isn’t, and Dean isn’t sure exactly what that means. Gabriel’s head snaps up immediately, his eyes darkening.

“Castiel okay?” he asks, his voice rough and low.

“Peachy,” Dean nods, holding his gaze for a second too long. He hopes Gabriel gets it. “Where’s Michael?”

“With his pup, surrounded by pack,” Lucifer supplies, his tone clipped as usual. “He is in no shape to deal with these things. As of yet.”

Dean’s stomach sinks.

Mary looks like she’s about to say something, but John beats her to it. He sighs, stands up out of his chair and circles the large table, coming to stand directly in front of Dean. Heavy hands land on both
of his shoulders, his dad’s eyes searching his face for god knows what.

“You okay, kid?” he asks, real, genuine concern in his eyes.

“Uh,” Dean stutters, not sure what to do with this. “Yeah?”

John stares at him for a few more seconds before nodding. “Good. Castiel?”

Dean’s eyes widen. “He’s…um. He’s been better.”

His honesty comes as a surprise to just about everybody, himself included. John’s jaw tightens, his scent flaring up with anger. Dean’s gut just falls further, all of him preparing for the worst from his dad.

“Listen up,” John grunts. “Go get some food, get some water, and go take care of your mate. We can handle the night search.”

“Dad, I—” Dean starts, before realizing what his dad actually said. “Wait…what? You want me to stay in?”

“Your mate needs you, boy,” John responds, like it’s the most obvious thing in the world. “So go be what he needs.”

“I don’t…” Dean trails off, his thoughts in pieces.

“Sweetheart,” Mary says softly, circling the table to come to Dean’s side. She lays a hand on his cheek, smiling quietly. “This isn’t your responsibility. The Pack needs you, and that includes Castiel.”

“I can handle the night search,” John grunts, crossing his arms across his chest. “Now go. We need you fresh tomorrow.”

“Uh, sure,” Dean rubs at the back of his neck. He wants to say thanks, or just say something, but his mouth won’t open. His dad nods at him though, so Dean’s pretty sure he gets it.

Cas is awake when he gets back with two water bottles and an armful of snacks, his eyes open and his body curled around Dean’s pillow.

“Comfy?” Dean says with a raised eyebrow as he dumps his provisions, walking slowly towards the bed and pulling his sweats off as he goes.

“Mmm,” Cas hums distractedly. “It smells like you. Why are you back?”

“Dad told me to beat it, spend the night with you.”

That gets an eyebrow raise out of Cas, even as Dean slips into bed beside him.

“I seem to be making an impression,” he says, words muffled against Dean’s chest as he tangles their limbs together.

“Apparently,” Dean chuckles, inhaling the scent of Cas’ hair. He cups his mate’s jaw with one hand, tilting it up so he can press a soothing kiss to his cat’s lips. Cas sighs and leans into it. His scent is way better, the sweet scent of arousal curling in Dean’s nose.

“You are irresistible,” Cas breathes, his voice already sounding wrecked. Dean is fucked.
“Yeah?” Dean teases, pushing a leg between Cas’ thighs and reveling in the feeling of Cas’ erection against him.

“Puppy?” Cas says sweetly, blue eyes sinful as he peers up at Dean through thick, dark lashes. Whatever Cas says next, Dean knows he’s going to say yes.

“Yeah, kitten?”

There’s a tiny smile playing at the corner of Cas’ mouth, and Dean likes the look of it. He leans up and puts his mouth right at Dean’s ear, letting his teeth scrape over the outer shell before sucking gently on the fleshy lobe. His voice, when he speaks, is low and husky, going straight to Dean’s cock.

“I want you to make me forget my own name.”

Chapter End Notes

One day I’ll stop being mean to Cas. One day.....
Chapter 31

Chapter Summary

“Who knew that a scalp massage is on par with sex for you.”

Chapter Notes

I bring you: sex and actual positive plot movement! And who ever said I wasn't good to you guys....

Lots and lots of love to all of you wonderful people, as always. See you all next week!

There’s nothing quite like the sound of Cas moaning Dean’s name.

“Fuck, Dean,” he whines, his back arching off the bed. Dean squeezes his thigh, adjusting its position on his shoulder and gently blowing cool air on Cas’ slick soaked hole. “Nonononono, cold.”

Dean chuckles at his complaining, placating him with broad strokes of his tongue that punch the air out of Cas’ lungs in one breath.

He’s been at this for a while, licking and tasting his mate until Cas melted into a quivering mess. To be fair, Cas stopped being coherent a while ago. Dean’s just enjoying himself far too much to stop. He moves his tongue slowly and leisurely, in no hurry to push Cas towards the edge. His cat seems to be on the same page, content to writhe under Dean’s ministrations for however long Dean wants to continue them.

Which, judging from the ache in between Dean’s own legs, won’t be much longer. And judging from the vice-like grip on Dean’s hair that Cas has recently adopted, his mate won’t last much longer either.

Dean pushes his tongue deep into Cas’ body, a rumbling growl starting up in his chest. Cas cries out loudly, fingers squeezing tight enough on Dean’s hair that his scalp is starting to ache.

“Dean,” he gasps, chest heaving in panting breaths. “Dea—De-aaaaaaaan—fu—”

Everything after that is a garbled mess of groans that neither Dean nor the wolf has any interest in interpreting. Their mate tastes like ambrosia, smells like heaven, and nothing else matters.

With his hands hooked under Cas’ thighs Dean pulls him as close as physically possible, catching his rim with flicks of his tongue and tasting each fresh wave of slick as it pours out of Cas’ body.

“Hnnnnnnmmmmngh,” Cas moans, breath catching in his throat. Dean can feel how close he is, can feel how every muscle in his body tenses with each passing second.

It’s fucking glorious when Cas comes. His body arched off of their bed, both hands buried in Dean’s
hair, his hole clenching around Dean’s tongue as it slides in and out of his body, throat raw and scratchy as he all but screams his orgasm to the world. The wolf preens, snarling happily at how well they’ve taken care of their mate.

Dean only relents when Cas’ body slumps back down, and he’s pretty sure there’s come in his hair. He doesn’t care. Dean pulls back slowly and gently, kissing his way down the insides of Cas’ thighs. The skin there is red, probably from his stubbled cheeks, and already covered in gentle teeth marks. Dean grins at the sight and sucks hard at the skin, unable to resist the urge to mark up his cat’s flesh. Cas, for his part, seems incapable of speech, but one hand strokes languidly through Dean’s hair and it feels like approval.

When he’s satisfied down there Dean works his way back up Cas’ body, pressing his teeth against the skin as he goes. He never draws blood, but each press sends a flood of calm through Cas’ scent so Dean continues. He licks up the come as he goes too, everywhere it’s splattered against Cas’ torso.

Their bond is warm and alight with sparks, the scent of comfort and happy mate soothing Dean’s instincts.

“Hey baby,” Dean murmurs, nuzzling Cas’ throat and wrapping his arms tight under his shoulders. Cas purrs and mumbles something in response, but Dean is pretty sure he doesn’t form any actual words. He shifts and fits his teeth over the mating bite, growling low in his throat and grinning at the way Cas curls around him.

“Little alpha,” Cas says blearily, wrapping his legs around Dean’s hips and threading his arms around his neck. “You are so beautiful, so precious to me.”

“Precious, huh?” Dean chuckles, nosing at Cas’ cheek and resting their foreheads together. And if he moves so that he can look into Cas’ dilated blue eyes, well, nobody needs to know about it. “You sure talk pretty post-orgasm.”

Cas hums and smiles, gummy and ridiculous, barely brushing the tips of their noses. “I talk prettier post knotting.”

“That so?” Dean rumbles, purposefully rolling his hips against the slick between Cas’ legs. Cas just hums and nips at his bottom lip, which is all the encouragement Dean needs.

His mate is tight and hot around his cock, their bodies moving together lazily. Cas moans with each drag of Dean’s dick against his prostate, his limbs tightening where they’re wrapped around Dean’s hips and torso. Dean keeps up the same pace when his knot starts to catch, switching from long thrusts to slow, circling grinding motions that make Cas whimper.

“You smell so fucking good, baby,” Dean rumbles into his ear, nipping at Cas’ earlobe and inhaling deeply at his throat. Cas groans and bares his throat, shivering when Dean sucks gently at the tendons of his neck. “So goddamn gorgeous.”

Cas’ breaths catch in his throat, picking up in speed. It’s an obvious sign that Dean recognizes, and he kisses Cas through his orgasm as his own knot swells to lock them together. Dean is coming seconds later, the heat that was coiled at the base of his spine shooting out to the tips of his fingers and toes. Dean moans into his mate’s mouth as he spills inside him, and Cas gives it right back.

Every instinct in Dean’s body settles at the feeling of being tied to his mate, locked together with Cas’ come between them and a sheen of sweat on their bodies.
“I love you,” Cas breathes into his ear, tilting his hips purposefully.

“Fuck,” Dean groans, burying his face in Cas’ neck as another orgasm tears through him. “Love you, too.”

Cas purrs happily. “My puppy.”

***

Dean wakes up to the beeping of his alarm in the morning. He’s nestled against Cas’ chest, arm wrapped tight around his waist.

“Noise,” Cas whines, sounding grumpy and annoyed. “Off.”

Dean rumbles and rolls over, smacking his alarm with the back of his hand. Cas shifts into the warm space in the bed as soon as Dean moves, molding himself against Dean’s back.

“Up an’ at ‘em, kitty,” Dean sighs, resisting the urge to lean into Cas’ chest. “We got work to do.”

Cas makes an unhappy noise and nestles deeper into bed. “No thank you.”

“Wish that was an option.” Dean drags himself out of bed, scrubbing a hand over his face and shuffling over to his bathroom to brush the unpleasant taste out of his mouth. Cas grumbles at the light shining on his face, pulling the covers up over his eyes.

“You’re awful.” His voice is muffled by the blankets, but it still makes Dean chuckle.

“Y’know,” Dean grins over his shoulder, casually strolling over to turn on the water in the shower, “how about you just sleep a little longer? I’ll wake you up after I shower.”

With that Dean turns to shut the door, closing it with a quiet click. It takes all of ten seconds for Cas’ sleep-scratchy voice to drift through to his ears.

“Dean?”

He slowly cracks the door just enough to peak through, where he sees a rumpled Cas finally sitting up in bed. If Dean isn’t mistaken, his bedhead is even more outrageous than usual.

“Yeah, Cas?”

Cas hesitates, tilting his head just slightly to the side. He looks sleepy and feline and irresistible as ever, which irritates the hell out of Dean in the absolute best way.

“I’d like a shower, too. I’ve never had one.”

It makes sense, given the leopards’ lack of running water in the forest for the most part, but Dean is still surprised.

“One of the few pleasures in life, dude. Get in here.”

A tiny smile plays at the corner of Cas’ mouth, widening as he shuffles over to the bathroom. They slip into the shower together, and Dean is sure to let Cas step under the warm spray first just so he can watch his face. And it’s definitely worth it.

“This is wonderful,” Cas hums happily, shivering as the spray beats down on his back. Dean huffs a laugh and joins him under the water, pressing their wet bodies together. Cas starts purring at that, the
soft, content one that makes Dean smile.

“This place has got some perks,” Dean chuckles, pressing a wet kiss to Cas’ lips. He steps away briefly to get some soap, his heartstrings tugging almost painfully at the pleased look on his mate’s face when he rubs it into Cas’ hair. “Feel good?”

Cas just hums and slips his arms around Dean’s waist, rolling his head from side to side as if to indicate to Dean where exactly he’d like his scalp massaged. He even lets out a low moan, one that sounds strangely familiar from the night before.

“Who knew,” Dean says teasingly, using his thumbs to rub at Cas’ temples, “that a scalp massage is on par with sex for you.”

Cas’ lips twitch, but he doesn’t bother opening his eyes to respond. “In truth, you should’ve known that about me already.”

Dean snorts, taking a moment to mold Cas’ hair into a mohawk before rinsing the suds away.

“My turn?” he says, eagerly reaching for the soap. Dean rolls his eyes dramatically and nods. “Sure. I got less hair than you do, though.”

As is turns out, the lack of hair doesn’t deter Cas at all. He gives scalp massages like a pro (which shouldn’t have been surprising) and has Dean groaning himself in no time at all.

So really, Dean can’t be blamed for pushing Cas up against the shower wall as soon as the soap is mostly out of his hair. He slots a leg between Cas’ thighs and parts his lips with his tongue, the hand at the back of Cas’ neck holding him right where Dean wants him. Cas groans and rolls his hips, and Dean can feel the smile against his lips.

With a hand around his cock Dean strokes Cas slowly, in time with the movement of his lips and the thrusting of his hips. Cas doesn’t have a whole lot of leverage to push back, but he tries anyway. His body tenses slowly, only giving out and slumping against Dean when his release spills all over Dean’s hand and stomach.

Cas is still panting when Dean pulls away, his pupils blown wide with lust and their combined scents clouding the room in a haze of sex and needy arousal. Their gazes stay locked for a few seconds, right up until Cas drops to his knees and swallows Dean down all in one go.

“Fuck!” Dean splutters, grabbing at the wall to maintain his balance. And he’s pretty sure he feels Cas smile, the bastard.

On instinct Dean’s fingers find their way to Cas’ hair, pushing through the wet locks and tugging only occasionally when Cas does that thing with his tongue. The shower head beats hot water on his back and the bathroom is muggy with the scent of his mate, and Dean is groaning out his own orgasm in minutes. Cas squeezes his fingers right where Dean’s knot wants to swell, working him through the whole thing.

Their shower is pretty tame after that, Cas purring the entire time while Dean lathers him up with soap from head to toe. He can’t resist pressing a few—or maybe more, but who’s counting?—kisses to his mate’s tanned skin, a pleased thrum running through his body at the happy little hums that Cas lets out each time.

They dry each other off and proceed to dress on opposite sides of the room, because neither of them can be trusted to keep their hands to themselves. Dean almost makes it out of the room, but the sight
of Cas’ tousled hair is just too fuckin’ much. He’s weak.

As soon as Cas’ slim fingers reach for the door Dean turns him and pins him against it, kind of enjoying the quiet thud that is Cas’ body hitting the solid surface. Dean kisses his mate deep and long and slow, pressing as close to him as he possibly can. The moan that escapes Cas’ throat melts into a whimper, both hands curling against the corners of Dean’s jaw.

“Dean,” Cas breathes, barely audible. The only response Dean manages is heavy breaths against his lips. “We have to—”

“I know.” Dean tears himself away before he loses the nerve again, before he decides that a day in bed is more important than anything else. Cas seems on board with this plan, tugging the door open and letting everything else in.

***

Day two of Operation: Search and Rescue goes basically the same as the first. With the exception being that Cas actually does stay where he’s supposed to and promises to do his best with…pack relations. Mary is on board too, and the two of them seem determined to get some intermingling going amongst the leopards and wolves.

Dean tries his best to sound genuine when he wishes them a very emphatic “good luck”.

The Hunters and Seraphs are out again, this time widening the search further. They don’t find anything, not until late afternoon when they’re supposed to be heading back in. And even then, it ain’t much.

It’s Jo who spots it, and she’s still standing next to it when Dean checks in on her group. They’re all still shifted so he can’t ask questions, but it’s pretty clear what he’s seeing. It’s smeared, and definitely old, but it’s pretty obvious that it’s a paw print. A leopard paw print. Outside of the western boundary of their territory.

Dean exchanges a glance with his dad and Gabriel, but they all sort of know what it could mean. The first possibility, a leopard wandered a little too far from home. The second…

They might just have their first lead.

***

Dean shifts when he gets back into the Bunker, eager to get some food in his stomach and hopefully find his mate. They don’t have long, since everyone is eager to pursue the new information, but they’d all agreed to come back to it with full bellies and fresh noses.

The Hunters and Seraphs pile into the dining quarters together, all of them absolutely soaked in animal pheromones and riding high from the thrill of a semi-successful hunt. Jo is at the center of their ruckus, grinning and flipping her blonde ponytail around happily. Some part of Dean wants to cut them off, but John stops him before he can even open his mouth.

“They need this,” he says quietly, holding Dean back while the rest of the group bursts through the entryway. “See that?” he points, gesturing not at the Hunters and Seraphs but at everyone else in the room. At the betas, the submissives. Dean watches carefully as the fear slides off their faces, as the heavy scent in the room lightens a noticeable amount.

“Got it,” Dean sighs, kind of smiling himself. He knows this is less than nothing still, but less than nothing is actually better than what they had before.
John grunts in approval, clapping him on the back and following into the dining quarters, snapping at a few of the alphas to quiet the hell down. Dean snorts in amusement.

Dean finds himself some food and a seat, ending up across from a smug looking Jo and next to an amused Lisa. He’s been wanting to have a normal conversation with her, and now seems as good a time as any.

“Hi, Dean,” she smiles good-naturedly when he sits down, automatically turning her body towards him. “Good day?”

“Guess so,” Dean shrugs, digging in to his sandwich. “Better than the last couple, that’s for sure.”

Lisa laughs lightly. “At least we have something, right?”

“Cheers to that,” Dean grins, raising an imaginary glass. Lisa humors him and raises one right back. “How’re you settling in?”

She falters a tiny bit, and Dean’s pretty sure he only noticed cause he knows her so well.

“I’m okay,” she nods, like she isn’t sure who she’s trying to convince. Dean raises his eyebrows at her.

“Everything okay here?”

Lisa shoves his arm playfully. “Everything is fine, Dean. And I can handle myself so no need to go all protector on me.”

“Shut up,” Dean rolls his eyes. “I do not go all protector.”

“Do you hear yourself?” she laughs, shaking her head in disbelief. “You, Dean, are trying to tell me that you don’t have a protective streak as wide as you are tall?”

Dean glares at her and digs into his sandwich some more. “Ya know, I don’t have to take this shit from you, Lis’.”

He tries to sound threatening, he really does, but the wolf isn’t backing him up on this one. It’s curled up and watching him through one cracked eye, and Dean is pretty sure that the fucker is laughing at him.

“No, but you could ask your mate,” she teases, poking his side. “I’m sure Castiel would love to discuss. Especially after yesterday.”

Dean’s head snaps up. “Yesterday?”

“Yes,” she nods, her eyes widening fractionally. “Everybody was talking about it. You know, the fight you two had?”

Dean’s body goes rigid, stiff as a board. “We didn’t fight.”

“You sure about that?” Lisa wrinkles up her nose, leaning very slightly away from him. “Because you smell pretty angry about it.”

“We didn’t fight,” Dean growls through gritted teeth, trying to reign in his frustration. He should’ve listened better to his mom’s advice, but all he can think about is which one of the assholes who saw them yesterday morning decided to blab about it to everyone.
“Okay,” Lisa holds up her hands, even going so far as to drop her gaze. That just makes Dean feel fucking awful, but it’s his own fault. “I believe you.”

Dean chews on his cheek for a few seconds. “If… I mean if we did. Fight. What’d… uh, what’d everybody say it was about?”

Lisa barely glances up at him, her eyes alight with indecision. “Nothing really. Just. You told him to do something. Castiel didn’t listen.”

Well. That’s a nice way to sum it up.

“Awesome,” he sighs heavily, dropping his head into his hands. Friggin’ awesome. Dean wants to stew in his frustrations—more at himself for being an asshole yesterday than at anyone else—but a faint scent catches his attention. The wolf perks up immediately, the smell of pine trees and wet bark more familiar to them than just about anything else in this world. Dean’s head snaps up, just in time to catch sight of Cas out of the corner of his eye.

His mate strolls into the dining quarters, back straight and chin held high. He’s got on one of Dean’s t-shirts, which he must have changed into because there’s no way in hell Dean would’ve been able to leave that sight behind this morning. His hair is mussed like he’s been tugging on it, which is probably exactly what he’s been doing. Cas’ blue eyes light up when he spots Dean across the room, and some part of Dean likes the idea that most of the people here can’t tell how pleased his cat is right now.

But Dean has gotten to know him, figured out that the crinkled corners of his eyes and the small twitch of his lips mean more than a big flashy grin.

“Earth to Dean?”

Lisa’s voice snaps him out of his trance, almost making him jump out of his seat.

“Huh?”

She laughs, laying a gentle hand on his shoulder. “You know, if I had known that that was how you would look at your mate, we would’ve broken up much sooner than we did.”

None of that really computes inside Dean’s brain at the moment, and all he really registers is the amused smile on her face.

“Sorry, what?” he replies distractedly, itching to go get his hands on Cas. Lisa laughs at him.

“Please go,” she says with a light push. “Show everybody you’re not fighting.”

Dean grins. Now that’s an idea.

He hops up from the bench and strides across the room towards Cas, who apparently decides to stop and wait for Dean in the doorway. Dean’s smile widens.

When he’s close enough he wraps his arms around Cas’ waist, kissing him breathless. Cas purrs against his lips, threading his fingers into Dean’s hair. They pull apart after a few charged seconds, because Dean isn’t eager to knot his mate right here in the open and that’s where his mind is heading right now.

“Miss me?” Cas chuckles, baring his throat so Dean can scent him and kiss along the scarred skin where his bite is. It’s a huge sign of trust, and Dean is more than thankful that Cas is humoring his
alpha instincts and their need to make sure that he's okay.

“Do wolves howl?” Dean mumbles rhetorically against his skin, tearing his lips away from the addictive taste of his mate’s skin. Their gazes lock, and it’s obvious from the heat between them that they’re both wishing for some more walls around them.

“I’d assume so,” Cas replies thoughtfully, apparently deciding to take Dean’s sarcasm seriously. “Though I’ve hardly heard you do it.”

“Full moon in a few days,” Dean shrugs. He’s not a huge fan of the full moon, makes him feel wild and out of control, but he doesn’t have many options. “You’ll hear plenty of it then.”

This seems to catch Cas’ interest, his eyebrows raising incrementally.

“Oh? Little wolf, will you be out to play?”

It’s strange, having Cas address the wolf when the wolf isn’t running the show. He looks at Dean like he’s looking through him, or maybe more accurately, into him. But it works, because the wolf is leaping around and barking excitedly like Dean has never seen him before.

“You’re a weird dude,” Dean chuckles, rubbing their noses together and kissing the rebuttal off of Cas’ lips. “And who gave you permission to wear my clothes?”

Cas leans forward to chase his lips as Dean pulls away. “Perhaps I was having a bad day.”

Dean looks at him seriously, leveling him with a gaze that he hopes will convince Cas to tell him the truth. “Perhaps?”

His mate rolls his eyes and sighs heavily.

“I may have underestimated the difficulty of being pack healer. Though your mother has been very kind and helpful,” he adds on. “So, yes. Perhaps I haven’t had the best day. And perhaps the scent of my mate made it better.”

Dean exhales and pulls Cas in against his chest, letting him tuck his head under Dean’s chin and thread his fingers beneath the hem of his shirt. Cas’ hands are cold against Dean’s skin, but he doesn’t complain.

“So, apparently we’re fighting,” Dean says quietly after a few seconds. Cas pulls back and peers up at him.

“Oh?” he raises his eyebrows, his lips pulling down into a frown. “Interesting. About what?”

“Yesterday. Our little spat got noticed.”

Cas furrows his eyebrows and frowns deeper. “We should play happy home then, shouldn’t we?”

Dean nods reluctantly. “Think so.”

Cas steps back and threads their fingers together, pulling Dean through the maze of tables back to where he was sitting with Lisa. It’s kind of frustrating putting on a show like this, just to put the Pack at ease. But Dean really shouldn’t complain, since all it really is is an excuse to be obnoxiously affectionate in public. So obnoxious, that Sam is well on his way to a fully developed bitch-face by the time they’ve finished eating.

Dean doesn’t care. The atmosphere is light, everyone is excited about their lead, and for the first time
in a few weeks things are starting to maybe possibly look up.

***

On their way back out for the night search—after Dean finally managed to drag himself away from Cas—Dean gets stopped by Charlie before he even strips to shift.

“Got a minute?” she says discretely, like she’s trying not to be noticed.

“Sure thing,” he steps away from the exit, trying to get mostly out of earshot of the others. “What’s up?”

“Ash and I,” she starts, already sounding and smelling nervous. “We’ve been keeping track of human encounters. You know, deducing a pattern. That paw print you found, it matched up with another marker.”

Dean’s eyebrows shoot up. “And?”

“Those ropes we found?” she prompts. “The netting? Same place, basically.”

Dean experiences a weird mixture of dread and anticipation. His stomach sinks low in his gut, but adrenaline races through his veins. Any doubt he had in his mind that the print might have been a coincidence flies out the window.

“They must’ve tried to use a net at first.” Dean muses, rubbing the stubble on his jaw. It’s getting long, and starting to itch just enough that it’s noticeable. “And either had a second one or a back-up plan.”

“I thought the same thing. But a leopard shouldn’t even have been over on that side, so—”

“So they were transporting it,” Dean finishes for her. Charlie nods in agreement. “And it woke up?”

She shakes her head this time. “I don’t think so. Ash, he said that netting you found broke. It wasn’t cut.”

“No claws.” Dean’s mind is racing, trying to puzzle this out. Bringing netting that isn’t strong enough to carry the weight, it’s an easy mistake to make. A rookie mistake for sure, but easy enough to understand. “We just need to know where they took it. And how. No way they carried it the whole way.”

“They must’ve had some kind of vehicle, or something,” Charlie suggests. “We need tire tracks, leaked oil, any kind of sign.”

“There’s tire tracks all over that side,” Dean sighs, frustrated. They head out that way when they need to go into the city, and although it isn’t often it’s often enough that there are tracks out there left by their own wheels. “From us.”

“You know what our tires look like,” Charlie pushes. “C’mon, Mr. Lead Hunter. Figure out what doesn’t belong.”

Dean huffs and laugh and rubs at the back of his neck. “You’re a hell of a motivator, you know that right?”

“I know,” Charlie grins at him and winks, looking overly proud of herself. “We got their number now, Dean. Let’s find them.”
“Aye aye, cap’n,” he grins right back, offering up a lazy salute. “Let’s get our people back.”
Chapter 32

Chapter Summary

“M’ proud of you.”

Chapter Notes

Hot off the presses! Brand new chapter that, after a week of sitting on it, I decided to scrap and completely rewrite starting at a very late hour. Apologies for editing that needs to be done, I’m exhausted and this is unbeta-ed and hopefully I didn’t type anything weird. I’ll run through and edit tomorrow, but for now here is Ch. 32: Take 2. Marker!

They don’t find anything. Hours of scanning every goddamn square inch of ground, and they have fucking nothing. Dean wants to tear his own hair out, wants to rip into something that’ll bleed.

But he can’t do that. Not tonight. So when John howls to call everyone home for the night, Dean follows. And he lets out a howl of his own, long and sad, imagining that somewhere the kidnapped shifters can hear him and maybe, maybe know that they haven’t been forgotten.

***

Castiel’s ears perk up when he hears the howls. They drift in through the air vents, only barely audible to his enhanced ears. Everyone else in the nursery takes notice too, even the pups tumbling around on the floor.

“Recognize that?” Mary says with a soft smile, touching a gentle hand to Castiel’s arm.

Castiel nods and smiles back at her. He would recognize his wolf anywhere.

“What does it mean?” Castiel asks, even as the rest of the shifters refocus their attention on their hushed conversations. His instincts react to the howl in a certain way, but he isn’t fluent in wolf-speak quite yet.

“Dean is calling his pack home,” Mary hums, scooping up one of the squirming pups and nuzzling it’s nose before setting it back down. “Inviting them in from the cold.”

“Both of them?” Castiel clarifies, trying to understand. His heart didn’t tug in the same way at the sound of the first howl, and he can’t tell if that’s because it wasn’t Dean or if there’s something else going on.

“No,” Mary shakes her head. “John is giving an order, telling everyone to return to the den. Dean, he’s…reaching out to those who are lost. Helping them find their way home.”

A shiver runs down Castiel’s spine, an ache in his chest. There’s only one wolf that Dean might be calling out to, and perhaps it’s all for Kevin but Castiel can’t help but believe that Dean is reaching
out to the stolen leopards too.

“It’s beautiful,” Castiel muses.

Mary nods, a sad smile on her face. “Yes, it is.”

The room around them is filled with wolves and leopards alike, all of them bundled together and only some of them talking while others just enjoy the proximity. They should all be sleeping, but emotions are running high. News of the paw print spread quickly throughout the Host and the Pack, followed closely by a sort of nervous excitement. Castiel doesn’t expect the search party to return with anything, but he can understand the desire to believe.

The morning spent with his pack in here had been trying, at best. Absorbing the fear and confusion and generally negative energy of his packmates was exhausting, all while exuding his own inner calm as best he could. Anna always seemed so serene, so Castiel went with that method. Look calm, feel calm. Right?

Except he wasn’t calm. At all. Castiel has been his own ball of nerves for days, worsened by the fact that his friends and his mate are out there while he’s in here now.

But he’s been trying not to go down that path. It helps that he seems to have made a noticeable impact on the members of the Host, and by the late afternoon he even coaxed them out of their rooms to meet some of the Pack.

It had been Mary’s suggestion to come up here, and Castiel wants to applaud her for it. It smells like comfort and pups, even to his leopard senses, and seems to have the same affect on the other leopards as well. The room had tensed up at first, the wolves and leopards not even wanting to look at each other, let alone interact, but they adjusted.

It was actually Sariel and the wolf pups who broke the ice. All three pups were shifted while Sariel was not, but all young enough to not fear one another. With a comforting nod from Castiel Michael let his squirming cub go, all of the leopards watching carefully as he shuffled towards the puppies. The three puppies seemed equally as excited, their little tails wagging while they licked excitedly at Sariel’s chubby cheeks. The baby laughed, and the tension in the room broke almost audibly.

They didn’t talk to each other at first, but they did talk, which was an improvement. Castiel and Mary attempted to get the ball rolling, talking to shifters on opposite sides of the room.

And it took all night, but it worked. It actually worked.

So when no one suggested going to bed, and shifters start to curl up in piles in the nursery, neither Castiel nor Mary had the desire to say a thing. Now they’re packed into the nursery, waiting for something before falling asleep. Castiel has a sneaking suspicion that it’s got something to do with the Hunters and Seraphs being out, and all of their animals eager to wait for the dominants to return. It makes sense.

Still, it takes a while for the search team to return even after they hear the howls. Castiel does his best not to fidget.

Ruby is the first one to enter the nursery, strolling in wearing only a sports bra and black sweats and flopping on the floor next to Meg. Balthazar and Hannah come in next, Hannah in a zip up and shorts and Balthazar in a pair of spandex so tiny that he might as well not be wearing anything at all. Castiel rolls his eyes.

When nudity isn’t such a big deal, sometimes a little bit of clothing is more enticing than nothing at
all. Mostly everybody else files in after that, all of them human except for the last. It’s a giant, darkly colored wolf that Castiel can only guess must be John. He sniffs in Castiel’s direction then turns to Mary, sticking his nose in her hair.

It puts a smile on her face and makes Castiel chuckle under his breath, reminiscent of another wolf he knows.

Sam arrives a few minutes later, arm curled around the waist of a sleepy-looking Jess. Though sleepy is the extent of it, the exhaustion that Castiel had seen previously apparently erased from her features. She still looks a little too slim for being pregnant with twins, but she looks better.

It still takes a few minutes after that for Castiel’s mate to arrive. Relief trickles down his spine when a familiar, sandy wolf appears in the entryway to the nursery, long tongue hanging out of his mouth and green eyes looking hard. His scent is bitter anger, and it doesn’t take much to see that Dean is on the edge of a break.

Dean trots over and sticks a nose in Castiel’s hair after dropping the bundle of clothes in his teeth, earning himself a sigh and a small smile.

“Hello, Dean,” Castiel hums quietly, tugging on his wolf’s ears. Dean pushes up against his hand, his tail thumping quietly against the floor. “Everything okay?”

Dean huffs and dips his head, sniffing at his mom until she pets the top of his head.

“Hi, sweetheart,” she smiles good-naturedly, pulling herself to her feet and stretching her back. “My body is too old for this. I trust you two will take care of everyone?”

Dean raises his eyebrows and glances at John, but from what Castiel can tell the older wolf is defaulting to his mate on this one.

“Of course,” Castiel answers for him, getting an approving dip of his head from John. He even snuffles at the nape of Castiel’s neck before trotting out the door with Mary, and it feels like the most acceptance that he’s gotten from the alpha thus far.

Dean hops up as soon as they’re gone, making rounds around the room. He stops at each group, leopards and wolves alike, brushing up against everyone and sniffing around until he’s satisfied. Jo pushes his muzzle away playfully, so Dean sniffs at her a little bit extra. Balthazar plays right into it, wrapping his arms around Dean’s neck and nuzzling into his fur. Castiel can’t find it in himself to glare at him.

One of the pups is still roughhousing around, so Dean snags it by its scruff and drops it on the chest of a wolf that Castiel assumes is its father. There’s a girl in the back, all dark skin and curly hair, that Dean spends an extra few moments with, along with a blonde omega that Castiel had met earlier. One beta bares her throat a little too suggestively for Castiel’s tastes, and Dean at least has the decency to pretend to look guilty when he moves on. Lisa gets some extra attention too, affection in her eyes as she scratches underneath Dean’s chin.

The animal part of him gently suggests that he assert his bond at this moment, when his mate is clearly bonding with another. But there’s not a single cell in Castiel’s body that really believes that Lisa is after Dean. She’s allowed to be important to him, he reasons. Because Dean deserves a multitude of people that love and care about him, and Lisa is definitely one of them.

Sam gets the most time out of everyone, and though they’re close enough that Castiel can hear the exchange easily, he does the polite thing and doesn’t listen. Dean noses around Jess’ belly until she...
pushes him away, and sticks his nose into Sam’s hair the same way he does with Castiel. Sam presses their foreheads together and talks to Dean in a low voice for a few moments, all while Jess strokes the fur on the back of his neck. The moment feels almost too personal for him to be looking in on, and Castiel finds himself tearing his gaze away.

By the time Dean makes it back to Castiel, his heart is so full it feels like it might bust open inside his chest cavity. It’s like it’s grown three sizes too big, and Castiel isn’t sure how his body is compensating for the new size.

The other shifters in the room are either already asleep or settling down to do so, all piled together with limbs tangled and cheeks nuzzled against shoulders and backs and thighs and even feet, in one case. With everybody human like this, no one could even tell that they’re different, that there are wolves and leopards here. Now they’re just…shifters. Family, maybe, one day. But united. For now, at least.

And maybe it isn’t perfect. Maybe it won’t even stay like this once the leopards are free to leave the Bunker and return to the open air of the forest. But right now this feels like his pack, it feels like their pack, him and Dean. Like his mate is taking care of their family. It aches inside of him, this feeling of completeness.

Castiel is torn from his thoughts by the feeling of Dean shifting through the bond. He doesn’t watch—the sight makes his gut twist unhappily—instead waiting patiently for Dean to finish and pull his pants and t-shirt on. Castiel’s mate lays down first thing, right on his stomach with his legs sprawled out behind him.

It takes a moment to flick off the lights in the room, and then Castiel is laying down beside him. Dean is breathing slow and even, his eyes closed, but still lifts his arm so as to let Castiel tuck himself in against Dean’s left side. With his right hand Castiel strokes softly down Dean’s spine, purring as the tension melts out of his body.

“You’re amazing,” Castiel says quietly, well and truly in awe of his mate. Dean cracks an eye and grins lopsidedly, the one he uses when he’s trying to project swagger, or whatever other kind of self-assurance that he pleases.

“What’d I do?”

“I’m serious,” Castiel insists, wanting Dean to actually hear him. “What you just did…”

“S’nothin’,” Dean sniffs, pulling Castiel closer. “Just takin’ care of everybody.”

“Yes, well,” Castiel hums, pressing a warm kiss to Dean’s lips. “You are succeeding in making me want cubs for the sole purpose of watching you take care of them.”

Dean huffs a laugh, which Castiel considers a success considering his scent and the stiffness in his shoulders. “Yeah?”

Castiel hums and nods, kissing his wolf again and toying with the idea of kisses being mildly addictive. Because he sure feels like they are.

“Not too bad yourself,” Dean sighs when Castiel pulls away, trying to gather himself. “You did all this?”

He nods sort of vaguely at the room, but Castiel knows what he means.

“Your mother helped, quite a bit,” he admits. “But we worked hard. And here we are.”
“Here we are,” Dean agrees with a heavy sigh. “M’ proud of you,” he mumbles, obviously drifting off to sleep. Castiel smiles.

“And I you, puppy.”

***

Everybody sort of…shifts overnight. When Dean wakes up he’s still on his stomach with Cas practically molded against his side, his arm wrapped protectively around his cat to pull him close.

Except now there’s a weight on his back, and two on his legs, and the other shifters are all just closer to him than he remembers them being when he went to sleep. Dean can’t say that he’s surprised. He’s the most dominant wolf in the room for sure, and maybe the most dominant shifter. He hasn’t tried to push Michael’s buttons yet, but the wolf definitely thinks they’d win that match. And with Cas at his side, they sure make an irresistible pair.

Turns out, everybody was basically right about the importance of Dean finding his mate. Surprise surprise.

“You awake?” Dean whispers quietly, feeling tendrils of consciousness crawling through the bond. Cas hums and shifts a little closer. “C’mon. Breakfast is calling my name.”

Cas doesn’t really open his eyes, but the two of them manage to extricate themselves from the sleeping pile and sneak out of the room without anyone fully waking up. Cas sort of stumbles down the stairs, one eye open now and his nose scrunched up unhappily. Luckily the dining quarters are close to the nursery, and with a little nudging Dean manages to get Cas inside and sitting down at one of the tables.

The cooks barely have the kitchen up and running since no one is here except the two of them, but Dean manages to get his hands on some pancakes and bacon, as well as a steaming mug of black coffee.

When he returns, Cas has apparently decided to relocate himself to sitting on the table top instead of on the seat, looking sleepy and grumpy as all hell. Dean is a fucking goner.

“Mornin’, grumpy,” Dean forces himself to smile, putting the mug of coffee into Cas’ hands. His mate just hums again, apparently not prepared to speak this morning. Dean takes a seat on the bench between his legs, gripping Cas’ thighs to pull him a little bit closer to the edge of the table.

Cas, for his part, purrs into the mug of coffee, taking several large sips before adjusting to hook his feet behind Dean’s back. Then he shoves a pancake into his mouth, and his whole demeanor brightens just a little bit.

“Better?” Dean chuckles, chewing on some bacon himself and snagging the coffee out of Cas’ hands to have a drink.

“Why are we awake this early?” Cas asks, his voice low and scratchy. He tries to clear his throat, but Dean kinda likes it.

“Wanted to spend some time with you,” Dean shrugs. He loves the Bunker, he really does, but… “We don’t get to be, ya know, really alone here. Kinda miss that.”

Cas smiles and sets his mug down, using both hands to cup Dean’s jaw and kiss him soundly. Dean’s arms wind around his waist automatically, dragging Cas as close as he can without pulling him off the edge of the table.
“When this is over,” Cas whispers, meeting Dean’s gaze, “we are taking a vacation. I know just the place.”

“That so?” Dean mumbles, nipping at Cas’ bottom lip.

“Mmm,” Cas kisses him again, licking into Dean’s mouth and sliding their tongues together. An involuntary groan escapes Dean’s throat, his hands sliding up Cas’ sides and down to his ass. “You’re going to love it.”

Dean whines—actually fucking whines—pulling Cas’ hands away from his face.

“You’re testing my friggin’ self control right now, Cas.”

His mate smiles a tiny bit, nibbling at a pancake and ruffling Dean’s hair.

“So sorry, puppy. I’ll go easier on you.” His tone is teasing, but there’s a challenge in his blue eyes that Dean so wants to take him up on.

“Bastard,” Dean shakes his head, sighing and leaning forward to rest his head on Cas’ stomach. Cas lifts a hand to Dean’s head, stroking his fingers through his hair and gently rubbing at the nape of his neck.

“So I’ve heard,” Cas huffs, the smile evident in his voice. “Tell me about last night.”

Dean snorts. “Nothing to fucking tell. We didn’t find anything.”

Cas’ fingers make a few passes through Dean’s hair before he speaks again.

“I don’t know how to help them.” His voice is quiet, and in one sentence just about sums up everything that Dean is in turmoil over on the inside.

“Me either,” Dean sighs, nuzzling Cas’ stomach and trying his best to let it distract him. “Wish I did.”

They sit like that for a while, even after a few people filter in to have breakfast themselves. It isn’t until John stations himself at the seat across from them that their peace is broken. Cas slides off the table automatically, taking the seat next to Dean so they can face John together.

“Dad,” Dean says with a dip of his chin, dropping his eyes for a split second. “What’s goin’ on?”

“Cancelled the search for today,” John grunts, leaning back in his seat and crossing his arms. “Got a better plan.”

“Are we already doing that?” Dean furrows his eyebrows.

“No, we’re taking this fight to them.” John answers. “I mean all the way to them. We’re marchin’ into that fuckin’ office of his and we’re gettin’ everybody back.”

Dean raises his eyebrows, sharing a quick glance at Cas before responding.

“What’s that?”

“We’re done sitting on our fuckin’ thumbs. We’re taking this fight to them.”

“What’s goin’ on?” Dean furrows his eyebrows.

“The wolf leaps to its feet, thrilled at the prospect of a proper hunt with a juicy, Crowley shaped prize at the end. Dean straightens his spine and looks his dad in the eyes, nodding sharply.
“When?”


Chapter End Notes

So, yeah. Wolf howls are only really audible over ten miles. Max. BUT, these guys are shifters and so have extra hearing blah blah, and also this is fiction so just give me a little (read: a lot) of wiggle room regarding facts okk??
Chapter Summary

“I could use, insouciant, maybe?”

Chapter Notes

TEN POINTS to me for shameless use of lines from canon and TEN EXTRA POINTS for using one of said lines as the chapter summary. This author takes herself very seriously.

In other news, our wonderfully wonderful beta Astrophilla is back from a big big big move, so everyone rejoice and pour yourself a glass of your favorite beverage to celebrate. Also join me in welcoming her back to this story, there are some wonderfully delicious lines in here thanks to her. Without further ado....

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Cas goes stiff beside him almost immediately, the coiled tension in his body putting Dean on edge right along with him. “Dean,” he says, his voice scratchy and low and tense. “A word. Now.”

He stands up and crosses his arms, giving Dean a look that’s just daring Dean to say no. Dean glances at his dad and warily stands, eager to get away from prying eyes before Cas combusts. Judging from the hard line of his shoulders, it won’t be long.

“Meet us in the Council room when you’re done,” John grunts, standing himself and exiting the dining quarters in front of them.

Cas waits about ten seconds, waiting for John to get out of sight, then calmly crosses the hall without another word. He goes straight to their room, and Dean follows quietly behind him like a lost puppy.

He tries not to drag his feet, but he’s too tired and stressed for this fight they’re about to have. The second that the door closes, Cas turns on him, blue eyes fiery and pissed off.

“You’re not going.”

Yeah, saw that one coming. Dean sighs heavily and crosses his arms.

“Don’t have much of a choice, Cas.” Dean receives a fierce scowl in response, so that’s obviously not a good enough excuse in Cas’ book. “You wanna end this or not?”

“Of course I do,” Cas snaps at him. “But this is absolutely not the way to do it.”

“Why’s that?” Dean stands his ground, scenting Cas’ frustration in the air.

“When has guns blazing ever been a successful tactic?” he steps up into Dean’s face, so they’re standing almost nose to nose. Dean rolls his shoulders back and holds his gaze, showing no sign of backing down in the face of Cas’ own stubbornness. “The fact that you are alphas, and you are
dominants, and your wolves think they’re scary and tough, *doesn’t mean you can win this fight.*”

Dean clenches his jaw, the wolf snapping its teeth at the insinuation that Cas is making.

“You sayin’ our plan is reckless?” Dean rumbles, resisting the urge to growl. He’s annoyed, but Cas doesn’t deserve that. Though his alpha must peek out a little bit, because his cat still lifts his chin in defiance, setting his teeth and pressing his lips into a thin line.

“You don’t like reckless,” Cas shrugs, “I could use, insouciant, maybe?”

Dean snorts, and runs his tongue along his bottom teeth. “So that’s it? You don’t even want to hear Dad’s plan?”

“It’s not a plan, Dean,” Cas growls, his resolve cracking only moments before Dean’s as he steps back and shoves a frustrated hand through his hair. “It’s idiotic, and your father’s attempt to soothe his ego, bruised by his inability to protect his own pack. And you are falling right into it, letting him put your life at risk because he told you to.”

“Tell me how you really feel, sweetheart,” Dean sighs, his voice dripping with sarcasm. This is the last thing he wants to be doing right now, waging World War III with his mate, but his resolve is strong as ever.

“Fuck you, Dean,” Cas snarls, shoving his chest hard enough that Dean’s back hits the door to his room, punching a pained grunt out of his chest. “You don’t get to leave me behind this time, and you certainly don’t get to walk out of here and get yourself killed because Daddy said so.” Cas pushes Dean back against the metal, pinning him there with a forearm across his chest. “What am I supposed to do when you don’t come back? When you’re gone? Because that is what’s going to happen. So you can take your careless self-conceit and go fuck yourself with it, Dean, you unbelievable, selfish asshole.”

Cas spins to stomp away from him, and even as Dean is recovering from the whiplash of those words he catches Cas around the waist, pulling his cat back against his chest.

“Cas—” he tries, his voice soft and threatening to break.

“Let me go,” Cas squirms, doing his best to twist out of Dean’s grip. But Dean holds tight, burying his nose against Cas’ neck and rumbling quietly so that Cas can feel the vibrations from his chest.

“I’ll come back, I’ll always come back,” Dean says quietly, soothingly, squeezing harder around Cas’ waist.

“No, no one comes back,” Cas growls, trying to pull Dean’s hands off of himself. “No one. Not Samandriel, not Inias, not Rachel or Josiah or Anna or Kevin. *No one comes back.*”

“I will,” Dean insists, relieved when Cas stops trying to pull himself away, even though his hands still half-heartedly pry at Dean’s fingers. “You’re mine, I’m yours. Remember?”

All fight drained, Cas finally slumps, pressing back against Dean’s chest. His breathing is heavy and he smells anxious and scared, heart beating too fast.

“I am yours, and you are mine,” Cas repeats, barely audible. “And we will get through this together.”

Dean presses a slow kiss to the side of Cas’ neck, exhaling and humming in agreement. “We’re gonna be fine.”
Cas turns in his arms so they’re looking at each other, his hands skimming over Dean’s cheeks and settling on the sides of his neck so he can pull their lips together. It’s slow and almost desperate, a plea that Dean can’t give in to.

“This is stupid. You know this is stupid.” Cas’ fingers grip tighter. “Please, Dean. I’m asking this one thing of you. Don’t go.”

Dean kisses him, wincing at the sharp inhale and the way Cas clutches at him like he’s going to disappear.

“I can’t be selfish,” Dean rasps out, holding his mate close. If it were up to him, he would never make Cas feel like this. Ever. But it’s not, and he has to. “What if it were someone else? If you weren’t worried about me, what would you say?”

After more than a few seconds of strained silence, Cas gives a heavy sigh against Dean’s skin. “I’ll listen to what your father has to say,” he grinds out. “I make no promises beyond that.”

Dean nods, brushing a thumb over the curl of hair behind Cas’ ear. “Thank you,” he says earnestly, hoping that whatever his dad has planned is enough to convince everyone else.

***

There’s some push back, from the rest of the Council, from the Arch too. Words like rash and risky and stupid are thrown around, everybody trying to come up with their own reasons why Dean and John shouldn’t go.

Mary says that they’re asking to get themselves killed. Lucifer says that having even more shifters in the humans’ hands won’t help anyone. Gabe says they just need more time to search the forest, that they’ll find something. Bobby says they’re being a couple of bullheaded idjits. Ellen insists that they at least take some back-up, in case things go south. Cas has his mouth shut most of the time, but the anger drifting off him in waves is enough.

John just stands with his arms crossed, listening to all of the outrage pouring out before responding to any of it. Only when everyone else falls silent does he take the time to respond.

“Here’s the deal,” he grunts, widening his stance instinctually. “We got no idea where these bastards are, and no place to start lookin’. We gotta draw them out, make them play into our hands instead of vice versa.”

“And you don’t think that you and Dean walking straight into their territory is doing the exact opposite of that?” Cas speaks up, finally willing to voice his concerns.

John shrugs. “Might be. We’re relying on two things here,” he holds up his fingers, glancing around the room to make sure everyone is following along. “One, the embassy’s s’posed to be neutral ground. This Crowley guy, he doesn’t want blood spilled there any more than the rest of us.”

Gabriel beats Cas to the punch this time.

“I’m sorry, but I thought I heard you say that you wanted to trust that the humans won’t shoot you on principle?” he raises his eyebrows. “What in the ever-loving hell possessed you to think that you can trust those S.O.B.’s?”

“It’s a shit storm for them, if something happens,” Dean responds. “These humans suck, but they got laws. Laws like ‘don’t murder shifters inside the embassy’.”
“They also have laws that say ‘kill rabid shifters on sight’,” Cas adds, looking pointedly at Dean. “Do you think it would be difficult for them to spin this against you?”

“I’m not an idiot,” John says in a clipped tone, the growl in his voice only barely reined in. “I know the risks. But the notes, the pictures, leaving witnesses? This is a game to this guy. Crowley wants to fuck with us, and ain’t no fun when your opponent is dead.”

Cas bites the inside of his cheek and stays silent, crossing his arms over his chest.

“This all brings me to number two,” John continues, with a pointed stare in Cas’ direction. “The game. We wanna beat these guys, we gotta think like them. So. Everybody here’s so smart, answer me this—” a pregnant pause, the room hanging on John’s every word, “why’s he lettin’ us hide in here? Why not collapse the tunnels, take us all out at once?”

The room falls silent, the air heavy around them.

“He wants us alive,” Mary says, her voice steady but quiet. Dean’s eyes flick over to Cas, who’s shaking his head just slightly.

“It’s not just that,” he adds on, getting an encouraging nod from John. “He’s doing this slowly on purpose, picking us off and watching us crumble. Crowley doesn’t want this to end quickly, because it’s fun for him.”

The wolf snarls, and Dean has to consciously push the noise down. He feels sick to his stomach at the idea of someone toying with the people he loves, amusing themself with the shifters’ lives like they mean nothing.

“Nailed it,” John grunts. “So Crowley doesn’t want to kill us, not yet at least. He wants to watch us squirm. And me ’n Dean, he knows we’re top of the Pack. Doesn’t get much more satisfying than that.”

“Go in with small numbers,” Dean nods, rubbing a hand over the stubble on his cheeks, “so he’s not threatened. Make him feel big, hope he spills somethin’ bigger.”

John purses his lips and nods, meeting the eyes of everyone else in the room and waiting to see if anyone is going to question him further. Nobody does.

After that it’s just…formalities. They agree on a return time, so the rest of the Council and the Arch knows when the ok time to panic is. They set up sentries at every entry and exit, and Ash is set to turn on the boundary sensors once they’re out of range.

Then they’re in the garage, and Dean is climbing into the cab of the truck next to his dad, and Cas is just standing there, staring at him with sad blue eyes and sealed lips. There’s no teary goodbye, Dean just lifts a hand and smiles at him through the window. Cas doesn’t smile back.

***

The car ride is quiet, all three hours and forty-seven minutes of it. Dean does his best not to fidget, plays off the twitching of his fingers as drumming to the too loud music John plays. The scent of the city clogs up his senses, burns his nose, makes him want to cough up the noxious air.

“So,” John grunts abruptly, clicking off the radio. “We get in there, you keep your mouth shut. Let him talk, let me prompt him.”

Dean sniffs and nods. He’d figured as much.
“Want you ears to the ground, figuring this fucker out. I wanna know when he’s lyin’, what he’s not
tellin’ us. Got it?”

Another nod. Without any help from scents, Dean is going to be relying solely on his hearing and
whatever body language cues he can get from Crowley. Neither him nor the wolf are very
optimistic.

“Good,” John says as he pulls the truck over in front of the embassy, giving even fewer fucks than
Dean had when parking. “We’re in’n out of here, quick and easy.”

Dean steels himself and hops out of the truck, holding his shoulders back and his chin high. Every
human walking by gives the truck— John and Dean included—a wide berth, eyes averted and
strides just a little too hurried to be natural. Normally Dean would find their fear of him amusing,
since he hasn’t done anything except stand here, but he’s pretty sure his sense of humor got left
behind at the den.

The sensation of practically losing his sense of smell is just as weird now as it was the first time.
Dean sees his dad crinkle his nose at the scent blockers at first, but he recovers smoothly. When the
elevator dings on their floor, the doors sliding slowly open, Crowley is standing directly on the other
side.

“Hello boys,” he drawls, cocking his head to the side. “Lovely of you to stop by.”

“Crowley,” John growls with no hesitation, stepping out of the elevator and just a smidge too close
to where Crowley is standing. It’s an intimidation tactic, Dean knows, his dad testing to see if
Crowley will take a step backwards. From the cocked eyebrow and smirk, Dean would say he isn’t
gonna do it.

“I’d say we’re due for a chat,” Crowley smiles, “wouldn’t you?”

John gives him a clipped nod, and that’s all it takes for Crowley to lead them back into his office, a
room Dean has been in before. He murmurs something to a blonde in a tight fitting pencil skirt before
she scurries away, then takes his seat at his desk.

Neither one of the wolves takes a seat.

“So, John. Dean,” Crowley smirks even more salaciously, tasting Dean’s name on his tongue. It
makes his skin crawl, but Dean refuses to show his discomfort. “What can I do for you?”

“Simple,” John shrugs, appearing by all accounts calm and collected. Dean only knows otherwise
because he can smell the rage on his dad’s skin. “Give us our people back, and there won’t be blood.
Don’t, and we’ll kill you all. That’s a promise.”

Crowley honest-to-god laughs, steeping his fingers and resting them underneath his chin.

“Quite the threat, John,” he rasps, his voice low and almost pleased. His heart is beating steady and
slow, no trace of nervousness or any kind of adrenaline in his bloodstream. “Impressive, really. I
would say you should have kept your nose out of our business, but then I think we would have
always ended up here eventually. Don’t you agree?”

“We ended up here,” John grits out, his teeth clenched, “because you took one of ours. You should
have left us alone.”

Crowley chuckles again, raising his eyebrows in disbelief. “Left you alone? And passed up all of the
money I’m making on you?”
Dean has to clench his jaw to keep his mouth shut, but thankfully his dad says basically what he’s thinking.

“What kind of sick fucks are payin’ you for this?”

“The kind of sick fucks who pay top dollar for leopard pelts, sometimes wolf ones too,” he shrugs nonchalantly. “The kind who would do just about anything for teeth and nails and every little part you can imagine. The kind that would just adore having a few well-trained wolves as watch dogs.”

That’s why they’re being careful, not just killing everyone. Because Crowley needs them whole. Dean comes dangerously close to hurling all over the table. Rage burns up his spine, the need to rip this guy’s fucking lungs out almost uncontrollable. The idea of somebody doing that to his family, to his pack, to Sammy or to Cas? He can’t even process it, can’t let the idea settle in his mind.

“That ain’t gonna happen,” John says calmly, obviously trying to tone down the aggression. Crowley only seems amused by it, judging by the glint in his eyes. “Gig’s up. You’re not getting your hands on any more shifters, not under my watch.”

“Ah, John,” Crowley smirks, putting on a decent act of being impressed. “Perhaps I will save you for last, after all.”

A nervous tug twists Dean’s stomach into knots, and not for the first time he feels like prey in Crowley’s clutches.

“The hell does that mean?” his dad growls quietly.

“Ah ah,” Crowley shakes his finger, leaning back casually in his chair. “Not yet. We haven’t even gotten to the good part.”

***

Castiel does his best to distract himself after Dean’s departure, tries not to think too hard about any of it. What he does have to think about is Michael’s conspicuous absence from their meeting, and Castiel finds himself on the way to Michael’s room to investigate as soon as the rumbling of the truck is out of earshot.

Really, he’s surprised that it took this long for Michael to melt down after Anna’s kidnapping. Castiel is sure that he wouldn’t handle it nearly as well, especially not under the same circumstances. Yet somehow Michael seems to have unraveled overnight, his composure slipping into something more akin to a full-blown breakdown.

“Michael…” Castiel speaks gently as he steps into the room, clicking the door shut quietly behind him. He’s glad that Sariel doesn’t appear to be here, because the entire space reeks of desperation and distressed alpha. He finds Michael curled in on himself in the corner, his skin paler than usual and his eyes dark with exhaustion.

“I can barely feel her,” he mumbles, almost inaudible. Two fingers touch his temple, his gaze trained on the floor. “Every day she slips away. I should be able to follow this and find her and I can’t, I can’t because it’s so thin and she is so far.”

Castiel thinks he’s talking about their bond, but it’s difficult to parse through Michael’s whispers. He’s never seen the alpha like this, and it makes him immediately uneasy. But if Michael thinks he might be able to follow the bond to Anna…

“You think you can find her?” Castiel prompts, hoping for more. A dry sob wracks Michael’s body.
“She **pulled** for me, she **pleaded** for help, for me.” His head drops into his hands, words even more garbled. “And I didn’t understand. Now she’s so far, I can’t hear her.”

“What do you mean she’s far?” Castiel furrows his eyebrows, trying his best to understand. “Did they take her far away?”

“No,” Michael shakes his head. “I don’t know. Anna, they buried her. I can’t feel her anymore. Our bond it just feels…wild.”

Castiel’s mind is reeling, because none of this makes any sense, none of what Michael is saying is clicking for him.

“Perhaps you can bring her closer,” he suggests, essentially grasping at straws. “Try to unbury her?”

Michael snorts derisively. “Castiel, I hardly remember her scent, her voice. How am I expected to find her again?”

An idea clicks in Castiel’s mind, one he knows that absolutely no one will support him in. And yet, he has to try.

“If you remembered her scent, if you could be close to her in some way physically, do you think you might find her in the bond?”

Michael hesitates, his eyes carefully scanning Castiel’s face. “Maybe.”

That’s settled then.

“I’ll bring you something,” Castiel states, pushing himself to his feet. “Do what you can, take care of yourself. And we’ll find her soon, I know.”

Michael sighs and tugs on his hair. “Don’t go alone.”

Castiel processes that for a moment. The obvious choice is to bring Michael, but from the way his hands are shaking, Castiel is inclined to think that he’s in no shape to leave the den. Then he thinks about Sam, or Jo, but they would both try to stop him. Never mind the fact that he would be putting them in danger, and Castiel couldn’t live with himself if _anyone_ was taken because of him. Wolves and leopards alike.

“I won’t,” he lies, the words rolling easily off his tongue. Castiel backs out of Michael’s room and heads down to the lower level, where he knows he’ll find Krissy serving as a sentry. It doesn’t take much to convince her to let him out, especially when he pulls rank on her. It’s obvious she wants to say no, but she lets him go anyway.

So Castiel heads out into the forest, targets set on Michael and Anna’s place, confident that he can get there and back without incident. The humans have their attention on Dean and John today, creating the perfect window for Castiel.

Now to just squeeze through it.

Chapter End Notes
Also! happy 10th birthday SPN, u the ultimate.
Chapter 34

Chapter Summary

“Curiosity killed the cat.”

Chapter Notes

There comes a chapter in every fanfic where I, as an author, feel the need to apologize for putting my characters (and subsequently, my readers) through so much pain and suffering. This is not that chapter.

It is unbeta-ed, and it is brimming with enough plot for 25 chapters and enough information to make even my brain explode. So read carefully, and know that any mistakes are entirely my own.

Warning: blood, some violence.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“The plan!” Crowley stands from his seat, planting his feet wide and puffing up his chest. “The grand plan. Aren’t you the least bit curious?”

“We don’t have all day,” John growls, matching Crowley’s stance. Dean stands behind him, his ears trained on the steady beating of Crowley’s heart.

“No?” he chuckles, turning his attention to Dean. “You’re curious, aren’t you?”

Dean narrows his eyes and crosses his arms, trying to look bored. “Sorry, man, don’t got time for your supervillain monologue. Spare us the drama—or at least go with the cliff notes version.”

There’s an amused glint in Crowley’s eyes, leaving Dean with the distinct impression that he should’ve kept his mouth shut like his dad told him to do.

“So you are curious,” Crowley smirks, his voice practically a purr. He taps a finger on his chin, pressing his lips together in thought. “What is it that they say, about curiosity?”

Dean shrugs, unwilling to say anything more. The guy got way too much pleasure over making Dean open his stupid mouth the first time.

“It’ll come to me,” Crowley smirks, his eyes flicking to the door when the blonde reenters. She has some kind of electronic tablet in her hands, taking a moment to speak something quietly into Crowley’s ear before handing it over. From what Dean can hear something is finished, and whatever it is brings a smile to Crowley’s face. “So,” Crowley claps his hands, placing the tablet on his desk in front of him, “where were we?”

“You were making your point,” John snaps, his eyes trained on the tablet for a split second.
“Touchy,” Crowley grins, his tone light and relaxed like they’re talking about the goddamn weather. “The plan is, simply, to pick you apart. One by one. I’ll break you, slowly, and I promise you that it will hurt—exquisitely.”

His voice is even, neither his words nor his heartbeat faltering in the slightest. From what Dean can hear, Crowley isn’t afraid of them.

“John, I’ll save you for last,” Crowley’s eyes shift to meet John’s own, unintimidated by the alpha’s gaze. “You’ll watch while I take your pack, your sons, your lovely mate. I’ll break them all, and by the time I get to you?” Crowley chuckles, a pleased smile stretching across his face, “I won’t have anything left to do. You will be broken already.”

John bares his teeth, fingers clenching into fists. “That’ll never happen.”

“We don’t break so easy,” Dean adds on, unable to resist the urge.

Crowley’s smile just grows. “This,” he gestures between them with a finger, “is why this is so fun for me. So confident in your ability to protect yourselves, and you don’t even know how I’ve been getting inside your den. How exactly do you intend to stop me?”

“Seem pretty keen on spillin’ your guts,” John says through a clenched jaw, the muscles ticking with each word. “Figure you’re about to tell us everything we need to know.”

Crowley’s eyes darken. “I am feeling quite generous.”

He snaps his fingers twice, eyes flicking to the door when it opens. It’s the same blonde as before, and Dean figures she must be some kind of assistant.

“Mr. Crowley?” she folds her hands behind her back, staring right past Dean and John like they aren’t even there.

“Fetch Brady for me.”

The blonde dips her head and disappears. The tension in Dean’s body ratchets up a few more levels, if that’s even possible.

“As I’m sure you well know,” Crowley starts, strolling out from behind his desk and standing next to what looks like some kind of perch. Dean hadn’t noticed it before, his wolf’s attention trained on Crowley alone. “Shifters come in many different shapes and sizes.”

Dean sighs and shifts on his feet. Everybody knows that, and even though Dean hasn’t made contact with more than a few kinds of shifters in his life that doesn’t mean he isn’t aware of their existence. There’d been a pack of rats that tried to move into their den when Dean was a kid, but the food chain sort of prevented that one from working out. There’d been some geese, too, but they’d only stopped for a few hours as a break from their migration south. Dean assumes that, somewhere in the world, just about every kind of shifter exists. Or, existed, maybe. Lots of them have been wiped out by humans like Crowley.

“And, like I told you, there’s a market for these kinds of…commodities.” Crowley smirks, the expression making Dean’s gut twist.

“They’re living creatures,” John growls, “not commodities.”

“Tell that to the market, darling.”
The blonde reenters then, and Dean does a double take at the sight. On her arm, perched on a leather arm brace, is an enormous hawk. Way bigger than Dean’s ever seen, though his experience is limited. Sharp beaked and even sharper eyed, talons flexing impatiently against the thick leather. Dean inhales discretely, his wolf snarling in frustration when he doesn’t catch even a whiff of the animal’s scent. It’s like they’re the only ones in the room, him and his dad. What he can smell is the small satchel the woman has in her other hand, which is filled with some kind of raw meat that smells like rabbit.

Crowley smiles, looking overly pleased with himself.

“This is Brady,” he says as the bird settles itself on the perch, shifting its wings restlessly. “Unfortunately, hawks are quite solitary creatures. I might have made some money off of his brood.” He trails off for a moment, gesturing discreetly at the bird until it stands up straighter. “I was rather lucky, though, in finding him. You see, although hawks and many other birds are solitary, you beasts tend to flock together, as it were.”

You beasts? As in…?

Dean’s brain finally clicks. Brady is a shifter. Dean tries not to think about how long it’s been since the guy’s been human, if he even remembers what it’s like.

“And everyone needs an alpha,” Crowley finishes, his eyes flashing dangerously. “Brady used to be the alpha, of quite a marvelous flock of birds. All kinds, really. And it was quite easy to pick them off. Brady, he begged for their lives.” Crowley chuckles, his gaze drifting like he’s remembering some kind of fond memory. “It’s really something, having an alpha kneel and beg you for mercy. I do regret that it won’t be you, Dean. I imagine you make quite the pretty picture on your knees. Perhaps I’ll make you beg for Castiel’s life, show him how pathetic you are before he dies.”

Dean snaps. The wolf growls and snaps its teeth, fangs bared and ears pressed flat against its skull.

“Don’t you dare say his name,” Dean snarls, held back from tearing into him by only his father’s iron grip on his arms. “I’ll rip you to fucking shreds before you touch him.”

This only seems to amuse Crowley even more, his grin widening and his eyes bright and excited.

“You all say that. I’ll rip you to shreds, or perhaps, I’ll pick my teeth with your bones, or for the truly sadistic bunch, I’ll show you the white of your own marrow.” Crowley sighs and straightens his tie. “Yet here I am. And here you are. Do you know what Brady said to me, when he confronted me?”

Dean’s lip curls up into a snarl, John’s fingers tightening on his biceps. Though Dean can’t think straight enough to be reasonable, he’s got enough self-control to know that they need this guy right now. The wolf doesn’t hesitate to remind him that they don’t need all of him, just the important bits.

“He said he planned to feast on my innards, save my eyeballs for last so I could watch him do it.” Crowley sighs, sounding more exasperated than anything else. “Quite repulsive, really. But Brady is here, perfectly trained, and my innards are safely inside me. What does that tell you?”

“That you’re a sick bastard,” Dean spits, pulling against his restraints. “And I got a laundry list of things to torture you with before you die.”

Crowley chuckles, strolling over to the bird and grabbing a scrap of meat from the waiting blonde. She seems creepily unfazed by all of this, like she’s seen it all before. Probably has.

“Charming as ever, Dean.” Crowley turns to face Brady, holding up his empty hand and spreading his fingers. The hawk spreads its wings easily, holding them wide to show off the long flight
“Make your fucking point, Crowley,” John grits out, pulling Dean away from him but keeping a tight grip on both his arms. “What’s your creepy collecting got to do with you gettin’ in to our den?”

“Collecting,” Crowley hums, tapping a finger against his chin. “An apt description. Tell me, have your tiny pea-brains figured out why we wear scent blockers?”

Dean’s trying to figure it out. He really is. But he’s fucking pissed off and physically ill from all the shit that Crowley is saying and no rational part of his brain is interested in functioning. Dean pokes at the mating bond at the back of his mind, trying to check and see that Cas is at home and safe and will be waiting when Dean gets there. Probably still gonna be pissed, but Dean would rather fight with him than listen to one more second of this shit. There had been a tug earlier, but from what he can tell Cas is asleep now, the bond fogged over with the haze that comes with unconsciousness. It feels a little heavier than Cas’ normal doze, but the guy had been tired when Dean forced him up that morning.

“You didn’t want us scenting your pet shifters on you,” John starts, interrupting Dean’s brief reverie. Crowley nods, looking suitably impressed.

“Certainly that is a part of it. It goes a bit further, though.” Crowley turns to the blonde and flicks a hand at her, apparently gesturing for something. She disappears again, the bird on her arm, to fetch what, Dean hasn’t got a clue. “I needed a way into your little cave, and I needed a way to plant my cameras without anyone noticing. Obviously one of us couldn’t walk in; a human would be far too noticeable. Another beastie though…”

Dean’s stomach drops. He doesn’t know if Crowley means another wolf—like one of the ones that have visited the Pack recently—or something else, but his question is answered a moment later. The woman reenters, this time with a small, clear plastic box in her hands.

“I’ll admit, I’ve never been able to remember this one’s name. I always get the three of them mixed up.” Crowley takes the box into his own hands, nodding for the woman to leave, and holds it up, showing Dean and John the small lizard sitting inside. It’s eyes are dull and black, it’s breathing steady. Dean can’t smell it. “But he—or she, perhaps—and the other two are experts at navigating your den, and they did quite well in placing my cameras.”

The inside of Dean’s head is a storm of creative curse words, each more inventive than the last. He’s seen those lizards around, crawling up the walls or along the tunnels on the ceiling. He never fucking gave them a second look, never even tried to see if he could scent them. If they’d have smelled like shifters he might have noticed, but as it is Dean just fucking ignored them, assumed they were harmless. And they were far from it.

“So, you see,” Crowley hands the box back to his assistant, squaring his shoulders to face Dean and John again, “my little hobby comes in handy. And Dean, you’ll make an excellent addition to the collection.”

Dean lunges forward again, only for John to pull him back. “Get a hold of yourself,” he growls into Dean’s ear, only loud enough for Dean to hear. “We need to get out of here. Now.”

Dean clenches his jaw and shifts, giving his dad the tiniest of nods. John exhales slowly but doesn’t release him.

“Why are you telling us this?” John asks, his voice even. “Why spoil your plans?”
Crowley considers this for a moment, a flash of amusement on his face.

“To satisfy your curiosity, of course,” he grins, wide and cat-like in the worst kind of way.

“Speaking of, I’ve remembered the saying, the one I couldn’t come up with earlier. I think it’s quite fitting, all things considered.”

Dean grinds his teeth and waits. He’s not gonna take Crowley’s bait here, so the fucker can spit it out or let them leave.

Crowley takes about thirty seconds too long to speak, and his grin never wavers. He hands Dean the tablet, switching it on to show a video on screen.

“Curiosity killed the cat.”

***

Castiel makes it to Michael and Anna’s home without incident, finds several items that still carry Anna’s scent, and heads back to the Bunker. He considers himself lucky for a few moments, before deciding that luck most likely isn’t on his side here. Castiel is being careful, extraordinarily so, and it’s taking him longer than usual to get back to the den but it’s worth it. Will be even more worth it when he can wrap Dean up in his arms tonight.

He’s close to the border of the wolf’s territory, of that Castiel is sure. He can taste the shift of the forest air on the back of his tongue, feels his animal react to the feeling. Castiel takes a deep breath, sighing happily. He may not have his treehouse, but he certainly has a home.

The pinch, right between his shoulder blades, Castiel hardly notices. It feels like a mosquito bit him. But then his feet start to feel heavy. *Really* heavy. And his eyelids really don’t want to stay open. And is it just him, or is the hole world turning sideways?

Castiel realizes—too late—what’s happening. His fingers grasp for the source of the pinch, but they’re thick and clumsy and only just brush the side of *something* sticking out of his back. Probably some kind of dart. He’s not getting it out of his back, not now, so Castiel does all he can do.

He drops Anna’s things and he runs.

“*Pussycat, pussycat,*” a voice sing-songs behind him, followed by a low chuckle. “*Don’t make this harder on yourself.*”

Castiel runs harder. The wolf border is in sight, and if he can just reach it, just trip the alarms that he knows are active, maybe—

His impossibly heavy feet stop cooperating, stumbling over god knows what on the ground and sending Castiel flying. He manages to (mostly) catch himself on his hands and knees, though from the closeness of the footsteps Castiel knows he’s run out of time.

“Get up,” a deep voice says gruffly. Castiel forces himself to obey. The forest is spiraling all around him, and he can’t make out the faces of the men standing over him besides *maybe* their hair colors.

With an overwhelming amount of effort Castiel sits back on his haunches, glaring up in their general direction. He doesn’t try to speak, because from the heavy feeling of his tongue he knows it wouldn’t go well.

“What’s new, pussycat?” the original, sing-songy voice chuckles again, using the toe of his boot to push at Castiel’s shoulder and throw him off balance.
Castiel growls and catches himself on one hand. “Smile,” the lower voice sneers as the arm that Castiel had caught himself on gives out under his own body weight. The forest floor is damp against his cheek, and he doesn’t have any feeling in his limbs. “And say goodbye to Dean.” “Wh—” Castiel can barely lift his head off the ground, and he hardly feels the contact against his skull before everything goes black.

***

Dean watches the whole thing unfold on the screen of Crowley’s tablet. Watches Cas stumble through the forest, watches his fingers reach uselessly for the dart buried in his spine. He watches his mate stumble and fall, listens to the way the cameraman laughs about it. When the guy not behind the camera raises the butt of his rifle to Cas’ skull, poised to knock him out, Dean has to look away.

The video cuts out after that.

Rage burns through Dean like nothing he’s ever felt before. He feels his dad try to hold him back, vaguely, but it takes little effort to tear his arms away. Two steps and Dean has his fingers around Crowley’s throat, easily lifting him up and slamming him down on his back on the desk.

“Dean—” John manages, but Dean cuts him off. “Where,” he snarls, baring his teeth in Crowley’s face. The fucker is grinning at him. A low, animalistic growl rips out of Dean’s chest, the wolf poised at the forefront of his mind. Dean adjusts his grip on Crowley’s jaw, lifting him up and smashing his skull on the desk. “Where is he!”

John tries to pull him away, but Dean shrugs him off. His dad might be speaking, but neither Dean nor the wolf is listening.

“I told you,” Crowley gasps out, his face purpling from loss of oxygen. “I would break you. Easier than I thought it’d be.”

“Not broken,” Dean tightens his grip, the metallic scent of fresh blood hitting the air as his nails lengthen and break the skin of Crowley’s neck. Dean feels his fangs sharpen inside his mouth, his bones itching to reshape themselves.

“You look per—” Crowley chokes, trying to take a deeper breath than his throat will allow, “perfectly stable to me.”

“Don’t test us,” Dean rumbles, his voice sounding double in his own ears. “You harm our mate, we will kill you. Slowly.”

“Interesting,” Crowley manages, his hands finally coming up to pull at Dean’s fingers around his throat. Dean holds on tighter. “We?”

Dean’s lip curls, neither him nor the wolf willing to answer the question. He’s aware that the wolf is speaking, but he doesn’t care. Now isn’t the time for self control.

Crowley waits a beat, grinning when it becomes clear that Dean isn’t going to answer. “Fine. Chatting is...over.”

John yells “Dean!” at the same time as the door slamming open, and Dean has a split second to react before he’s being pulled backwards by strong hands. Well, “strong”. Relatively speaking.
himself be pulled off of Crowley, releasing the slimy bastard as he goes. The hand on his shoulder is an easy target, Dean’s fingers wrapping around the guarded wrist and twisting until he feels bones break. The human who grabbed him makes a pained sound, and it just spurs Dean on more.

His mind is buzzing with static, his ears ringing, his lungs filled with the scent of fresh blood. Human blood. There are seven of them in the room, not including Crowley. One staggering from his recently broken arm, one grappling with John through a broken nose that must have been inflicted seconds earlier. It takes Dean less than a second to scan the room, to get his bearings. Seven, all protected from chest to toe. No helmets, non-lethal weapons. Tasers and tranq’s. Dean snorts.

Piece of cake.

Dean aims a kick to the jaw of the human with the broken arm, sending him down for the count. Instep of the guy to his left, broken nose. He grabs the taser from that guy’s belt, flicks it on and shoves it against the throat of the guy sneaking up behind him. Claws in the throat of the next guy, more blood in the air, a triumphant howl from the wolf. Dean flings that one to the side, tossing him like a rag doll, though the crack of his body hitting the wall begs to differ. His knuckles burn as he swings through a carefully-placed uppercut, his boot stomping down and snapping the femur of the last human standing. Dean grabs the tranquilizer gun from the fallen guard’s belt, aiming the single dart at the guy still clutching his broken nose. He goes down in a second.

John watches him, his chest heaving, blood on his hands and wild rage in his eyes. Dean whirls on Crowley, ready to tear his face from his skull, only to feel the cold press of metal against his forehead.

“Down, dog,” Crowley coughs, the click of the gun seeming to echo in the suddenly quiet space. He rubs absently at his throat with his free hand, where bruises are already forming. “As entertaining as that was, I think we’re done here.”

Dean wraps his fingers around the barrel of the gun, shifting it to the center of his chest. It’s long and thin, revolver style with carvings in the grip. Crowley’s finger tightens on the trigger.

“It’s not worth it,” John snaps at him, but he doesn’t put a hand on him like Dean suspects he wants to. “Step down.”

“You won’t shoot us,” Dean growls, ignoring his dad’s words. “You can’t.”

“Oh I can,” Crowley laughs, faking a dramatic sigh. “Rabid shifters. Always a shame.”

Dean grinds his teeth and smirks at him, taking a step closer. To his intense pleasure, Crowley takes a step back.

“No, you can’t. The game isn’t over. You don’t want us dead. Not yet.”

Dean takes another step forward, but instead of stepping back Crowley shifts the gun and fires straight through Dean’s right shoulder. Dean staggers, biting back the pained noise and forcing himself to keep his gaze on Crowley. The bullet was small, thank god, so he’s not immediately worried about blood loss. But fuck it hurts. Even through the numbness that’s overtaken his entire body, that one hurts. John makes an angry noise behind him, but there’s nothing his dad can do except wait and watch.

“I have three bullets,” Crowley drawls, pulling back the hammer until it clicks. “That was your first strike. I want you out of here.”

“What’d you do to him,” Dean bares his teeth, resisting the urge to step forward. He stands straight,
refusing to favor his injured arm.

“Nothing yet,” Crowley smirks. “You see, it was pure luck that we found dear Castiel all alone in the forest today. I haven’t made plans for him yet. Although, I must say, I am shocked that you would leave your poor little mate all alone in the woods, Dean.”

“What does that mean,” Dean snarls, his dad growling from behind him.

“It means,” Crowley sighs, shifting on his feet. “That Castiel just happened to wander outside the den today, so we snatched him up. Hours ago, I might add, while you two drove here and listened to me blather on about my plans. Now I have to decide what his most valuable asset is. That beautiful black fur?” he grins, the words rolling off his tongue and sending fire down Dean’s spine. “Or those stunning blue eyes? Or perhaps…” he trails off, tapping the barrel of the gun against his temple as he thinks. “Perhaps I let him live. Sell him to a collector, or keep him to myself. He is so fiery, your little kitten, I can only imagine how exquisite he would be in his obedience.”

The noise that tears out of Dean’s chest is animalistic to the core, rage and pain and sadness and a promise to protect Cas from the creature in front of him. A promise to destroy him so totally, so completely, that he suffers a hundred times what Cas is suffering right now. Alone.

The gun goes off, the bullet tearing through the cartilage in Dean’s knee. Without his permission Dean’s leg crumples under him, preventing him from doing the damage to Crowley that he really wants to do.

“Terrible, really,” Crowley continues, his pride far too evident in his voice. Dean can’t wait to rip him off of that pedestal. “That you won’t be able to run to him, to save him. Tell me, Dean, did you hear him scream for you in that bond of yours?”

Dean growls through the pain, chest still heaving and lip curled up to show his fully lengthened canines. He ignores the comment about their bond, because Crowley is fucking right about that. Dean did feel a pull, and if he wasn’t so goddamn useless he might have been able to tell the difference between Cas sleeping and Cas getting fucking tranquilized and kidnapped. But he couldn’t, because he's a goddamn miserable excuse for an alpha and a mate and he's never deserved Cas and now he's gone and it's Dean's fucking fault.

“I’m going to save him, and then I’m going to stick my claws in your throat and watch you drown on your own blood before ripping your fucking lungs from your chest. I’m going to watch the life leave your eyes, Crowley, you can trust me on that. I keep my goddamn promises.”

Crowley clicks back the hammer one more time, pressing the tip of the gun to Dean’s forehead once again.

“Please exit my office. Your blood is staining the carpet.”

There’s a smirk on his face, and his heart is calm as ever, but there’s something else. A strain of something in the air, some sign that the scent-blockers aren’t working as perfectly as Crowley wants them to—not with all the blood in the air.

It’s a wisp of fear, and it’s coming from Crowley.

Dean grins, aware that he probably looks like a lunatic covered in blood but not caring one fucking bit. He takes his dad’s offered hand to stand up, leaning on him as little as possible as he faces Crowley one last time.

“Might need some more scent blockers,” he spits, rising up to his full height and rolling his shoulders
back. His knee doesn’t want to support his weight, but he just needs a second. “I could kill you, kill everyone in this building. Easy.”

“You could,” Crowley agrees, nodding along. “A strapping alpha such as yourself. But you and me both know what happens after that kind of slaughter.” Crowley quirks an eyebrow, smirking from the other end of the gun. “Would you do that to your pack, Dean?”

Dean grinds his molars, wishing Crowley were wrong, wishing he had another option. “Last chance to tell me what you did with him. I’ll make sure you die quick.”

Crowley laughs, not lowering the gun for a second.

“Not a chance. See you in hell, darling.”

Chapter End Notes

Don't hate me too much. I will update the very soonest I am able, next Sunday at the very latest.
Chapter 35

Chapter Summary

"Name's Crowley. Castiel, right?"

Chapter Notes

So hopefully it was clear in the last chapter that Dean and Cas' timelines were off a little bit, but they line up again here at the end of this chapter. Now, onto the drama!

Dean isn’t really sure how his dad and him get to the car. He just knows he’s fucking bleeding everywhere and his dad his cursing at him but none of that fucking matters because Cas is gone. He’s goddamn gone just like that and there’s not a thing Dean can do about it.

He tunes out John’s ranting, tunes out the road noise as they hurtle back to the den, squeezing his eyes shut and focusing all of his attention on the bond. It’s still muted, the heaviness of the fog obvious now that Dean knows that Cas got tranq-ed and isn’t just asleep. The image of that dart buried in Cas’ spine, of his blue eyes staring defiantly up at his captors, they’re burned into the back of Dean’s eyes.

Dean balls his hands into fists, resists the urge to punch something since nothing viable is within reach. The burning in his shoulder discourages him too, which is actually pretty helpful for his self-control.

“You need’a stop that bleedin’, before you keel over from blood loss,” John snarls at him, and they’re the first words that manage to bury through to Dean’s mind. Right. Blood loss.

He pulls open the glove box and finds a cheap first aid kit, complete with about half as much gauze and tape as Dean needs. Fucking awesome. Dean manages to slow the bleeding a little bit, but the wound coverings soak through too fast to make them useful.

“Doesn’t fucking matter,” Dean growls, shoving the useless kit back where it came from. Some blood isn’t gonna kill him.

“Get your goddamn head on straight, boy,” John snaps at him, pressing a little harder on the gas. Dean glares at him.

“Don’t you think we’re trying?” he grinds his teeth. Dean is doing everything in his power to hold himself together. He's never felt so in sync with his wolf as he does right now, but all that really means is that they're losing their collective shit together.

“Yeah, well try harder,” John huffs, shaking his head. “Your mate needs you, so you need to focus.”

Dean keeps his mouth shut and takes a few deep breaths. “How long ’til we’re back.”

“Two hours,” John grunts.
Dean nods. His wolf wants to jump out of the truck and run, but it’s at least going to take the night for these wounds to heal and the truck can move faster than he can run on a good day. Still, the entire drive is torture of a unique variety. It’s all he can do to keep his thoughts in check, his imagination itching to run away and take his meager amount of control away with it. His brain is consumed with thoughts of Cas, of where he is, of what’s happening to him. Dean tries to focus on the memory of waking up with Cas in his arms that morning, on the damp bark and pine tree scent that surrounded him. If he lets his thoughts wander, he’s sure he’ll lose it right there in the goddamn truck.

The Council, Gabriel and Lucifer, the Hunters and the Seraphs are all waiting when they get back. John comes around the car, offering a shoulder for Dean to put his weight on. Everyone’s faces fall at the exact second they scent Dean’s blood in the air, see the red soaked into his pants leg.

Dean speaks before anyone else can.

“Who the hell,” he pants, gritting his teeth through the pain as his adrenaline seeps out of his bloodstream, “let him leave.”

Silence falls. Sam recovers first.

“Cas?” he says quietly, his brown eyes wide and brimming with worry. “He…he’s gone? We thought…”

“He was with Michael,” Gabriel jumps in, running a hand through his hair. “All day. Michael was royally melting down this morning, Cassie went in there to help—”

Dean doesn’t need to hear any more. He pushes away from his dad, and luckily the alpha doesn’t try to hold him back. His knee doesn’t want to hold his weight, and his arm hangs limp at his side, but the wolf refuses to lean on anybody else and Dean is with him.

Everybody stares as he limps his way to Michael’s room. Dean flings the door open, his chest heaving as he does. Michael is sitting cross-legged on his bed, eyes dark and mouth pulled down in a frown. His room reeks like desperation and grief, but Dean doesn’t have an ounce of sympathy.

“I’m sorry,” Michael sighs, standing and managing to look down at Dean despite their similar heights.

Dean punches him square in the jaw. It’s his left arm, so it’s not the best punch he’s ever dealt out, but it sends Michael stumbling backwards. The wolf is pleased that they are finally putting this alpha in his place.

“We let you into our den,” Dean snarls, grabbing Michael’s shirt to haul him upright to the alpha has to look at him, “we protected your pack, we put our lives at risk to get your people back. And you handed our mate over to them.”

Someone says Dean’s name from the doorway, someone puts their hands on him. He shoves them away, stares Michael down until the alpha drops his gaze.

“Why.”

Michael keeps his eyes trained on the floor.

“I need to get Anna back,” he says, voice calm and even. “If that means risking Castiel…then so be it.”

Dean is definitely, 100% going to kill this fucker. Spines are fragile, he could break Michael’s
without a thought. Or maybe something more painful, something slower. Maybe—

Several sets of arms come around him before he can even take a swing. Dean snarls and bares his teeth and does everything in his power to get free of them, but none of them let go. The wolf is bounding around and growling, itching to take control.

Everything in Dean’s body hurts. The bullet wounds, yeah, but more than that. There’s a gaping hole in his chest, and the silenced bond in the back of his mind feels like a migraine he can’t get away from. Some part of him, he thinks, had been hoping that Crowley was full of it. That Cas would be here. But Cas is gone. Cas is gone and Dean didn’t apologize or kiss him goodbye or tell him how much he loves him, how much he needs him. Cas is just gone.

Dean lets go, lets the wolf take over, and promptly blacks out.

***

Castiel wakes up in the back of some kind of…car. It’s spacious, relatively speaking, the only light barely filtering through from the front. There’s rope digging into his wrists and ankles, and judging from the stiffness of his muscles and the ache in both his shoulder and his hip, he’s been out for a while. There’s a gag in his mouth, which he’s actually relatively thankful for. It muffles his pained groan as the tranquilizers start to wear off, something he definitely doesn’t want his captors hearing.

His mind is groggy, and for the life of him Castiel can’t figure out how he ended up here. He left the den, but…

There’s an excited, buzzing kind of energy coming from the back of his mind. It takes a few moments for Castiel to figure out that it’s coming from his mating bond with Dean, who is obviously feeling pretty agitated. Dean. Dean!

Castiel squeezes his eyes shut and latches on to the bond with everything he has. He screams into it, pulls on it, tries to wrap himself up in Dean’s warmth as much as he can. He wishes he could see something, smell something, anything to give Dean a hint about where they’re going. He doesn’t even know if he’s capable of communicating that through their bond, but…Dean is going to find him. Dean has to find him. If Castiel can just hold on…

The car lurches to a halt, slamming Castiel’s back against the metal siding. He hears the front doors open and close, the crunch of gravel under boots. So they aren’t in the forest, he knows that much. Castiel slows his breathing and lets the tension out of his body, laying limp and doing his best to act like he isn’t awake. By their reaction when they open the doors, the humans seem to have bought it.

“Shouldn’t he be awake by now?” one of them says, grabbing on to Castiel’s bound ankles and dragging him across the floor of the car towards the back doors. His shirt slides up and the rough metal isn’t comfortable against his skin, but Castiel doesn't react quite yet.

“Who gives a shit,” a deeper voice grunts, lifting Castiel by his shoulders. “Just get him inside, let Crowley deal with it.”

Castiel’s gut sinks. He wants to open his eyes, get a handle on his surroundings, and from the sound of it this is going to be his only opportunity. So he better make the most of it. He tenses his core and swings his legs with as much momentum as he can muster, getting in a good kick to the stomach of the guy holding on to his feet. The man stumbles and releases him, giving Castiel the leverage to slam his skull into the other human holding on to his torso. He hears a pained grunt and the sound of breaking bones, and he’s promptly dropped onto the gravel.
He’s breathing in dust and there are rocks digging into his cheek, but the scent of human blood is in the air and he can’t help but be pleased with himself. He takes the spare second to look around, though nothing is familiar. There’s gravel all around him, tapering off to a dirt road that exits out through the chainlink fence that probably surrounds the entire area. The car they arrived in is a black van, and there are several others just like it all parked in a row.

Castiel is about to roll to get a look behind him when something sharp presses into his neck, and his muscles get heavy once again.

“Fucking animal,” the deeper voice swears at him, blood dripping down his face. “You’ll regret that.”

Castiel just glares at him, growling as much as he can through the gag.

There’s enough tranquilizer in his system to stop him from fighting back, but this one doesn’t seem intended to knock him out completely. Castiel has enough control over his muscles to crane his neck around, getting a look at more of his surroundings as they carry him inside.

“Inside” is a large building that seems to be some kind of warehouse, metal and sort of rusted on the outside. It feels out of place next to the shiny vans and barbed wire that tops the fences. There aren’t any windows, and it looks to have only one main entrance and exit.

The smell is the worst part. It all smells damp, and awful, and Castiel immediately wants to empty the contents of his stomach. Everything is blood and panic and fear and death, desperation and distress at an intensity that Castiel has never before experienced. He’s dizzy with it, overwhelmed by the memories imprinted in this place. He can’t help the whimper that escapes his throat.

The humans don’t scare him. This place does.

It’s dark inside, Castiel’s mind too foggy and overwhelmed to process much of what he’s seeing. There are cages, he knows that for sure, and shivering forms inside that curl away from the heavy boots of the humans as they walk by. Castiel can’t even begin to distinguish the scents, to try and figure out who is alive and whose death is fresh in the air.

The two humans dump him into a cage, thick-barred and forged from heavy metals that he knows he won’t be able to break. They untie him and undo his gag, though Castiel isn’t able to drag his body upright quite yet. The two of them murmur to each other as they walk away, but Castiel isn’t listening.

The dark eyes of a leopard peer at him through the bars of his cage. Familiar eyes, more scared and predatory than Castiel has ever seen them in his life. Anna.

“Anna,” he whispers, trying to get her to recognize him. “Anna, it’s me.”

She hisses at him, backs further into the corner of her cage. She has no reason to fear him, Castiel knows that, but he doesn’t know how to make her understand.

“It’s okay,” he tries, speaking in the most soothing tones he can manage. “We’re going to get out of here. We’re going to—”

“She can’t hear you.”

Castiel inhales sharply, turning towards the source of the voice as quickly as he can manage in his current state. He sits up as much as he can, which isn’t much, but it’s something.
“Who are you?” he bites out, letting his fear funnel into anger.

“Name’s Crowley,” the man grins, and it’s more predatory than anything Castiel has seen amongst the shifters he knows. “Castiel, right?”

He stiffens. Castiel doesn’t like the idea of this human knowing him, knowing his name. It’s logical, but he doesn’t like it.

“What did you do to her?” he asks, ignoring Crowley’s question. The less information he gives up, the better. Crowley might know everything about him already, but he doesn’t need to hear it from the horse’s mouth.

“The same thing I’ll do to you,” he shrugs, crouching to he’s at Castiel’s level on the ground. He holds up a syringe, filled with a sickly yellow-colored liquid. Or perhaps that’s the poor lighting in here. “You see this?”

Castiel clenches his jaw and ignores this question too. He refuses to play into Crowley’s obvious desire for the dramatic.

“Stubborn little thing,” Crowley smirks, winking at him. “This is a little concoction I worked up myself. All it took was a little tinkering with those ridiculous tranquilizers that you cooked up for yourselves. I asked myself one question,” Crowley pauses, obviously giving Castiel a few seconds to fill in the blank for himself. “If you can turn off the animal half, leave the human half running, is it possible to do the opposite?”

A chill runs down Castiel’s spine.

“The answer is yes,” he continues, practically gleeful. He is so obviously pleased with himself, it makes Castiel sick. “So a little of this, a little of that, and voila! You say goodnight, the beast says good morning.”

Castiel clenches his fists, relieved to have that much movement back.

“You did that to her,” he breathes, desperate to reach through the bars and tear this human apart.

“Don’t be silly,” Crowley chuckles. “Not just her. I did it to all of them.”

Castiel closes his eyes against the rage, takes a deep breath to steady his voice. “Those tranqs, they have consequences. You throw the two halves out of balance.”

“The science lesson is unnecessary, Castiel,” Crowley waves him off, gazing fondly at the syringe in his fingers. “And the consequences aren’t something I’m concerned with. We keep you pumped full of this stuff, so don’t you worry. And if the human halves don’t wake up…” he shrugs, obviously unconcerned. “Well. Animals are easier to train anyway.”

Castiel’s heart rate ratchets up about ten notches. He carefully trains his face into something like amusement, doing his best to act like he knows something Crowley doesn’t. He obviously isn’t getting out of this cage, not with the state of his body right now, so the least he can do is try to throw Crowley off balance. Hope he makes a mistake.

“He’s going to find you, you know,” Castiel smirks, tilting his head just barely to the side. “Dean is going to find you, and he is going to kill you.”

Crowley just chuckles. “I find that hard to believe.”
“Oh?” Castiel quirks an eyebrow, trying to keep him talking. In this game they’re playing, seconds matter.

“I put two bullets in your mate,” Crowley sighs, the smile just barely kept off his face. It’s obvious how much he’s enjoying this. “He’s unstable, that one. But I’m sorry to say, sweetheart, that you’ll be long dead before anyone finds us.”

Castiel blinks slowly and smiles wider, despite the burning rage in his veins over the thought of Dean bleeding and in pain and going off the rails back in the den without him. Crowley isn’t the only one here who can put on a show.

“Mmm,” he hums, letting thoughts of his mate warm him. “You think two bullets is going to slow him down?”

Crowley’s careful facade falters. Good.

“I’ll say it again,” Castiel says slowly, carefully pronouncing each letter slowly and precisely. “Dean is going to find you, and he is going to kill you.”

Crowley reaches through the bars and grabs Castiel by the hair, shoving the syringe into the meat of his neck without preamble.

“Go to sleep, cat,” he growls low, the scent of fear just barely wafting off his skin. Castiel laughs, even as his vision blacks out and he feels the bones of his body unwillingly stretch and break as the shift begins.

“You’re dead. All of you are.”

***

Dean is tied up when he comes to. He isn’t surprised. His mouth doesn’t taste like blood, but that doesn’t necessarily mean anything. There’s a blanket draped over his shoulders, obviously the one from his bedroom. It’s drenched in the scent of himself and Cas together, of happy mates, and content alpha and omega. It takes the edge off, lets him think straight, but that’s as good as it gets.

He’s in the basement, he can tell that much from the room he’s in, and there’s only one other person present. Sam.

“You Dean this time?” he grunts, crossing his arms across his broad chest. “Really would like to talk to my brother.”

Dean glares at him and shifts to get a better whiff of the blanket around him. The wolf is quiet, thrumming with barely-restrained energy, but Dean knows how fast that switch can flip.

“It’s me, bitch.”

Sam rolls his eyes. “Jerk. Lisa told them it’d work.”

“Lisa?” Dean raises his eyebrows, confused about whatever the hell Sam is on about.

He nods. “It was her idea to get the blanket. Said a scent token might settle you. Enough so we could talk, anyway.”

“Wringing Michael’s neck’d settle me,” Dean huffs, not thrilled at the idea of everybody plotting about how best to control him.
“Har har,” Sam rolls his eyes. “You’re not allowed to kill him.”

“He sent Cas on a suicide mission,” Dean growls, grinding his teeth. “I can do whatever the hell I want.”

“You almost just killed me in your psycho rage,” Sam snaps right back, not backing down in the face of Dean’s aggression for even a second. “So you’re just as bad. Give him a break. Anna has been gone for a few days.”

Dean’s sympathy is right about at zero. He’s trying but…yeah. He’s not trying that hard.

“We gotta get out there, Sammy.” Dean’s trying to keep the pleading out of his voice, but his brother sees right through it. “We gotta—”

Dean stops. Wherever Cas is right now, whoever has him, he’s awake.

“Untie me,” Dean says low, throwing every ounce of dominance he has into the command. Sam drops his gaze, but doesn’t obey.

“Dean, you need to calm down. Give us some time—”

“Sam,” he snarls, “untie me, right fucking now.”

Sam doesn’t hesitate that time.

Dean practically sprints out of the den, shoving past the sentry and ignoring Sam’s pounding footsteps behind him along with the pain in his knee. His brother keeps asking him what he’s doing, but he ignores him. He can feel Cas tugging on the bond, and even with nothing else that’s enough. Cas is pulling Dean towards him, and if he can just follow it, if Cas can keep on pulling…

He has no clue how long he runs through the forest. He has no clue where he runs or why. He just runs. It’s instinct, or it’s Cas telling him where to go, or who fucking knows what it is but Dean won’t stop. The tugging gets less insistent, and Dean runs harder. Cas might only have minutes, seconds, he might—

It stops. The bond goes dead, hanging limp between them. Dean’s knee gives out from under him. A sob wracks his body.

He doesn’t know where to go. Cas is out there in danger and possibly dying and Dean doesn’t know where to go. He punches the ground, jarring the bones against the hard dirt, but it doesn’t make him feel better. The second time he catches something sharp and his knuckles bleed. That grounds him a little bit.

At Sam’s first attempt to pull him off the ground, Dean shoves him away. The second time he goes willingly, but makes no effort to carry any of his own weight.

Sam deposits him in his bed. Cold and alone. Pam changes his bandages with deft fingers. Dean hardly notices any of it. His wounds are healing quickly anyway. Then they leave him. He wraps himself in the comforter that smells like Cas and doesn’t even close his eyes to sleep. He knows it won’t come.

Not until he gets Cas back.
Chapter 36

Chapter Summary

"But he might've found me."

Chapter Notes

**shows up late with Starbucks**

So. This chapter fought me tooth and metaphorical claw the entire time. But here it is, and do me a favor and ignore how late it is ;) Thank you forever and always to the lovely Astrophilla for being the bestest beta.

Also, there will still be an update on Sunday! So for those of you that want to strangle me after this one, you won't have to wait much longer. Hugs and kisses and lots of love, as always.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Dean doesn’t know how long he’s been staring at the ceiling. Doesn’t care. It’s taken… a while for him to get a handle on himself. His brain is running on an extended loop, cycling through thoughts of Cas and the endless ways he wants to torture Crowley to a bloody death. His chest aches like he’s hollowed out, like he’s nothing but a gaping hole, and something must not have healed right because there’s still a dull throbbing in his knee.

Maybe wasn’t the best idea to run on shattered bone. Dean can’t find it in himself to give a shit. Whatever’s happening to Cas, he knows that it’s infinitely worse. Dean can handle a little knee pain.

The whole time, the wolf stays pathetically glued to the mating bond, like if it waits long enough, the thing’ll spring back to life. It never does though, and the silence of it is driving Dean up the fucking wall. So yeah, it took him a while to get his shit under control. But he’s managing himself. Mostly.

And now he’s got a plan. Or an outline, ish. Some kind of idea of what he’s gonna do. He gave his pack the night, let them rest while he pretended not to mourn. Now the sun’s up, and he’s not sitting on his ass a minute longer.

Dean forces himself out of bed, but can’t quite bring himself to leave the scent of Cas behind. He grabs a dirty t-shirt from their laundry, draping it over his shoulder and letting the scent of pine trees and damp bark envelope him as he makes his way through the den. It makes him feel like Cas is closer to him. Dean heads towards the Council room, pounding on doors as he goes as a wake up call. God fucking knows how early it actually is, but Dean doesn’t care. They’re going to find everybody, to find his mate, and they’re going now.

With the Council, the Arch, the Seraphs and the Hunters all gathered in front of him, looking bleary eyed but present, Dean finally speaks.
“This ends,” he breathes, feeling the aggression building up in his muscles. He wants to rip into something. “Today. We are going hunting, and we aren’t coming back until we find them.”

Murmurs of assent filter through the room, and Dean barely catches John’s nod of approval from the corner of his eye.

“You headed south, last night,” Sam jumps in, obviously in agreement with Dean’s plan. “Farther than we’d searched on our own. All the evidence pointed west, so we didn’t go much more than ten or fifteen miles south of Pack territory.”

“We went twenty-five,” Balthazar adds, crossing his arms with a heavy sigh. “Still nothing.”

Dean wonders how far the humans could realistically be, considering they were transporting unconscious shifters, but with a car in their possession it wouldn’t be unreasonable for them to be a hundred miles out, maybe more.

“Then we go further,” Dean grunts, undeterred. If south is the direction Cas pulled him, then south is where they’ll look.

Surprisingly, Michael is the next one to speak up.

“Last night, did Castiel call out to you?”

Dean tenses, studying Michael with suspicious eyes. He hadn’t even really told Sam that that’s what happened, so if Michael already knows…

“Anna,” he breathes, “she did the same to you?”

Michael nods. “Before I lost her. I can’t feel her now, she’s too far away.”

A chill runs down Dean’s spine, a flash of sympathy for Michael who he knows is suffering just as much as he is. The shadows under his eyes are even darker today, a sign of his continuing sleepless nights. His skin is grey and pallid, eyes dull and far away.

“Your bond…” Dean prompts, unable to say the words out loud. It hurts too much to feel the lifeless bond, let alone actually recognizing it verbally.

“Silent. Limp. Broken. Dead. Do these suffice?”

Dean grits his teeth, tries not to flinch. And he refuses to describe his bond to Cas as dead. He won’t do it.

“Yeah. Got it.” Dean rubs at the scruff along his jaw, breathing deep and trying to regain some control. The wolf is pacing and anxious to get moving, its impatience spreading through Dean’s veins. He tries to focus on the scent of Cas’ shirt on his shoulder, but it’s getting harder by the second.

“We got a full moon tonight,” John grunts, getting things back on track so they can come up with some kind of plan. Dean is grateful. “Sure everybody’s feeling it already. Our pack knows how to hunt on a moon. And you two,” he gestures at Dean and Michael, “not sure of it, but there’s a chance those bonds of yours’ll perk up when the moon’s out. Whatever it is that makes us shifters, it’s on full force tonight.”

John glances around the room, catching everyone’s agreeing nods.
“Everybody rest up,” he continues, apparently satisfied with the response. “Spend the day with your family, your mate, your pup. Eat, relax, and get ready for a hell of a hunt.”

***

The Bunker is a bundle of nerves for the entire day. It’s thick in the air, weighing everyone down. It’s quiet too, with mostly everyone hiding out in their rooms in close quarters with the people most important to them.

Dean goes to his room alone. He’d like to rest up, but the wolf won’t let him sleep. Even with the scent of Cas all around him, his bed is cold and the scent is a day old at this point.

There’s a knock on his door, and Dean thinks about not answering, but whoever it is decides not to give him the choice.

“Dean,” someone sighs, the voice and scent familiar. Dean pulls his comforter closer around his shoulders, doesn’t raise his head off of Cas’ pillow.

“Lisa,” he mumbles. “What’re you doin’ here?”

She’s quiet for a few seconds, and Dean feels the comforter lift and the mattress dip under her weight as she slips into his bed behind him.

“Lisa. What are you doing,” he repeats, even as he instinctively settles back into her arms as she wraps them around him.

“I’m trying to help,” she says softly, her warm breath brushing against the nape of his neck. “Is that okay?”

Dean hesitates. He feels wrong, being here with Lisa while Cas is out there suffering. Scared. Alone. Dean doesn’t even know if he’s alive. Maybe he already breathed his last exhale, maybe he wondered why Dean had given up on him. Maybe—

“Dean,” Lisa cooed, combing her fingers through his hair. “Breathe.”

He let out a shaky exhale, curling away from her. “Don’t. I can’t—”

“Shh,” she continues to stroke his hair, nuzzling the nape of his neck along his hairline. “You’ll find him. He’ll be okay, Dean. Castiel will be okay.”

Dean turns over in her arms and buries his nose against her collarbone. Her scent is comforting and familiar, not enough to bring his heart rate down but definitely something. She shifts to run a hand down his spine, still making soothing noises at each unsteady breath.

He doesn’t realize that he was shivering until he stops.

“You don’t have to be here,” Dean mumbles, trying to reign his thoughts back in. Freaking out some more isn’t going to help anybody.

“No,” she sighs, “I don’t. But I’m here.”

They’re quiet for a few minutes, the silence of Dean’s room filled only with their combined breathing. Dean gives in, letting his arms wind around Lisa in return.

“Thank you.”
They head out at dusk. Load up the truck and the jeeps and go south, following the trail Dean had set the night before. The moon is bright and full above them, and Dean can feel the wilderness of it racing through him. His wolf itches to get out, to run, to breathe the forest air and howl to the moon.

But that isn’t the plan.

It doesn’t take long in the jeeps to arrive at the end of Dean’s trail from the night before. Dean himself doesn’t remember running most of it, but Sam does and there’s an obvious, messy trail through the forest leading them there. The Hunters and the Seraphs, along with some of the older soldiers like Garth and Meg and the Dominions like Uriel and Zachariah, plus the Council and the Arch all climb out and free their animals, giving in to the pull of the moon.

Dean slides into the driver’s seat of the truck, Michael in the passenger seat beside him. The truck is saturated in alpha pheromones, and Dean has to grit his teeth at the edge. He wants to join the hunt with his pack, but this is how he finds Cas. He reminds himself of that over and over again. This is how he finds Cas. This is how he brings him home.

The leopards waste no time getting up into the trees, looking for visuals. They hunt on sight and sound, so it’s up to the wolves to lead the charge on the scent front. That is, if they can even find a scent trail.

That’s Michael and Dean’s job. Get the hunt headed in the right direction, close enough that they pick up a trail, or that they can see something from the leopards’ perch up high.

How the hell they’re going to accomplish that though, Dean doesn’t have a fucking clue. There’s still nothing coming from his bond with Cas, and he can only hope that he’ll feel something once the moon hits its peak. For now he’s running on blind instinct, hoping for the best.

“South?” he grunts at Michael, throwing the truck into gear as the last of the wolves finish their shifts. He has some shit he’d like to say to the guy, but now isn’t the time. He focuses instead on the scent of Cas that’s clinging to the shirt he still has over his shoulder. They’d had to get Michael some of that god-awful synthetic slick to trigger his scent memory of Anna, and judging from the pink tint to his cheeks it must be working.

It’s also more than a little awkward to share a truck cab with another alpha going through the synthetic slick experience. But Dean doesn’t have the emotional capacity to process that, not at the moment.

“I suppose,” Michael murmurs, obviously getting a little lost in Anna’s fabricated scent. All Dean smells is the sticky sweet scent of the slick, but he’s glad it’s working for Michael. Anything to get them closer.

So they drive. The moon drifts higher in the sky, and they keep driving. Hannah finds a set of tire tracks that lead to nowhere. They drive some more. The Pack scans every square inch of forest as they make their way south. The leopards see nothing but trees in the distance. They keep driving.

The full moon hits its peak in the sky, and it would be a stretch for Dean to say that the bond came alive. Because it doesn’t. But it does…breathe. A flare of warmth as it reaches for him, pulls him slightly left. It’s weak, but…

“You found him,” Michael breathes, eyes focused hard on Dean’s profile. He doesn’t look at him, just presses harder on the gas and urges the wolves in a new direction.
“No,” Dean grinds his jaw. “Not yet. But he might’ve found me.”

Through the growl of the truck’s engine, Dean hears his father’s howl. Long and proud, John’s wolf projecting its pleasure at the thrill of this hunt. A chorus of howls sound after that, the pitches whirling and blending together in a haunting, moonlit song. Dean feels a chill run down his spine, the urge to join in almost overwhelming. The warmth of his bond intensifies momentarily, pulls him harder forward before dying out again.

Dean drives as fast as he can, convinced that they must be getting close. They have to be.

Time seems to slow down, maybe even halt completely, as a lone howl echoes in the distance. There are a lot of wolves in the Pack, all of them unique and all of them important. Dean prides himself on knowing his pack like he knows his own hands. And so he knows, without a doubt, that the howl they just heard was Kevin.

The hunt changes pace then. The wolves know here to go, the leopards know who to follow. Dean is racing towards the pull even as the bond goes completely lifeless within him. The wolf is singularly focused on their mate, every thought a rousing chorus of CasCasCasCasCasCas.

Every second brings them closer. Dean and Michael are on the edges of their seats. Dean pushes the truck harder. Almost there. Closer.

All of the shifters come to a halt. Dean slams on the brakes and throws the car in park, letting himself out and breathing the air around him. There’s a faint scent of gravel dust, but other than that it doesn’t really smell like…anything. The scents of the forest, the trees, the damp earth, that’s still there. But there are no hares, no birds, no life to be scented. Things are missing. And that’s a more obvious scent trail than anything else they’ve found.

Through the bush is the very beginnings of what probably turns into a gravel road, further up. Dean can’t see through the darkness and the trees where it leads to, yet, but he plans to. Without a word the wolves creep forward, following John, Rufus, Bobby, and Ellen’s slow approach. They all stay off the road, intentionally.

Running parallel to the gravel leads them to a chainlink fence, not low enough to jump and high enough that it would take Dean some effort to climb over. On the other side is a decrepit looking metal building, so off-putting to Dean’s senses that he knows they’ve found the right place.

Everything else that happens is a blur. The leopards don’t hesitate to get over the fences, taking out the electrical panel on the other side to open the gates for the rest of the shifters. It’s obvious they’ve been spotted when gunshots slice through the silence of the night, but from what Dean can hear and smell none of them hit their mark.

They have the cover of darkness here, which gives them the advantage. The five humans who step outside of the building are dispatched quickly and quietly. It’s easy for the wolves to herd them away from each other, from the safety of the door at their backs.

Dean is almost surprised that there aren’t more humans here, but it passes quickly. As much as Dean and the wolf both want to rip apart every human involved, they’ll settle for Crowley. Just to end this.

The scent of human blood in the air settles in his lungs, and Dean is the first to enter the warehouse. Death and pain and fear assaults his senses, sending him stumbling and just barely out of the line of fire of more guns. More wolves file in, several yelps of pain as bullets find their way into shifter flesh, but Dean’s attention is razor focused. He can smell Castiel in this room, terrified and hurting
but alive. Dean hardly registers his own movements as he dispatches the humans in his path.


Four. Crowley.

That fucking smirk is still on his face, the long barreled colt in his hand. Except it isn’t pointed at Dean. It’s pointed at a dirty, iron-barred cage on the side of the room. Inside it, a black panther.

Dean’s blood runs cold. Of everything that’s happening in this room, all there is to see, Dean sees exactly one of them. His mate in a cage.

“Well, well. You did show up rather sooner than anticipated.”

Dean growls low in his chest. Rage is hollowing him out from the inside, burning everything else away. “Hurt him, and you’ll wish I killed you.”

“Hurt him?” Crowley outright laughs, the sound singing out above the harsh noises still echoing around the warehouse. The scent of death is making Dean dizzy, and his urge to stare at Cas until he’s sure he’s alive is almost overwhelming. “Darling, please. I’ve ruined him already.”

“I don’t believe that,” Dean snarls, taking a step forward but freezing when Crowley slowly cocks his gun. 

“Suit yourself,” he shrugs. “But you will let me leave, or I’ll kill him and you won’t ever find out. Capisce?”

Dean hesitates, and listens. The fighting around them has stopped. Over Crowley’s left shoulder, coming out of a shift and adjusting to the weight of a leopard body, is Michael.

Dean blinks slowly at Crowley and cocks his head. “Ya know one time, I might’ve let that kind of threat fly. But I’m done being scared of you, Crowley.”

Michael stalks closer, body low to the ground, muscles tensed to pounce. Unlike a wolf, Michael is equipped to take out his prey in one attack, alone. Concentrated power. Dean keeps Crowley talking.

“Ah, but isn’t that exactly your problem, Dean?” Crowley grins, sick and twisted. “You are afraid of me. I own you.”

“No,” Dean growls, “you just wish you did. But the difference between you and me?” he lets the words hang, watching Crowley’s gears work away inside his head. “You’re not a predator. We are. And right now, you’re the prey.”

Michael is in the air before Dean even finishes speaking. He lands heavily on Crowley’s back, flattening the human against the hard floor of the warehouse. The gun skitters across the floor, out of reach.

And just like that, it’s over. Michael’s teeth sink into Crowley’s neck, severing his spine at his nape. Some part of Dean thought he would have liked to claim Crowley’s life himself, would have liked to make him suffer, but his feet move him towards Cas’ cage without a thought. Because Crowley’s death is all that matters. He’s gone. Cas is safe.

Dean falls to his knees outside of the cage. Cas’ tail flicks back and forth, his body crouched like he
plans to pounce any second.

“Hey, Cas,” Dean breathes out, for the first time in what feels like days. “You’re okay.”

A low growl rumbles in Cas’ chest. Dean furrows his eyebrows and tries again.

“Cas. It’s me,” he puts his hand against one of the bars, tempted to reach through and touch.
“C’mon. You know me.”

Dean’s stomach clenches, searching Cas’ eyes for any sign of recognition. Anything.

“What did he do to you?” Dean growls, and the panther seems to react to the sound. It inches closer, its nose twitching. Panic rises in Dean’s throat. “You gotta be okay, kitten. You have to be. Hey, got that? You have to be.”

The panther just tilts its head, blue eyes piercing.

“Don’t fucking look at me like that,” Dean snaps, and the panther only seems to look harder. “Snap out of it, okay? You’re safe and—” he looks around briefly, trying to find something to get this lock open so he can get closer to Cas. “Jesus, doesn’t anybody have some fucking bolt cutters? Christ—” he shifts back to Cas, ignoring any and everyone around him, “Just snap out of it. Change back. Do something.”

Cas just stares at him.

Dean’s heart drops. A hand lands on his shoulder. Sam.

“We’ll relocate him back to the den, figure it out there. We need to get everybody out of here.”

His brother is being too gentle with him. Tiptoeing. Dean knows what he isn’t saying.

“Relocate. You want to knock him out.” His voice is deadpan, but anything else is too much effort.

Sam doesn’t need to answer. Dean reaches his fingers through the cage, encouraging the panther to sniff at his fingertips. Hopefully Cas’ panther finds comfort in his scent. Out of the corner of his eye Dean sees Ellen step forward with a shot in her hand, probably from the emergency kit in the truck. They keep it stocked, just in case there’s a rogue unexpectedly. They’ll knock a shifter out for two, three hours max.

Cas—the panther, whatever—leans against Dean’s fingers, rubs its nose against the soft skin of his bare wrist. Dean shivers.

“I’m sorry, Cas. I’m so sorry.”

Chapter End Notes

And I promise, a reprieve from the angst is on its way. Stick with me!
Seven shifters were taken, in total. Inias, Samandriel, and Rachel didn’t make it. Dean tries to be thankful for the ones that did. Even that is difficult.

He doesn’t leave Cas’ side the entire trip home. Sits in the bed of the truck next to the limp form of the panther. Michael is at his other side, Anna’s similarly limp form draped over his lap. They don’t announce their arrival back at the den with triumph and excitement. They don’t celebrate. Everyone disperses quietly, sneaking off to quiet corners of the Bunker to be thankful that this didn’t happen to them.

Pam handles the few shifters who were injured in the fight, but none of their wounds are serious. Bullet wounds heal easily, when given the time. Dean’s knee stings as a reminder.

Nobody really knows what to do with the four that made it out. When the drugs wear off, both their own and Crowley’s, they aren’t sure what they’ll find. It’s obvious that Crowley did something to throw their animals off balance, and whether or not their bodies will set things right is yet to be seen. Dean has seen some wolves come back from using tranq’s, perfectly normal, but he’s seen some not come back, too. Some that lost their animals forever, some that went totally rogue. So they might all be fine, or they might not be fine at all.

And he can’t lose Cas. He can’t.

Mary and John disappear into one of the locked rooms with Kevin, the ones they use for rogues. It speaks volumes about their expected outcome here. Michael does the same with Anna, and Gabriel and Lucifer take Josiah. Dean carries his panther himself.

These rooms are bare, just this side of being empty. There aren’t beds in all of them, and the one Dean chooses just has a pile of clean blankets and pillows to rest on. He works silently on making up a nest for Cas, adjusting the pillows as best he can to replicate what Cas’ treehouse feels like. It doesn’t work, but he tries.

When he’s satisfied he strips off his clothes and shifts, just in case Cas wakes up and opts for
violence. Dean could probably hold his own against the panther as human, but being around a fellow animal might help keep him calm.

The shift is easier, faster than normal, the wolf pulling on the waning energy from the full moon. His joints still ache, but it helps him focus. Dean wants to curl up next to Cas right away, feel his warmth and heartbeat and assure himself that his mate really is alive and at his side again.

And then Cas is waking up, and it’s right away obvious that Dean won’t be getting close to him anytime soon.

Castiel drags himself to his feet, stumbling and baring his sharp teeth as he does. He glares across the room at Dean, a low, angry hiss sounding in his throat. Dean bares his own teeth and growls right back, refusing to fold under Castiel’s outward aggression. He can smell the panther’s fear in the air, knows that he is testing Dean’s dominance right off the bat.

So he holds Castiel’s gaze, and waits.

It feels like minutes before Castiel looks away. He starts to pace around the room, and he might not be hissing but it’s clear that he has no interest in getting close to Dean. He sniffs around the door, at the nest Dean piled up, at the scratch marks on the rock walls. He moves with a lazy kind of grace, flexing his claws into the dirt with each step.

This panther is so alien to him, so different from the Cas he knows that he wouldn’t believe it was his mate if he couldn’t smell it himself. But here he is, sitting in an empty room with a panther he doesn’t know, their mating bond still hanging limp between them.

Dean’s chest aches, his tail twitching anxiously on the floor. Castiel is still so far away from him, and he doesn’t know how to fix it.

***

Dean wakes up out of a light, fitful sleep to a quiet knock on the door. Castiel is still snoozing in his nest on the opposite side of the room. Sam’s voice drifts through the door.

“Dean? Can you…can we talk? For a minute?”

Castiel cracks open an eye and peers at him, obviously annoyed by the interruption if his twitching tail is anything to go by. Dean shifts back to his human form, pulling his clothes on. Castiel watches with mild interest as he does, claws flexing against one of the pillows.

“I’ll be right back,” he says, hearing the exhaustion in his own voice. He’d been hoping to get some sleep with Cas nearby, but that didn’t really happen. He’s just been tossing and turning while Castiel lazily napped the day away, seven empty feet between them.

Dean slips quietly out the door, clicking it shut behind him. The look on Sam’s face is pure pity and sadness, and Dean has to brace himself for whatever his brother is about to say.

“Spit it out, Sammy.”

Sam takes a deep breath, hitting Dean with the full-strength puppy eyes.

“Anna and Kevin both shifted back, a little while ago. Anna isn’t speaking yet, but Kevin is. Detached, no sentences, but verbal. Mom and Dad are working on him still. Some of the Host are bringing Sariel down to see Anna, so we think she’ll start talking soon. Hopefully.”
Dean feels sick to his stomach. “Josiah?”

“Not shifted, but apparently acting himself,” Sam shifts on his feet, running a hand through his hair. “We think he’ll be back to normal, when he does manage a shift. His drugs might not have worked their way all the way out yet.”

Dean nods. He wants to be relieved that the others are recovering, because this means they’ll get them back. Eventually. And then there’s Cas.

“Castiel, is he…?” Sam trails off. Dean just shakes his head.

“I don’t know what to do.”

Sam drags him in for a hug, clapping him on the back and squeezing him harder than is comfortable. Dean knows it’s meant to be comforting, and normally it would be, but he can’t sink into it like he usually would.

“His dose of whatever Crowley gave them, it’s probably the freshest,” Sam mumbles. Dean sniffs, manages a half-hearted nod. “It’ll work its way out. Maybe he just needs more time.”

Yeah. More time.

***

Dean goes and gets some food before going back into the room with Castiel. Neither of them has eaten, so. He thinks maybe it will help. He’d like to bring something bigger, like elk or deer, but chicken is all they have in the kitchen so he goes with that.

He doesn’t bother trying to feed it to Castiel, instead laying the plate down for the panther to pick at himself. He seems relatively pleased, if not a little suspicious, with the offering, finishing it off in minutes before padding back over to stretch out in his nest of blankets and pillows.

“Hungry, huh?”

The panther peers at him still, rolling onto his side and stretching one paw out towards him, claws flexing and unflexing lazily.

“I dunno what you want, man,” Dean sighs, picking at his own food. Castiel yawns wide, his eyelids heavy and only half open. And then he starts to purr.

Dean’s resolve breaks. He shoves his food to the side and drops his head into his hands, his breathing shivering as his entire body shakes.

“God fucking dammit, Cas,” his voice cracks, frustration and sadness racing through him. The wolf whines and buries its muzzle under its paws, the low rumble hitting them both where it hurts.

He’s heard Cas purr like this before. It’s drawing him in, urging him and his wolf to hold their cat close, curl around him with warmth and the scent of mate.

“Not even Cas,” he laughs humorlessly, tugging sharply on his own hair. “You’re not even…”

The purring continues.

“Fuck,” he growls, stomping across the room. The panther rolls onto its back, pawing at Dean’s chest. The purring deepens as he lays down, burying his fingers in the soft black fur. The wolf curls up, but it feels uneasy and restless. Guilt wracks Dean’s bones, because he should have prevented
this. Should have kept Cas safe.

“Please come back, Cas,” he says softly, staring into the panther’s ice blue eyes. Eyes that should be familiar, and are so not that Dean’s brain can’t process it. “Please.”

The panther just shifts a little closer and closes its eyes, the purr slowly dying out as it drifts off to sleep.

***

The pattern repeats the next day. Sam shows up, updates Dean on everybody else, asks after Cas. Josiah is actually faring the best out of the four of them, which Dean has to guess is because he’s submissive. Apparently, according to Lucifer, his animal was never all that prevalent anyway. Kevin is finding his way back into the Pack, little by little. He’s having moments, here and there, when he slips back into his animal, but they’re becoming fewer and farther between. Anna is acting sort of like herself, caring for Sariel, but she hasn’t spoken yet.

That’s as many details as Dean can really handle right now.

Castiel still hasn’t shifted, still hasn’t fallen back into his human self. The panther plays with Dean and sleeps next to him at night, but he’s so clearly animal that there’s no way Dean could believe that it’s really Cas in there. The cat has decided that yes, Dean is its mate, and yes, it likes this wolf, but that’s about it.

It fucking hurts.

The only upside, if he can even call it that, is the time Dean spends with the panther. Not Cas in his animal form, but Cas’ animal. He knows that Cas knows his wolf, and now he can say the same.

The panther is playful, eager to test its strength against Dean’s in impromptu wrestling matches. It also sucks at keeping its claws retracted during said wrestling matches, but it always tries to lick Dean’s wounds clean afterwards. Dean complains and pushes his damp nose away, because no way he admits that he likes the attention. It’s also way more submissive than Cas is, which is weird as hell to adjust to. Mostly because he’s pretty sure that neither Cas nor his animal are actually submissive in the slightest. It feels more like the panther is playing the part of innocent little submissive, teasing Dean with his exposed throat and the soft underside of his belly.

Dean’s alpha enjoys the trust that the cat is displaying, but that’s about it. The panther doesn’t really feel like his mate. Not right now. And the wolf misses their fierce, wild cat.

It’s only when his cat is asleep that Dean lets it show just how much the whole thing is affecting him. During the hours that Castiel is awake Dean keeps his chin up, shoulders back, and acts like nothing is wrong. When the panther sleeps, Dean lets the walls crumble, and then puts himself back together.

***

On the fourth day, Michael breaks the routine and comes to see him. He waits outside the door, since they found out the day before that Castiel’s acceptance of Dean doesn’t translate to other shifters, especially other alphas. He’d nearly torn Sam’s nose clean off. Dean runs a hand over Castiel’s fur and slips outside, sighing heavily when the panther completely ignores the touch.

“Michael,” he nods at the leopard, pulling the door closed behind him. Michael’s flick over to the door, then meet Dean’s gaze again.
“How is he?” he murmurs, his voice even and calm.

Dean shrugs. “The same.”

For a few seconds Michael just gazes at him, the pity in his eyes pissing Dean off more than anything else.

“As I’m sure Castiel discussed with you,” he continues after a few seconds, speaking slowly and cautiously. “We have methods for restoring rogues.”

“He isn’t rogue,” Dean jumps in, crossing his arms in frustration. “He’s under control.”

Michael nods serenely, still studying Dean’s face. “Be that as it may. We believe the process will still work.”

“Uh huh,” Dean grunts, running his tongue along his bottom teeth. “Why are you only telling me this now?”

So quickly he barely sees it, Michael drops his eyes to his feet before looking back into Dean’s eyes.

“Gadreel,” he says, voice even lower than before. “You know him?”


“This…mysterious past. Castiel never told you?”

“Didn’t get the chance.” Suspicion rolls through Dean in waves. “You gonna spill?”

A muscle in Michael’s jaw ticks. “Understand, Dean, that our decision to migrate here was one made in the best interest of the Host. We were meant to be safer here.”

Dean almost doesn’t want to ask. But if it concerns Cas… “Safer from what?”

“The forest we used to call home, it had been ours for many years,” Michael says through an exhale, the tension apparent in his body. “My father, he was Arch leader before me. Each year the humans got more bold, and only recently they got too close. We thought we were safe within our borders, but this turned out not to be the case.”

Dean steps instinctively closer to the door that Cas is currently held behind. He feels sick at the idea of how much these leopards have suffered at the hands of humans.

“What did they do?” he asks, voice raspy. He doesn’t want to know, but he has to hear it.

“These humans,” Michael continues with some difficulty, clearly as unhappy about this topic of conversation as Dean is, “they don’t understand us. Nor have they tried to. They think of us like wild animals, like pets or toys for them to play with.”

A thinly veiled growl sneaks out at those words, Michael’s rage apparent.

“Some of them, they had their fun with Gadreel and his mate. His name was Abner; he was a kind soul.” Michael pauses and looks down at the floor, taking several long, deep breaths as he recovers his composure. “They hurt him, and forced Gadreel to watch. All for the amusement of watching an alpha melt down while his mate is broken in front of his eyes.”

Dean clenches his fists and stifles a growl. Every time he thinks he can’t be any more sickened by these humans, they prove him wrong.
“Tell me that you got him back.”

“We did,” Michael says flatly, finally able to meet Dean’s eyes again. “Too late. Neither of them truly recovered. Gadreel was already lost to his animal, and it took much to bring him back.”

“You reset him,” Dean grunts. “Now he’s fine. What’s this got to do with Cas?”

“Put the pieces together, Dean,” Michael sighs, sounding more put upon than ever. “Have you seen Abner here? Met Gadreel’s mate?”

Oh. “No, I haven’t. He didn’t migrate with the rest?”

Michael shakes his head slowly. “No, he didn’t. He was unable to reconcile who Gadreel was, with who he became. After.”

“After the humans?” Dean asks hopefully. He doesn’t want this to be about the reset. Because if the reset could get Cas back, with these consequences…Dean doesn’t know if he could do it. And he would have to.

“After the reset. We shut down the rogue, yes, but we shut everything else down, too. Gadreel is just a blank slate, now.” Michael’s shoulders sag a little, and Dean imagines the weight that must be on them at the moment. “Abner was unable to live with it. He needed more than Gadreel’s physical presence. To him, it was preferable to have nothing than half of something.”

“Gadreel, did he…” Dean steels himself. “I mean, he remembers they’re mates, right?”

Michael shrugs. “He remembers. He doesn’t seem to care. Abner’s absence from our pack doesn’t bother him.”

Dean is silent. He pinches the bridge of his nose and squeezes his eyes shut, willing all of the shit from the past few days, weeks, whatever, to just melt away.

“I’m giving you the choice, Dean.”

He doesn’t look up at Michael. Won’t or can’t, he’s not sure.

“How the fuck can you put that decision on me?” he speaks quietly, half to Michael and half to himself.

“One of us decides,” Michael says firmly. “But know this. On that night, during the moon, I didn’t feel Anna. I cannot speak to what that says about our bond, but we have been mated for years and I love her with everything I have. And still your bond to Castiel, young as it is, is more profound.”

Dean forces himself to meet Michael’s gaze. “What are you saying? Use the power of love to bring him back?”

The corner of Michael’s mouth twitches. “If you can’t, no one can. Just think about it.”

***

The next day, Dean takes Castiel out of the den. The other leopards have started moving back to their homes in the forest, apparently confident that things are safe again. He knows that both the Council and the Arch have met with the human embassy, so something good must have happened in that meeting. He doesn’t really care to find out.

A small part of him worries that the panther will just take off once they get outside. There’s nothing
really holding him here, except maybe Dean himself. Even that is kind of a stretch. So Dean holds his breath as they exit the Bunker, trying to decide if he should give chase if Castiel does decide to make a break for it.

Luckily, it isn’t a decision that Dean has to make. Castiel immediately climbs up into the nearest tree, then stops and waits like he wants Dean to follow. Dean isn’t sure where the panther is going to take him, but he can sure as hell find out.

Castiel wanders through the forest lazily, chasing a few birds and squirrels here and there. Sometimes he disappears into the leaves higher up in the trees, but Dean can always hear him rustling around up there. It’s kind of amusing to watch, and for a little while Dean can forget that it’s not really Cas up there.

Really, Dean shouldn’t be surprised when they arrive at the treehouse. After days of being cooped up in the den, the panther probably wants nothing more than to relax in open spaces. Castiel slips in one of the windows, and Dean begins the slow climb up without the ladder.

Being up in the treehouse hurts. Their mingled scents are all over everything, not fresh by any means but sort of melded with all of the surfaces. This place is undeniably theirs, and it feels like a kind of betrayal to be here sort of... without Cas. The panther, on the other hand, seems unfazed. It’s already curled up in the nest, right in a wide patch of sunlight coming in through the skylight. Dean shakes his head.

“We just came out here so you could nap some more?” he sighs, flopping down into the cushions on his stomach. The scent of mates absolutely assaults his nose. He growls unhappily.

The panther huffs and stands up, climbing easily out the window and into the trees. Dean doesn’t follow him. He drops his head into his hands for what feels like the 200th time today and lets out the breath that he’s been holding for hours.

Dean knows what his decision is, what he needs to tell Michael. He knows that he came out here as a last hurrah with Castiel, a last hope that something might trigger and bring his mate back. But Cas is only more distant, if possible. And Dean can’t keep denying it forever. He’s failed, and he doesn’t know what else to do. How else to fix this.

So he’ll spend one more night with his mate, out here in their treehouse together. One last night, before handing him over to the Host to be reset. He’ll say goodbye to the panther, apologize for not being what Castiel needed or deserved.

He won’t say goodbye to Cas. He already said bye to his Cas. One tiny little wave, before he left for the city. That was it.

And now Dean has to live with that.
Chapter 38

Chapter Summary

“You smelled upset.”

Chapter Notes

So if I were to apologize for a chapter, it would've been the last one. Know what that means? You guys MADE ITTTTTT. (through the angst, that is.)

This chapter was challenging and also just very enjoyable for me to write, and I hope that translates across to you guys. Thank you for those of you that stuck it out with me, really and truly. I have so much disgusting fluff for you, I promise.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Dean falls asleep while the panther is still outside, the sun barely down below the horizon. His rest is fitful and light for a while, and only when the sky starts to lighten does he sink into the first real sleep he’s gotten in more than a few days. It’s absolutely blissful.

And when he wakes up, it’s to bare skin under his hands and fingers in his hair. Dean groans happily, tightening his arms and nuzzling the familiar collarbone of his mate. He inhales deeply and fits his teeth over the jut of bone, growling low in his throat.

He’s missed waking up like this, with an armful of Cas. Dean’s hands slide slowly, worshipfully down Cas’ spine. His cat starts to purr. Quiet and slow, like everything is exactly right in the world.

For about…two seconds, that is. Then Dean wakes up all the way, the reality of his situation slamming into him like a freight train.

“What the fuck,” Dean mumbles as he jerks away from the warm body next to him, his heart automatically racing. It’s definitely Castiel, a very human, very naked Castiel. “Are you…?”

Castiel stretches and groans, cat-like as ever, then slowly blinks open deep blue eyes. Dean knows right away.

“You’re not,” he slumps, not bothering to conceal the hurt and disappointment on his face. “You’re not Cas.”

He’d been this close. His body is reeling from the false closeness that he’d woken up to, and the wolf is staring at this human next to them with confusion in its eyes.

Castiel sits up slowly, a soft blanket falling gracefully across his bare hips. He holds his spine straighter than Cas does, though he seems to have the same lack of interest in personal space. He tilts his head carefully, studying every millimeter of Dean’s face.

“See somethin’ you like?” Dean tries to joke, but it falls flat. Those unfamiliar eyes peer right into
him, and Dean doesn’t like how easily they see through him. “Guess you don’t talk, huh?”

Castiel rolls his eyes dramatically.

“Do not belittle my intelligence, little wolf.”

Dean feels his jaw hit the floor. “You—what? I—um? Just, you—is he, um, in there?”

Blue eyes stare through him some more. Dean wants to cower under the gaze, but he doesn’t.

“Castiel is not here,” he says, like the answer is somehow obvious. “At the moment.”

“And you are…what? His panther?”

Castiel hums and nods, picking up Dean’s hand from where it rests between them and toying with his fingers. Dean lets it happen.

“You find this hard to believe.” It isn’t a question.

Dean shrugs, trying to play off his surprise. *Hell* yeah he finds it hard to believe, even if he should’ve seen this coming. “Didn’t expect you to talk.”

“Your wolf, he speaks. We have heard him.” The panther is staring at the back of his palm now, tracing the veins with the tips of his fingers. “Do you expect less of me?”

Dean curses inwardly. He isn’t getting this off to a good start, that’s for sure. But this is…weird as hell. And he’s still reeling, at least a little bit. He’s got no idea how Cas managed to handle his wolf with such ease. Talking directly to the animal is unnerving at best.

“Course not. Just…didn’t know.”

Castiel hums and scoots closer. Dean can feel the heat from his bare skin.

“You’re not nuts,” Dean mumbles absently, mesmerized by the calm and gentle way that Castiel is handling him. Not that he needs it, he just doesn’t get it. He’s grown up knowing that the beast, without a human conscience, it would kill you if it got the chance. And maybe it’s because they’re mates, but there’s something about this Castiel sitting in front of him that seems so starkly different than any rogues he’s come across. “You’re not rogue.”

Castiel quirks an eyebrow, and Dean swears that’s a smile hiding in the corner of his mouth. “You knew that already. Would that make this easier, if I was?”

“Probably,” Dean huffs, not bothering with a lie. He lifts the hand that Castiel is toying with slowly, cupping the corner of his jaw and forcing his gaze up. Castiel looks easily, a playfulness in his blue irises that almost brings a smile to Dean’s face. His hair is mussed with sleep and his cheeks are pink, his scent warm and content.

But it’s the soft way that Castiel gazes at him that almost breaks Dean’s resolve. He wants to cradle his cat in his arms and kiss away his own misery.

“I’m supposed to let them reset you,” Dean says before he can stop himself. Castiel’s face falls and his lips tug down into a small frown. Dean wants to take it back. Instead he lets his thumb slide across Castiel’s cheek bone.

“Supposed to?”
“Have to.”

“I see,” Castiel sighs, covering the back of Dean’s palm with his own. “You think that will fix us?”

Dean shrugs. “Gotta try, right?”

Castiel studies his face for a few seconds. “Do you? Have to try?”

“What else am I gonna do, C—” Dean cuts himself off. Not Cas. “What else can I do?”

Castiel is quiet for a moment or two. He presses impossibly closer to Dean, rests their foreheads together. Dean lets his eyelids fall closed and listens to the rasp of Castiel’s voice. He can almost pretend that it’s actually Cas, and not just his panther.

“You can let us live, like this,” Castiel suggests, though his voice remains perfectly neutral. “You know me, wolf.”

He brings his other hand up to Castiel’s jaw. The scent around him is muddling his thoughts, and has already dazed the wolf enough that he’s practically useless.

“No, I don’t. You’re not Cas,” Dean repeats, though whether he’s convincing the panther or himself, he doesn’t know. Doesn’t care.

“Aren’t I, though?”

Dean’s stomach does an uncomfortable flip flop, clenching and unclenching. It’s getting harder by the second to hold his ground.

“No,” Dean says through gritted teeth. “You aren’t. You’re a part of him, sure. But I want all of him. Every bit. I need him.” Dean presses a kiss to Castiel’s forehead, lingering a second longer than he needs to before pulling back to meet his gaze. It feels odd, but he tries to reach into those blue eyes, like he’s speaking through the panther. “You hear me, Cas? This isn’t you. I need you, baby. So you gotta come back to me.”

The panther tilts its chin back, its pink lips parting gently as he exhales a tiny puff of breath. Castiel blinks slowly at him a few times before he speaks, waiting long enough that Dean isn’t sure he’s going to respond at all.

“Castiel isn’t ready yet,” he says, and the crack in Dean’s chest splinters further. “He might never be.”

Dean flinches at his words. The word never ricochets around his mind like crazy. He doesn’t let it settle, doesn’t let the thought take root.

“Why’d you shift back, then?” Dean grunts, dropping his hand. The closeness is driving him nuts, the need on Castiel’s face that he’s sure is mirrored in his own.

Castiel tilts his head in confusion, again staring at Dean like the answer is obvious. He pushes both hands through Dean’s hair, dragging his fingers along his nape slowly.

“You smelled upset.”

Every thought in Dean’s brain goes full-stop. It feels like physically throwing the brakes on himself, like his feet are skidding forward on the floor.

“I what?”
“You are my mate,” Castiel sighs, hardly resisting an eye roll. “And you have not been sleeping. Did you sleep well?”

Dean doesn’t want to admit it but…yeah. He fucking slept like a baby.

“So you can…I mean, you can control it. Your shift. So the drugs, Crowley’s drugs, they wore off,” Dean guesses, excitement and nervousness tingling his spine.

Castiel nods carefully, pressing his lips into a thin line. Dean pushes further.

“They’re gone, how come Cas isn’t back? I mean everybody else—”

“Is different,” the panther snaps, growling low in his throat. “Two submissives, a quiet omega. We are neither of those things.”

A lightbulb flickers in Dean’s head. He pushes rough fingers through Castiel’s hair, tugs gently at the sensitive nape, holds onto his jaw so that the panther has to look at him. His streak of alpha is glaringly wide, but he doesn’t give a shit. And judging by the way that the cat leans into the touch, he doesn’t mind being handled a little bit either.

“You’re not keeping him quiet,” he speaks gently, at odds with the roughness of his hands. “You don’t know why he’s not awake either.”

The panther holds his gaze, even when it’s clear that he wants to do otherwise. Though from his furrowed eyebrows and the tight press of his lips, it’s more to do with shame than dominance.

“How would you feel, if your wolf went silent?”

The wolf in question whines unhappily. Dean can’t imagine his wolf not being around, even in those moments when he wishes it was quieter.

“Think it’d be lonely,” Dean murmurs quietly, stroking Castiel’s cheek. The panther just hums, nuzzling Dean’s palm and letting the topic shift to something lighter.

“So tell me, wolf. Did you sleep well?”

Dean studies Castiel’s face, trying to decipher everything he sees. The barely-there expressions are familiar, but the panther is less expressive even than Cas is.

“I did,” he nods. “Yeah.”

A tiny smile pulls on Castiel’s lips, his blue eyes lighting up. “Good. It is still early…” he trails off, nestling back down into the pillows. “We have time yet.”

Dean briefly thinks that he should say no. Instead he says “screw it” and curls up next to Castiel. He keeps his hands mostly to himself, only letting his arm wrap around Castiel’s waist when the panther puts it there himself. Dean exhales and closes his eyes, leaving Castiel to his business of walking his fingers across all of the freckles on Dean’s nose.

“Maybe I can wait,” he mumbles, already drifting off to sleep. The debt he built up by not sleeping for the past few days is catching up to him rapidly. “Give ‘im more time.”

The panther hums, sounding pleased. “Thank you, little wolf.”

***
They nap the day away, they listen to the forest critters making noise in the trees. They don’t talk a lot, because it turns out the panther doesn’t actually care much for verbal speech. But he says a lot, in other ways. Like how he stays human, how he stays close to Dean without being too close. How he traces the veins on the backs of Dean’s palms, how he starts to purr when the sun tumbles in through the windows and falls across his already tanned shoulders.

The silence is unnerving for a while, until Dean decides that it isn’t silence. Their breathing oddly in sync, the rustling of leaves, the shifting of blankets against skin. They’re existing beside each other, and it isn’t what he’s used to but it’s better than being alone.

When the sun starts to fade into the horizon, they head back to the bunker.

Dean tries to think of something he can say to his pack, some explanation, but comes up with nothing. He’ll have to explain Cas’ state, somehow, but…yeah. He’ll wing it.

“So, uh, try to act normal,” Dean says when they arrive at the Bunker, lingering outside the main entrance. Castiel cocks an eyebrow at him in question. “You know, no gettin’ aggressive at other wolves ‘cause they’re not me.”

The panther glares at him.

“Don’t look at me like that,” Dean rolls his eyes. “You did that exact thing like, two days ago.”

Castiel huffs and ignores Dean’s comments. “I’m hungry.”

“Sure,” Dean nods, still mildly worried about letting Castiel near the rest of the Pack. “Food. Let’s go.”

There aren’t a lot of shifters in the halls as they walk through the den, which Dean figures is because of the late-ish hour. The dining hall isn’t so fortunately unoccupied, and the entire place falls silent as soon as they step through the doorway. Dean makes eye contact and nods at a few people, like Sam and Jo and Charlie, but otherwise leads Castiel over to get some grub. Thankfully none of them are stupid enough to approach. The panther’s nostrils are flared and he smells unhappy, but he’s quiet and seems to be ignoring everyone else. Dean keeps a hand low on his back just in case.

Once they have some food they settle at a table in the far corner, as far from everyone else as they can get. Castiel sits a little too close to him, and Dean ends up with an arm around his shoulders more out of necessity than anything else.

“You okay?” he murmurs, staring intently at Castiel in search of any signs that he’s going to snap.

The panther nods. “The scents in this room are overwhelming. How you wolves live here is beyond me.”

Dean snorts. Of course. Cas always hated the lack of air too.

“Sorry, man. Can’t help you with that.”

“Yes, well—” the panther freezes, his head snapping up and staring at something across the room. A low, rumbling growl emanates from his chest. Dean follows his gaze, his eyes falling on a familiar beta who is less than twenty feet away.

“Cool it,” Dean growls under his breath. The panther ignores him. “Cas—”

“Hello, Dean,” Bela says with a sultry smile, pulling her hair over her shoulder and all but flaunting
her scent at him. Earthy and deep, her desire obvious to anyone with a nose. Castiel’s shoulders tense even further.

“Beta,” Castiel growls at her, aggression apparent in both his scent and body language. “I know your scent.”

Dean curses. Oh shit. Oh shit. Castiel does know her scent, probably remembers it vividly since Dean was absolutely coated in it. Bela just grins at him.

“Oh? You like what you smell?”

Castiel’s glare deepens, and Dean jumps in before she can make this any worse than it already is.

“Bela, now’s really not—” he barely gets the words out before Castiel is on his feet, head tilted predatorily.

“You think you would have him for yourself,” the panther hums, his voice part amused and part full-on possessive alpha. For an omega, he pulls it off well. “Let me be clear. Dean is my mate. Not yours. Mine. You put your hands on him again, I’ll peel the skin off your bones with my teeth.”

Dean chokes on his food.

“Touchy,” she sneers, but Castiel seems unconcerned. He reaches a hand down and tugs on the collar of Dean’s shirt, pulling it to the side until his now-healed mating bite is showing.

“The fuck,” Dean grumbles, rolling his eyes. Still, he lets Castiel handle him all he wants. If it stops the panther from leaping across the table and tearing Bela to shreds, then he can deal.

“Mine,” he repeats. “Test me, I dare you. It’s been a while since I last dismembered a body. Some practice might do me good.”

Bela looks to Dean again, her eyebrows raised and an offended look on her face. Dean just shrugs helplessly, curling an arm around Castiel’s waist and doing his best to tug him back down.

“I kind of like him better like this,” Bela says with a predatory smile that Dean doesn’t like at all, tossing her hair over her shoulder. “Still if you get tired of being his catnip…” she turns to walk away, purposefully swaying her hips as she goes.

Castiel is still growling when she gets out of earshot, pushing away from Dean. His side feels cold where Castiel was pressed against it a moment earlier.

“What, are you mad now?” he sighs, rubbing at the back of his neck. The panther shoots him a withering glare.

“Need to leave this room,” Castiel says through gritted teeth. “Now.”

Dean doesn’t argue with him. “Yeah, okay. C’mon.”

And if he thinks things will calm down once they’re back in Dean’s room, away from all the other scents in the Bunker, then he’s wrong. The panther automatically tenses before the door is even shut, tucking himself into the far corner and dropping his head into his hands.

“Castiel?” Dean panics, immediately going to his side. The panther is shivering violently. “Kitten, talk to me, tell me what’s wrong.”

With his back still pressed against the wall Castiel slides down to the floor, curling even further into
“Don’t call me that,” Castiel snarls. Dean flinches.

“Sorry. Just, tell me what’s wrong.”

“Castiel does not like that beta,” he mumbles under his breath, fingers gripping tight to his hair. “And the smell. The smell. Our smell, here. Our wolf, and us.”

Dean’s brain tries its best to keep up. There’d been residual scents at the treehouse, enough to upset Dean’s emotional balance. And yeah, now that Dean’s paying attention the scent is stronger here. Less fresh air moving around, fewer days since he and Cas were here together. So maybe the treehouse was faint enough for the panther not to feel it, feel the hurt that the scent brings along with it. Maybe…

A curling warmth spreads across the back of Dean’s mind, something he hasn’t felt in days. But he’d recognize the feeling of their mating bond anywhere, faint as it is. The wolf howls triumphantly, bounding around and tugging at the bond as it slowly comes back to life.

“Cas?” Dean says breathlessly, collapsing onto the floor in front of Castiel’s quivering form. “Cas, are you—”

“Too much,” he snarls, his voice echoing double in Dean’s ears. He mumbles something else, but it gets lost beneath his hands.

“Cas, look at me,” Dean practically begs, tugging at Castiel’s fingers, trying to pry his palms away from his cheeks. The scent of fear and panic spreads in the room, but Dean grits his teeth against it and keeps pushing. Cas is right there, so close to the surface that Dean can feel it. “Kitten, it’s me, open your eyes, please look at me.”

Dean wraps his fingers gently around Castiel’s wrists, sending his thank you’s to every god out there when Castiel stops resisting. Dean pulls his shaking hands away from his cheeks, settles them on his own flushed skin. Leaving them there he brings his palms up to cup Castiel’s jaw, finally meeting his gaze. Castiel’s blue eyes are wide and wild, his breathing too fast and his cheeks too pink.

“That smell, it’s us,” Dean urges, speaking low and as soothing as he can manage. “Remember, being here together? Didn’t get nearly enough nights with you, Cas,” Dean chuckles, trying for a smile and hoping he lands in the vicinity. “So you gotta come back. You owe me a surprise vacation, and I can’t go without you. So you just—you gotta. God I love you so fucking much, you can’t leave me, Cas. Please.”

Owlsh blue eyes stare right into him as the words tumble out, and Dean has no clue what he’s even saying anymore but if he can just say the right thing then maybe that’d bring Cas back. Maybe that’d bring all of this finally to an end. Dean shivers when Castiel’s fingers shift against his cheek, rubbing against the stubble growing in there. He licks his lips slowly, and the warmth of the bond brightens.

Dean wills the desperation out of his voice, speaks as calmly as he can muster.

“You are mine, and I am yours. And we get through this, together.”

Castiel’s eyes widen, his chin tilting in the barest of nods.

“I am yours, and you are mine,” he repeats, understanding smoothing his features.

Dean grins, his eyes burning with unshed tears. “Yeah, kitten. Forever.”
They hold each other’s gazes for a handful more seconds before the dam bursts open. Dean doesn’t even realize he’s holding his breath.

“Dean?” Castiel says quietly, voice raspy and rough. His eyes look a little glazed, but are clearing up with each passing moment.

Dean exhales. “Cas.”

Cas practically launches himself into Dean’s arms, wrapping arms tight around his neck and waist, burying his nose in Dean’s throat. Dean holds him equally as tight, and he’ll deny the tears until the day he dies. Cas is still shaking, but not nearly as much as before.

“Tell me this is real,” he breathes against Dean’s neck. “Tell me you’re here.”

“I’m here,” Dean confirms, voice equally as muffled by their proximity. “You’re here. You’re *home*, Cas.”

Chapter End Notes

For anyone that cares, the panther here speaks in first person (instead of saying "we" like the wolf does) because as it is speaking with Dean, Cas isn’t really present. The wolf says "we" referencing itself and Dean, but the panther doesn’t reference itself and Cas because Cas isn’t there, not til the end. So. The More You Know.
Chapter 39

Chapter Summary

“So someone is feeling better.”

Chapter Notes

Sorry this is late guys! For those of you who know me on tumblr, I was at ChiCon this weekend having the time of my life and I didn't have my computer. So thank you for your patience! And I apologize that this isn't super exciting, hopefully some mild hurt/comfort makes up for it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They don’t move or speak for a while. Sitting on the floor, curled together, holding each other so tight that their muscles ache seems as good a plan as any. Dean is overwhelmed with relief, determined to do everything in his power to make Cas feel safe again.

It isn’t easy. The stench of fear is permeating the space, only mildly soothed by Dean’s murmured words and gentle hands on Cas’ spine.

“How long?” Cas asks quietly, voice rough with emotion. He keeps his face buried against Dean’s neck, and Dean doesn’t push him to move.

“Couple days,” he says gently, intentionally vague with the timing. Cas is back now, so it doesn’t really matter.

“Everyone else?” Cas asks, hesitation evident in his voice.

“Last I heard they were fine,” Dean sighs, squeezing him a little tighter. “Been a little preoccupied though.”

He feels Cas nod against his neck, but he doesn’t say anything else. Dean wishes he had a better idea of what he could do, how he could help.

“Do you want to sleep?” Dean speaks into Cas’ ear, hoping to inspire him to move.

Cas goes automatically tense in his arms, his limbs tightening all at once around Dean’s torso and a tiny whimper coming out muffled against Dean’s throat.

“I can’t sleep,” he says, so quietly that Dean can barely hear him. “I can’t, I can’t—”

“Hey, hey,” Dean shushes him, rocking in place to try and soothe the panic he’s caused. “It’s okay. You don’t have to sleep. We’ll stay up.”

Cas nods again against his neck. Dean exhales and closes his eyes, trying to steel himself. His fingers against Cas’ scalp seem to help, though not by much.
“Let’s just climb in bed,” Dean suggests, eager to get Cas off the cold floor of his room. “We won’t sleep, we’ll stay up together. Promise.”

It takes a few moments for Cas to nod that time, his agreement hesitant. Still, he lets Dean untangle him enough so that they can both stand up and shuffle over to the bed. Dean catches a glimpse of his face for the first time, flushed cheeks and watery eyes burrowing an ache deeper and deeper in Dean’s chest.

Unsurprisingly, Cas tucks himself in as close as he can get to Dean as soon as they’re under the blankets. Dean ends up sort of half on top of him, but Cas seems relatively satisfied with that. Dean pulls the blanket tight around their shoulders, trapping the rest of the world out with the cold. He murmurs soothing words against Cas’ skin, every combination of “you’re safe, I’m here, I love you, they can’t hurt you, you’re home, I got you” that he can come up with. It’s all nonsense, but it keeps Cas’ breathing even and the shivering at bay.

And they don’t sleep. The wolf sinks into the warmth of their bond to keep watch, and Dean listens to the faster-than-normal beating of Cas’ heart, the rattling of air in his lungs. He scents him with every breath, parsing through the tendrils of fear that infect each inhale.

“I’m sorry, Cas,” Dean whispers finally, letting the heavy guilt seep out before he overflows. “I never should have let this happen. You never should’ve gone through this. I should have—”

“Dean,” Cas exhales, and Dean practically whimpers when he finally pulls back and lets their eyes meet. After days of looking into those wide, blue eyes and seeing nothing, the relief of finding familiarity there is overwhelming. “You think this is your fault?’

Dean knows where this is going. He says yes, and Cas tries to convince him otherwise. Tries to tell him that it isn’t his fault for not being there when his mate needed him, that he isn’t the one that Crowley was trying to piss off by taking Cas in the first place. And Dean doesn’t want to hear it. Doesn’t want Cas making excuses for him. He knows this is on him. And right now, ain’t about Dean, it’s about bringing Cas back from the brink. Dean reigns his guilt back in, shoves it away for another time.

“Doesn’t matter,” he insists, stroking a thumb against Cas’ temple. “Do you want to talk about it?”

Cas’ gaze drags over Dean’s face for a few seconds, like he’s drinking it in slowly. His tongue peeks out slowly to wet his lips, and he gives a tiny shake of his head. Dean just nods in response, not sure what else he can do.

“Okay. I’ll listen, when you’re ready.”

Cas doesn’t answer, instead choosing to tuck his face in against Dean’s throat once again. Where his scent is strongest, probably.

And they stay like that. For a long time. Dean doesn’t sleep, and neither does Cas. They don’t talk, the only sounds their combined breathing and the occasional rumble from Dean’s chest when somebody walks too close to his door. Dean only gets up to get them food, and leaving Cas alone is just about the hardest thing he’s ever done. It’s during one of these food runs that Dean finally lets Sam in on what’s happening, and only because Sam ambushed him in the main hall. Dean doesn’t ask about anybody else, because Sam would make him listen if he needed to.

Those first forty-eight hours or so are the hardest. Cas is back, but he definitely isn’t himself. There are ghosts in his eyes that he doesn’t want to talk about, and he hasn’t slept a wink since that day in the treehouse with his panther. The dark bruises under his eyes are getting worse, and his skin is so
pale it makes Dean’s stomach twist. Dean keeps hoping he’ll give in to the exhaustion, but by the third night, he’s still fighting sleep.

“Cas…” Dean murmurs against the back of his neck, curling closer around his back. “You need to sleep.”

Cas tenses automatically. “No.”

“Baby, look at me,” Dean says sadly, shifting away from him and rolling Cas onto his back to he can meet his gaze. “I know you don’t want to. I get it. But exhaustion only makes this worse. Maybe you’d feel better after some sleep.”

Cas peers across the bed at him, breathing just a touch too fast and his eyes brimming with nervousness.

“Dean…” he trails off, his voice still scratchy from disuse.

Dean reaches across the space between them to cup his jaw, studying Cas’ face. “What are you afraid of?”

Cas’ face crumples, his lips pulling down into a frown and his eyebrows furrowed over fearful blue eyes. “Last time I went to sleep, in that cage, I didn’t wake up. If I sleep now I might not wake up again and I can’t, I can’t—”

“Hey, breathe,” Dean shushes him, pulling him close and stroking his dark hair. “That was different. You’re with me now, and I’ll be here when you wake up. Because you will wake up.”

“You don’t know that,” Cas whispers, his eyes still wide and afraid.

Dean smiles at him, stroking his temple and pressing a kiss to his forehead. “Course I do. You’re mine, and I’m not losing you again.”

Cas’ gaze softens fractionally, his hand lying flat on Dean’s chest. “You are ridiculous.”

“That’s why you love me,” Dean shrugs, a tiny knot in his stomach unclenching. “Just breathe with me.”

He places a hand on top of Cas’, keeping his palm flat against Dean’s chest. Cas nods, taking a deep inhale on pace with Dean, then a slow exhale.

“Good,” Dean nods, winding an arm around Cas’ shoulders. Cas removes his hand and lays his cheek on Dean’s chest.

Inhale, 2, 3, 4…exhale, 2, 3, 4…inhale, 2, 3, 4, 5…exhale, 2, 3, 4, 5…

Slowly, Cas’ breathing evens out. Their breaths fall out of sync, but Dean doesn’t mind. Cas’ body is heavy against his own. Tension bleeds out of Dean’s body, sleep finally, finally drawing him under.

***

Dean wakes up to Cas’ terrified whimpers in the bed next to him. His cat is curled into himself, away from Dean, mumbling under his breath.

“Don’t, don’t, Rachel…” Another whimper, this one pained and mournful. “Please help… Dean,” he whines, “Dean, I, n—no, no no…”
The sound of his name spurs Dean into action, hands flying to Cas’ shoulders to shake him awake and out of his nightmare.

“C’mon, Cas,” Dean urges, his voice practically begging. “Wake up, come back…”

Cas’ eyes fly open, and for a split second all Dean sees is the panther. Wild, snarling, and 100% animal, teeth bared in a feline growl. Then it’s gone, replaced by desperate relief, blue eyes familiar once again. Cas clings to him, breathing heavy in his arms.

“Dean,” he exhales, tension melting out of him. “Dean.”

The name is like a prayer on his lips.

“I’m here, kitten,” Dean mumbles against his skin, making Cas shiver. “I got you.”

They sit like that for a few minutes before Dean burrows down into the bed again, pulling the comforter back over their shoulders.

“Go back to sleep,” Dean whispers, already feeling the heavy weight of Cas’ body. He breathes slow, lets Cas find his rhythm. Cas is asleep within minutes, and Dean follows shortly after.

***

Dean’s pretty sure they’ve been sleeping for just about a day. Or close to it. His body is stiff from being in one position for so long, evidence of the friggin’ coma he’s been in. But he doesn’t really have much to complain about. Cas is tucked half underneath him, puffs of warm breath brushing against his throat with each exhale. Their limbs are tangled around each other, bodies pressed flush together.

All of that, and Cas is purring.

A grin spreads across Dean’s face without his permission and he buries it in Cas’ skin, nuzzling the exposed line of his throat. The movement is enough to rouse Dean’s mate, and he feels a soft hand card through his hair.

“Dean,” Cas sighs reverently, his body bending towards him. Dean hums happily in response. Their eyes meet for a moment before their lips mold together, their first kiss since Cas returned. Dean can’t help the groan in his throat. Cas tastes like home, his lips so familiar and soft and warm against Dean’s own. Their mouths move together like this is what they were made for. Cas’ tongue parts Dean’s lips and slips inside, and Dean presses closer to run the tip of his tongue along the roof of Cas’ mouth.

Cas whines, low and needy, his gentle hand in Dean’s hair growing rougher with each second. Dean answers him with a growl, shifting so Cas is completely pinned beneath him. Dean rolls their hips together teasingly, tugs on Cas’ lips with his teeth. He itches to try them out on Cas’ neck, to leave marks along that beautiful throat, to sink his teeth in deep, but Dean can’t pull himself away from the ambrosia of Cas’ mouth. So he keeps kissing him, keeps lazily rolling their bodies together without any real goal in mind.

Things slow down when Dean shifts his attention to Cas’ neck, which is intentional on his part. As much as he would like to lay Cas bare, worship every inch of him, Dean is pretty sure now isn’t the time for that. So he sucks bruises along the column of Cas’ throat, scatters teeth marks along his collarbone, lets the weight of his body press Cas down into their bed. Only when Cas is thoroughly coated in Dean’s fresh scent and smelling sleepy and content does Dean find his way back to his mate’s lush, pink lips.
“Someone is feeling better,” Dean mumbles, letting his fingers graze the raised bite scar on Cas’ neck. Cas hums in approval.

“You were right. Sleep helped.” Cas sucks gently on Dean’s bottom lip, licking at the redness with his tongue.

“Think you’re ready to face everybody?” Dean asks, pulling slightly away to study Cas’ reaction. His blue eyes are brighter and clearer than Dean has seen them in a while, the dark circles finally faded away with the help of sound sleep.

“I’m not sure,” Cas admits, tracing a thumb over Dean’s lips. “But I’d like to see my pack. We are mourning, and I should be with them.”

Dean nods, pride blooming in his chest. “I’ll come with you,” Dean tries to suggest, wary of the fact that he’s hardly been out of Cas’ sight since freeing him from Crowley.

“You can’t,” Cas smiles sadly, “though I want you to. You should be with your own pack.”

Damn him and his logic.

“Sure,” Dean sighs, pressing a kiss to his lips. “Let’s get some food in you first, then you can go.”

Cas kisses back a little more forcefully than necessary, and Dean has to drag himself out of bed with a reminder that the sooner Cas goes, the sooner he’ll come back. They get dressed quietly, and it doesn’t escape Dean’s notice that Cas pulls on one of his old shirts and an oversized flannel on top. He’s glad for it, since the weather is cooling down a bit and he knows Cas will be warm, but it makes his chest ache with sadness for his mate.

He slips an arm around Dean’s waist as they step out of the solitude of Dean’s room, and Dean holds him close against his side. Cas is walking tall, though, chin tilted up and meeting the gazes of everyone they pass. The other wolves eye him warily, like he might snap, but Krissy offers him a smile and Cas manages to (mostly) return it with his own minute expression.

The dining quarters are buzzing with activity, everyone up and about for breakfast. Morning patrols must have ended already, since the other Hunters are gathered around one of the tables and making an impressive amount of noise.

“We should go sit with them,” Cas exhales heavily, obviously steeling himself.

“It’s fine if you don’t want to, Cas,” Dean tries to reassure him, not expecting that much progress right away. But Cas never ceases to impress him.

“I want to,” he nods, as if he’s convincing himself. “I want to feel like myself, Dean.”

Their eyes meet for a moment, and Dean sees all of that determination pooled up in those blue depths.

“Oh. Alright. Let’s go.”

They make their way over slowly, and the table goes abruptly quiet when everyone notices them. Dean feels Cas go tense under his arm, all of their gazes falling on him at once.

“You talkin’ about us or somethin’?” Dean jokes, ruffling Cas’ hair as an excuse to pet him.

“Hello everyone,” Cas says with impressive confidence, his hand sort of flapping in an aborted
attempt at a wave. There’s a beat of silence, then a flurry of blonde as Jo flings her arms around Cas’ neck.

“Hey, Cas,” she says, emotion cracking through her voice. “Good to see you.”

It takes him a few seconds, but Cas hugs her back stiffly and that seems to be enough for her. It’s Sam’s massively long arms that wrap around him next, his giant hands clapping Cas on the back.

“Glad you’re back, man. Dean’s been a pain,” he laughs, ruffling Cas’ hair and guiding him over to sit in the empty seat next to Jess. Dean trails after him and takes the seat on his other side.

“He can be quite the handful, can’t he?” Cas manages a straight face, and Dean is probably the only one who sees the smile in his eyes. Sam laughs, and Jess gives him a tight hug. She doesn’t say anything, but she cups his cheeks with soft hands and shiny eyes and that says more than anyone else could put into words. “You look well, Jess,” Cas smiles back at her, his voice gentler than normal.

“I am well,” she smiles, leaning back against Sam. “These two have been giving me grief,” she gestures at her stomach, still hardly showing, “but I think we may be out of the storm.”

Dean feels Cas lean back against him, and he can’t decide if he’s mirroring Jess or looking for comfort. He winds an arm around his shoulders just to be safe.

“I can’t wait to meet them,” Cas smiles back at her, in his own way.

“So anyway,” Jo jumps in, and Cas seems to sag in relief that the attention is off of him. She pushes her plate across the table with a wink, and Dean nods at her in thanks. There’s three pancakes, some bacon, and a pile of cantaloupe, and a tall glass of milk that Jess slides over from Sam. Benny gives up his fresh mug of coffee, for which Dean is specifically grateful. It warms him, pleases his wolf, for his pack to behave like this. Caring for his mate when he needs it.

“Back to my story,” Jo continues with a smile, pulling Dean’s attention back to the present. With a little nudging Cas starts to pick at the food, keeping his hands curled around the warm mug. “So I’m running patrol on southeast, and I run past check seven, where Balthazar should be. And that fuck —”


“We’re trying not to call them that, Dean,” Sam chastises him, in that patronizing tone of his that he uses when Dean is being an idiot. “They don’t like it.”

A smile lights up Cas’ eyes, and he has to bite his lips to stop from laughing. Dean glares at him.

“I know that, Sammy. What I don’t know is why you care, all of a sudden,” he rolls his eyes, ignoring Cas’ self-satisfied look.

Sam gives him an odd look for a moment, before a wave of understanding washes over his features. “You haven’t been up to the Council yet, have you?”

“No?” Dean shrugs. “Cas was hungry. We came here first.”

Everyone else at the table exchanges knowing looks, but Jo is the only one who says anything. “Don’t worry, Dean-o. They’ll explain it all. Just let me finish my story, ‘kay?”

Dean glances over at Cas, but his cat just shrugs so he lets it go for now. He can talk to the Council when Cas is with the Host.
“Fine. Let’s hear it.”

“Okay so,” she says excitedly, clearly itching to get this out. “That fucker is always giving me shit when I’m on southeast. You know, dropping fucking pinecones on me, trying to land on top of me when I run under his stupid tree, that kind of stuff. Today, you know what he did?”

Everyone leans forward slightly, waiting to hear the escalation. Jo makes them hang on for a few seconds longer.

“Nothing. I run past check seven, and there’s nothing.” This obviously doesn’t get the reaction she’s looking for—which is to say, it gets some mix of no reaction and disappointment—so she rolls her eyes and continues. “Obviously I stop, because something is up. I sniff around, and I can smell him so he’s definitely close. But there’s this other smell too, you know? Kinda sweet and sugary, and I’m sniffing around trying to figure out who it is when BAM!”

She bangs her fists on the table, all of the other shifters jumping and laughing at the noise. Jo seems overly pleased with herself.

“Guy drops right out of the trees, like it’s nothing. Barefoot, no shirt, hickeys all over him. Just guess who it was.”

Before anyone can really even start to toss out ideas, Cas ruins all their fun.

“Gabriel, I’d imagine,” he mumbles around a mouthful of pancake, taking a long drink of coffee and humming happily.

Jo’s face morphs from shock to annoyance in what seems like record time.

“Dude!” she crosses her arms, glaring half-heartedly across the table. “Why you gotta steal my punchline?”

Cas pauses with his mug halfway between the table and his lips, glancing at Dean for confirmation. He just shrugs and grins down at his mate.

“Um. Sorry?” Cas says, not sounding apologetic in the least. “We’ve known that the two of them have been sleeping together for quite some time. They think they are discrete.”

There’s a beat, and then the whole table is laughing together once again. Cas smiles into his coffee, and it feels so fucking good to be normal again. Relatively speaking. Dean is pretty sure he’s forgotten what normal even feels like, but if this is his new normal then he can definitely deal.

The two of them stay for long enough to fill Cas’ belly and get some color in his cheeks, and by the time they get up to stretch and move on with their day it’s been a few hours and the Hunters are either headed to their rooms for naps or out into the forest for afternoon patrol. Cas is more relaxed, though still quiet, so Dean considers the morning a success.

Dean walks with Cas all the way out to the main exit of the Bunker, not even trying to resist the urge to press him up against the stone wall and kiss him silly. Cas melts into him easily, the kiss lazily blurring the lines between them. Dean is just thinking that he could enjoy the feeling of Cas’ soft, warm lips for the whole rest of the day, could let Cas dismantle him and then put him back together again, could get lost in the taste of his mate’s mouth and the press of their skin, when Cas pulls reluctantly away.

“I need to…” he trails off, already gravitating back. His hand slides into the hair at Dean’s nape, and Dean tightens the arm around his waist. Dean lets himself be pulled back in, sucks gently on Cas’
plump bottom lip. Cas surges forward when Dean relents, then breaks away once again. “Dean, I need to go.”

Dean rumbles unhappily, pulling Cas tight against his chest. His scent is already all over him from the clothes, but a little more can’t hurt.

“Want me to meet you at the treehouse?” Dean suggests, speaking into Cas’ messy hair. He shakes his head.

“Not yet. I don’t think I can, quite yet. I know my panther…” he lets the rest of the sentence hang, but Dean gets it.

“Yeah, I know. Back here then?”

He leans back to meet Dean’s eyes, then steps backwards out of his embrace.

“Of course, puppy. I’ll see you soon.”

Chapter End Notes

Cas will get back to his sassy, badass self. He's just not there yet. Be patient with him!
Chapter 40

Chapter Notes

This little bit is unbeta-ed at the moment, so any mistakes are my own since I am awful at getting my chapters to my beta on time. Some small tweaks might happen in the next few days, nothing major.

So right about now is the time that I warn you guys that we are coming up on the end here. I don't know how many more chapters we have, but the number is getting low. But rejoice! There will be lots of timestamps and epilogue stuffs after the end. And while we're on that topic, let it officially be said that there will //not// be any mpreg in our main story here. I have every intention of wrapping this up with a pretty little bow before I go there. So if mpreg isn't your thing, have no fear. If mpreg //is// your thing (or you're looking for some little blue eyed babies), then you will find all of that in the timestamps/epilogue stuffs. Hopefully this will satisfy everyone to the best of my ability!

Castiel feels…strange. The forest around him feels too quiet and too loud all at once. Sounds are too sharp, scents too overbearing. The warmth of oak and chestnuts is the only smell that hasn’t churned his stomach. It surrounds him now, clinging to the fabric on his shoulders. It’s comfort, but it aches.

A hare darts across Castiel’s path, and his entire body goes tense. He feels his fight or flight response kick in, the urge to get somewhere up high and away.

The panther snarls at the response, and Castiel has the odd sensation of not being in complete control of his body. His feet are moving, but Castiel feels as though he’s watching it happen instead of doing it himself.

“Thank you,” he says aloud, letting the words melt into the forest. The panther carries him, and Castiel allows himself to drift through the trees. He listens, but doesn’t really hear. He inhales, but smells nothing. The forest that he’s come to know as home feels distant and unfamiliar. The panther takes in everything around them, sorts through the sounds and scents and allows Castiel to take a back seat in his own body. He’s never felt this before, never let the panther take control over him. It’s unnerving and comforting at once.

The panther has no fear of the forest. And Castiel…well. He’s recovering.

When Michael and Anna’s home comes into view the panther steps back, and Castiel comes back into himself with a deep breath and a slow blink. He notices a fellow leopard snoozing above him just along the tree line, and his lips twitch.

“Hello, Josiah,” he speaks towards the leaves, getting a tail flick in response. Castiel soldiers on, knocking lightly on the wooden door. He considers entering on his own, and decides better of it.

Michael answers after a few moments, his cheeks pink and his hair mussed. The second he sees Castiel his eyes blow wide and his face falls.

“Castiel,” he exhaled, all of the air seeming to leave his body. There’s a heavy thump and hurried footsteps, and then Anna is materializing at Michael’s side, only haphazardly covered with a thin
She seems to hesitate a moment, and then flings herself into Castiel’s arms. She doesn’t say anything, and neither does he, just buries her nose against his neck and starts to purr. Michael pets Castiel’s hair gently before wrapping his arms around the both of them, joining in with a slow purr of his own. Castiel hardly notices his own body joining in. There’s something instinctively pleasing about being embraced by his alpha, his alpha’s mate. Dominance doesn’t mean the same thing here as it does to the wolves, in terms of loyalties and hierarchies, but all the same. Castiel feels protected, cared for.

“We thought you were lost,” Anna manages after some time, only after Michael as pulled her back. She’s trembling, and the more Castiel watches the more he realizes how weak she is on her feet. Michael is practically holding her up.

“And I was found,” Castiel smiles gently, laying a hand on her cheek and doing his best to soothe her. “I’m okay, Anna. I am.”

She nods, her eyes rapidly welling up with tears. Just as Castiel thinks they’re about to spill over, she goes absolutely still. The trembling stops, and her face goes blank, her eyes practically glazing over. Castiel’s heart sinks. “Anna…”

“Damn it,” Michael sighs, heaving a deep sigh as he looks Anna over. She blinks at him like she sees him, but it’s clear that not much of what she sees is registering. A tear slides down her cheek. “Give me a moment, Castiel.”

Michael takes Anna by the shoulders and guides her slowly inside. She doesn’t protest, doesn’t even look at him, really. Castiel can feel the worry racing through his heart during every minute it takes for Michael to return.

“I’m sorry,” Castiel says as soon as Michael steps through the doorway, trying to shove away the mess of feelings in his chest. “I don’t know…”

“It’s alright. This isn’t your fault,” Michael speaks calmly, so obviously trying to calm Castiel down that it actually works a little bit. “Sometimes the world becomes a bit too much for her.”

“I’ve obviously interrupted…” Castiel gestures lamely at the door, hoping that Michael will understand. After all, the scent of arousal on Michael and Anna’s skin when he’d arrived had been pretty unmistakeable. “And now…”

Michael smiles sadly, taking another slow breath. Castiel has no idea how he’s so calm.

“Sariel is spending the day in the Bunker,” Michael explains, and Castiel experiences no small amount of surprise at his words, “with Mary, and the other girl. Layla, I believe. Anna had been doing so well, lately. No episodes to speak of. We’d thought…”

He trails off. Guilt sinks to the pit of Castiel’s stomach.

“Anyway,” he waves a hand. “I need to be with her. You may speak with Gabriel, if you’d like. He should be at home.”

Castiel nods, determined not to press the issue and keep Michael any longer away from his mate, as much as Castiel would like to apologize repeatedly for causing this. Michael should be at Anna’s side.

“I will,” Castiel steps back from the house, intending to go find Gabriel right away. “Take care of
Another sad smile pulls at Michael’s lips. “I will try, Castiel. I will try.”

***

Dean almost walks right out of the Bunker after Cas. He almost friggin’ does it, because the thought of Cas going out into those woods and not coming back again is too goddamn much and Dean is pretty sure he’s gonna have a coronary just thinking about it.

He doesn’t, though. Dean turns his ass around and marches up to the Council room, because Cas needs this. His cat needs to get out on his own, to feel strong again. Dean can give that much to him, even if he fucking hates it.

It’s the middle of the day, so it’s not like Dean expects the Council room to be full. Actually, he’d be less surprised to find it empty than what he does find, which is just his dad. And Lucifer.

“What in the hell is happenin’ here,” he mumbles in disbelief, barely remembering that he should enter the room all the way and shut the door behind him. The air is thick with tension, and from the frowns on their faces it’s clear that neither of them likes the other, but they are here. Together.

“Dean,” John grunts, standing and clapping him on the shoulder. “Good to see you out and about.”

“Yeah,” Dean nods distractedly, glancing over at Lucifer. “Luc, how’s it goin’?”

“Well,” he says with a smile that doesn’t even come close to reaching his eyes.

“So, uh,” Dean prompts, “what’re you guys talkin’ about?”

“Security, obviously,” Lucifer rolls his eyes. He stands with a shake of his head, his gaze flicking over to John. “We can finish this later. Little alpha here has some catching up to do.”

Dean glares at him, but Lucifer hardly spares him another glance. After he’s gone John sighs and leans back into a chair.

“So?” Dean tries again, crossing his arms across his chest. If it makes him look bigger, then, well… whatever.

“I’m gonna give this to you quick, son,” John grunts, rubbing at his scruff with the palm of his hand. “I was wrong, before. Bout these cats. We’re not the same, and I don’t trust ‘em. Not completely. But we can help each other. Making sure nothin’ like this happens again.”

Dean nods, trying to mask his reaction. This is serious improvement.

“We work together now, then?” Dean raises his eyebrows, waiting for the other shoe to drop.

John shrugs. “We run security together. The Pack listens to our Council, the Host listens to the Arch. Whatever everybody else wants to do…” he trails off, and it’s obvious the reluctance that’s wafting off of him. But surprisingly, he says nothing. Either Mary has been working on it, or dad got out voted in the Council. Dean can’t decide which one he hopes for more. “Well. Long as they follow my rules.”

And anyway, Dean’s pretty sure his jaw is on the floor.

“Wow, dad. That’s uh…yeah. Wow.”
John sniffs and nods at him. “Yeah, well. We’re tryin’. Nothin’ is worth this happening again.”

Dean holds his dad’s gaze for a moment before dropping his out of respect.

“Tell me about the new security system.” Dean is eager to get onto a subject that’s less…turbulent.

“Leopards are visual hunters,” John continues, seemingly happy to ignore the little moment right then. “Wolves hunt by scent. So we set up eight sentry posts around the entire territory, and are running eight-hour sentry shifts. Patrol routes map the perimeter.”

Jo’s words float back to him, all of them starting to make a lot more sense now that he knows what the hell is going on. Dean nods to let his dad know that he’s following.

“Not that we’ll need that much,” John sighs. “Don’t think we’ll have that much action this far out.”

Dean raises his eyebrows. “What’s that mean?”

“You been hidin’ out with that cat of yours for a while,” John leans forward, resting his forearms on the table in front of him.

“My mate,” Dean corrects him with gritted teeth. “He’s fine, by the way.”

“I know that, your brother kept the rest of us updated.” John levels a hard look at him, more a warning than anything else. Dean reminds himself to cool it with the attitude, given how much his dad is doing for the packs. “Anyway. Humans made some big changes, once they got wind of what Crowley was up too.”

“Really,” Dean snorts, hardly willing to believe a word that the humans say.

“I was as doubtful as you,” John laughs low, shaking his head. “But, uh, this woman. Jody Mills, if I remember. She took over Crowley’s job.”

“You’re tellin’ me she’s, what, sympathetic? To the shifter cause?”

John shrugs. “She doesn’t want us dead. There’s this…group. Activists, or some shit. Callin’ themselves NASH, or somethin’.”

“Nash?” Dean outright laughs, not even bothering to cover up his disbelief. That, and the name is hands down the worst acronym he’s ever heard.

“Stands for National Alliance of Shifters and Humans, I think.” John waves a hand in Dean’s general direction, brushing the topic away. “Doesn’t matter. These NASH guys, they got the local government to set up a forest perimeter. Nobody gets in or out of this forest without the embassy knowing about it.”

Dean’s eyebrows shoot up his forehead. “You’re kidding me.”

“Can’t make this up,” John holds up his hands, his eyebrows pinched together. “Some kinda safe zone out here, now. In fact, we got a whole herd of elk movin’ in because of it.”

Dean’s jaw is well and truly settled on the floor, at this point.

“No shit. How the hell did we get lucky on this?”

“Dunno,” John grunts, shrugging one shoulder. “Maybe lucky is too generous.”
“Yeah,” Dean nods in agreement, thinking over everything they’ve lost. “Maybe.”

***

Castiel is eager to see Gabriel, and eager to go home. He goes straight to the alpha’s cabin, unsurprisingly finding him lounging in a tree nearby.

“Hello, Gabriel,” he says serenely, peering up through the leaves. Gabriel bolts up, nearly falling right out of the tree in his effort to twist his body towards Castiel.

“Castiel?!” he yelps, scrambling out of the tree and launching himself at Castiel. “Fuck, little man. You scared the ever-loving shit out of me.”

“I appreciate your concern,” Castiel smiles a little bit, squeezing back as much as he can.

Gabriel pulls back, gripping Castiel’s shoulders tight and looking him up and down.

“So you’re good now? No more cat Cas?”

“I think so,” he hums, squirming a little bit under Gabriel’s gaze. It feels odd to be so…studied.

“Fantastic,” Gabriel grins, throwing an arm over his shoulders and dragging him towards the house. “You reek like wet dog, pussycat.”

“Do not,” Castiel chuckles, shoving at his side. “I smell like my mate, thank you very much.”

Gabriel’s grin grows even wider. “Not gonna lie, Cassie. That dog of yours has quite the aroma.”

“Watch it,” Castiel growls lightly, allowing Gabriel to guide him over to his makeshift couch. Similar to Castiel’s treehouse, Gabriel doesn’t have a lot of actual furniture in his home. More like convenient piles of soft things that he can curl up on at any time.

“Whatever. Those wolves…” he makes a pleased noise, and Castiel can hear the undercurrent of desire. “Between you and me, they don’t smell bad. Not bad at all.”

His gaze gets far away and sort of…dreamy for a moment. Castiel narrows his eyes.

“Gabriel, what did you do?”

The other leopard turns another blinding grin on him. “Nothing you need to worry about, little man.”

Castiel rolls his eyes and settles back into the cushions. They smell like Gabriel and pack, and the panther finally relaxes a tiny bit.

“While we’re on the subject,” he sighs, closing his eyes and stretching, “you should know that the Hunters have been gossiping about you.”

Gabriel raises an eyebrow, looking far too pleased with himself. “Oh?”

Castiel snorts and drags a blanket over his shoulders. “You and Balthazar have never been as discrete as you think you are.”

Gabriel laughs along and curls up next to Castiel on the pseudo-couch. “Or we’re very discrete, and our affair is simply…misdirection.”
“Misdirection,” Castiel repeats, cracking open one eye to study Gabriel’s expression. It’s always been difficult to read him. “And what, pray tell, are you misdirecting us from?”

“Spoilers, Cassie. Spoilers.”

***

Castiel spends the next few hours catching up with Gabriel. He is more than surprised to hear the progress that the Host has made with the Pack, though it warms him from the inside out. It’s good to know that the forest is safe again, or maybe just safer than it had been. It feels like maybe…well maybe Castiel could revisit his and Dean’s rock. Spend an afternoon there in the sun, without worrying. That might be nice.

By the time Castiel thinks of leaving, it’s dark outside. A fact which Castiel is resolutely trying to ignore. The forest at night has always been his friend, has never been unkind to him. Castiel has never feared darkness, or the things he can’t see. He is a Seraph, and fear isn’t a word that he operates under. He’s stronger than that.

And yet here he is. A branch snaps behind him; the wind whistling through the trees is the scrape of claws against metal; the rustling of the leaves is the sound of fur being dragged across concrete floors; chirping crickets are the terrified whimpers of the other shifters imprisoned with him. A bug whizzes past his ear, but the only sound Castiel hears is that of the near silent dart before it had buried itself in his spine.

None of it is real. None of it. He left that place, Castiel came home, he’s safe now. He’s…he’s safe…and…

And he’s alone. Castiel is alone. It’s dark. The trees around him are bars on a cage. Castiel’s heart is racing and he can’t breathe no matter how hard he tries to force his body to take a deep breath. He can’t do it.

His normally sharp vision goes blurry at the edges. The whole world seems to tilt sideways, and Castiel falls right along with it as strong arms guide him to the damp forest floor.

Castiel focuses on the dirt under his fingers. Soft, wet, organic. There’s no concrete, no iron. Castiel isn’t behind bars. He manages a short, shaky breath, and tastes fresh air on his tongue. It doesn’t smell like death and blood and despair. It smells like…

Oak. And chestnuts.


Castiel manages a full breath in, which feels like an accomplishment. It takes a few more breaths before his eyes refocus, taking in the worried green eyes that are gazing at him.

“There he is,” Dean seems to sag in relief, resting their foreheads together. He pulls Castiel closer and drags his fingers through the hair at his nape, spreading his scent over Castiel’s skin. “You with me?”

“I think,” Castiel mumbles, his voice feeling raw. “Why are you…?”

Dean shrugs, offering up a guilty smile. “It got late, and I was thinkin’ about coming out to find you. Then, uh, felt you panic. Came as fast as I could.”

“Oh,” Castiel practically squeaks. He hates this. “I don’t know what happened. I just…”
Dean cups his jaw and kisses him thoroughly, stopping Castiel’s thoughts in their tracks.

“Hey. Doesn’t matter.” Dean’s voice is calm and rough, soothing Castiel’s frayed nerves. “Nobody expects you to be fine overnight. Long as you’re okay.”

It’s Castiel’s turn to initiate a kiss this time. Dean hums against Castiel’s mouth and holds on for a second or two longer than Castiel had intended. Not that he minds.

“I would very much like to be asleep right now,” Castiel sinks into Dean’s hold, letting the weight of it smooth away the last of his shivering. “Preferably with my mate unclothed in my arms.”

Dean grins and growls low in approval. A happy shiver runs up Castiel’s spine, and even the panther seems to squirm happily.

“That can be arranged.”

***

“Hey, Cas?” Dean says quietly once they’re nestled in bed, curled close around each other in the dark and warmth of his bedroom. Cas nuzzles the side of Dean’s throat and hums happily, his scent spreading slowly through the air.

“Yes?”

“We should go on that trip,” Dean whispers, pressing soft kisses along Cas’ jawline, mouthing lazily at the bolt of his jaw. Cas’ finger nails drag down Dean’s bare back, his chin tilting to bare his throat even further. “Tomorrow. Get up, get out, spend some time. You and me.”

Cas chuckles and starts to trace circles around the knobs of Dean’s spine.

“Puppy, are you trying to get inside my pants?” he accuses, only sounding mildly admonishing.

Dean shrugs. “Only like, thirty percent.” Castiel laughs, and he feels Dean’s own smile against his skin. “So, kitten. What d’you say?”

Castiel makes a pleased noise low in his throat, surging up for a kiss and sucking gently on Dean’s bottom lip.

“You’re going to love it.”
Chapter 41

Chapter Summary

"My fingers are pruny."

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Cas is being sketchy. To say the least. But he's smiling like a cat that got the cream as he leads Dean through the forest, so Dean can't complain much. He still doesn't know where they're going, but he figures he'll find out soon enough.

"We almost there?" Dean chuckles as Cas hums along to the sounds of the forest, the wolf warmed by the happiness flowing from their mate.

"I believe so," he says over his shoulder, dragging his fingers over the bark of a tree. "Though I've never been."

"Awesome, you don't even know where we're going?"

Cas glares at him, apparently deciding that Dean's ribbing isn't worthy of a response.

"Shush, little alpha."

Dean shuts up, amusing himself for the rest of the walk by just watching Cas. He stalks through the trees carefully, picking his steps around fallen branches and scraggly ground plants. It's markedly different from the way that Dean walks, forging a path straight ahead. Cas yields to the wilderness, lets it guide him. And he walks so quietly, like a specter between the trees.

They arrive eventually at a wall of rock, covered from top to bottom in heavy sheets of ivy. Cas stops and stares up towards the top, a smile tugging at his lips.

"We're here," he turns to Dean, folding himself into Dean's chest.

Dean's arms wrap around him automatically, even as he doubtfully scans the dead end in front of him. He looks down at Cas' pleased face, one eyebrow raised.

"Really? Doesn't seem like we're much of anywhere," he scans the ivy again, looking for something he may have missed.

"Ye of little faith," Cas hums, stroking soft fingers against Dean's nape as he presses their lips together. "Follow me."

He steps backwards and turns toward the wall of ivy, barely brushing his palm across the hanging vines like he's looking for something. It takes a few moments before he makes a satisfied noise, and pushes the ivy aside. Behind the heavy curtain is what looks like a cave, or at least the entrance to one. Cas slips inside, and Dean follows right after him.

The first thing Dean notices is the humidity. The air is damp and warm and a little suffocating, at
least at first. After a few deep breaths he decides it's kind of nice, despite not being what he's used to. The next thing he notices is the scent. Flowery in a pleasant way, like wet stones and clean water. It isn't overbearing, and the main thing it's doing is amplifying the scent of his mate.

The entrance leads into a relatively narrow tunnel, dark and mildly claustrophobic. Dean feels the need to get closer to Cas, so he presses himself along his back, his pack against Dean's chest. Cas hums and leans into him for a moment, before continuing forward. The tunnel opens up a handful of feet later, and what they see sends Dean's eyes flying wide.

It's a huge cave. No, not even really a cave. A friggin' cavern, or something. Vaulted ceilings, dripping stalactites, the whole nine yards. Small cracks in the ceiling allow streams of sunlight in, enough to set the entire space in a muted gray light. There are two pools of water, a smaller one trickling into a larger, deeper one. Steam wafts off the surface, dissipating into the air. Sure explains the humidity. There's a smoothed out circle of ground on the side of one of the pools, edges raised like a kind of nest.

Dean pulls Cas' backpack off and presses himself up against Cas' back, wrapping his arms around his waist and tucking his nose behind his ear.

"Cas..." he whispers, all of his senses awed. He'd been expecting a vacation, he hadn't been expecting this.

"You like it?" Cas hums, and Dean can hear the smile in his voice. "I told you, a while ago..."


Cas turns in his arms, settling both hands on either side of Dean's neck. “So? What do you think?”

Dean tugs Cas forward so their bodies are pressed together from knee to chest, capturing his lips and groaning happily in his throat.

"I think we need to get in that water right fucking now."

Cas bites at his bottom lip and smiles, pushing Dean's pack off his shoulders and dropping it next to his own. "We need someplace to sleep, first."

The wolf leaps into action at that, more than willing to build a nest for their mate. "I can do that," Dean says eagerly, grabbing the hem of Cas' shirt and pulling it off over his head. He doesn't resist. "You get in the water. Relax."

Cas pushes his fingers through Dean's hair and kisses him again, then spins away and drops his pants to the floor. Dean almost whines out loud. Cas strolls over to the larger pool and dips his foot in, humming happily at the feeling. With one last backwards glance at Dean he dives in, disappearing briefly beneath the water. Dean hadn't been sure how deep it was, but he's got a better idea now. Cas pops back up a second or two later, his hair slicked back and a smile on his face.

"Baby," he says breathlessly, his arms moving to keep himself afloat, "this is fucking wonderful."

Dean bursts out laughing.

"You never call me that," he grins, even though the wolf is practically purring with how happy their mate is right now.

Cas shrugs. "Whatever, Dean. Hurry up and get in the water."
Dean rushes to unroll the blankets and untie the pillows from their bags, fluffing them up and laying them all out in the smooth circle. Cas watches him while he putters around, his chin resting on his forearms as they hold him in place along the edge of the pool. He looks like some kind of fucking water nymph, or something, light reflecting off the water’s surface and lighting his face from all kinds of weird angles. Cas’ features are serene and smooth, like there’s nothing he’d rather be doing in this world than watching Dean make a nest for them.

Which, might not be so far from the truth. Dean’s instincts are definitely convinced that making this nest is the most important thing they’ve ever done or will ever do, so. Maybe Cas is feeling it too.

When Dean is satisfied with their sleeping situation he turns towards Cas, waiting for some kind of approval. The corner of Cas’ mouth twitches.

“Just like home. Now take your clothes off.”

Dean obliges, stripping in record time and diving right in to join his mate. Cas was right. The water is…fucking wonderful. Hot against his skin, rich with something that makes his senses go wild. He can feel the water sliding against his skin, every tiny knot in his body melting away. His heart hammers away in his chest, and Dean feels light and free in that water more than he has ever before in his life.

When he breaks the surface and takes a deep breath of air, Cas is already smiling at him.

“I’m never leaving,” Dean declares, arching his back and letting his body float on the surface. “You can’t make me.”

“I think I can,” Cas hums, swimming lazy circles around Dean’s floating body.

“That so?” Dean snorts, closing his eyes against the harsh sunlight that falls across his face.

“Unless you plan to fuck me while treading water.”

Dean scrambles around in an effort to get turned towards the sound of Cas’ voice, and ends up doing a kind of somersault underwater.

Cas is laughing at him. “Thought so. We’ll want to move to the shallower pool for that.”

“Asshole,” Dean grumbles, spitting water out of his mouth and feeling it dribble down his chin. Cas cocks an eyebrow at him, floating a little closer.

“Unless, of course, you’d like to skip the sex part…?”

Dean growls and pushes Cas backwards through the water until he’s pressed gently up against the rough wall. He braces his forearms on the solid ground to anchor himself and runs his nose up the side of Cas’ throat, inhaling deeply. Cas winds his arms around Dean’s neck, letting his body relax in the water.

“Definitely not,” Dean rumbles, pressing open-mouthed kisses to Cas’ damp skin. Cas hums in agreement. Dean can feel Cas’ cock against his stomach, but he doesn’t feel the immediate need to do anything about it. For once, they have all the time in the world. So Dean continues to mouth lazily at Cas’ skin, sighing happily at the taste of his mate on his lips. “How’re you feelin’?”

Cas sighs and tilts his chin, his eyes fluttering closed. A little shifting and his legs settle around Dean’s hips, his blunt nails scratching at Dean’s nape.
“More myself, I suppose,” Cas says without opening his eyes. Dean reaches a spot under the bolt of Cas’ jaw that draws a particularly nice sounding groan out of him, and decides to spend a few extra seconds there to leave a nice little bruise. “Dean…” he manages breathily, fidgeting in the bracket of Dean’s arms.

“Cas…” Dean rumbles back at him, sucking harder at the skin. Cas whines, and Dean decides to have some mercy on him. Some. “You wanna…”

“Yes,” Cas groans, squirming out of Dean’s hold and pulling himself out of the large pool. “It’s been…far too long.”

Dean laughs and follows him out, wading into the smaller pool. This one is shallower, the water reaching up to Dean’s armpits when he sits down. It’s warmer too, the water just this side of too hot against his skin. Cas is on him in an instant, straddling his hips and smashing their lips together. There’s no question about who’s in charge here, and Dean is happy to let Cas invade his mouth with his tongue. Cas growls and tugs on Dean’s short hair, and Dean’s dick goes from interested to fully on board in half a second.

Cas arches his back and rolls his hips, the sound of water sloshing against the edges of the pool just a distant background noise. Dean follows the movements with his palms flat and wide on Cas’ back. He slides one hand down between Cas’ cheeks, feeling his fingers slide against the slick on Cas’ skin. Two fingers slide into him easily, a low groan coming out muffled against Dean’s mouth.

Two push back against his fingers and Cas’ scent practically explodes. It was overwhelming before, and now it’s…everywhere. Like the steam in the cave is increasing the potency exponentially. Damp bark and pine trees soak into Dean’s pores, overloading all of his senses. All he sees is Cas’ blue eyes, all he tastes is his lips and tongue, all he hears is those soft moans, all he feels is miles of smooth skin and the hot clench around his fingers, all he can smell is mate.

Dean tries to make words, but his mouth won’t listen. He’d have to pull away from Cas to speak, and he’s definitely not willing to do that. Dean kisses back harder, licks deeper into Cas’ mouth, whines and whimpers passing back and forth between them. His skin is hot all over, and he doesn’t know if it’s the water or the lust but none of it matters. Cas is grasping desperately at his skin, holding him impossibly close with bruising fingers.

Dean wordlessly removes his fingers, one hand on Cas’ hip to handle him into place and one on the base of his cock. He slides into Cas in one push, and the groan that punches out of his cat’s throat is the most wonderful sound in the world.

With both hands tight on Cas’ hips Dean manages to direct his movements, since Cas seems content to let Dean move him how he wants while Cas focuses on moving their lips together. Dean can’t form any coherent thoughts, but he’s pretty sure he’d like to let Cas continue what he’s doing for the rest of forever.

It’s pretty clear from the start that this isn’t going to last long, the heat around Dean’s cock just too much. He spreads his legs a little so Cas can sink down further, and if Dean moves Cas’ hips just right he can brush against Cas’ prostate. He’s a little too far gone to get it consistently, but from the noises that Cas is making he’d guess that his cat doesn’t mind so much.

Their kisses have devolved to panting and moaning against each other’s mouths by the time Dean’s knot starts to swell. He isn’t even thrusting, just rolling Cas’ hips around, so he feels his knot swell alarmingly fast right inside of his mate.

Cas moans something completely incoherent, nails scratching hard against Dean’s nape and scalp.
Dean’s breathing picks up, like he’s hyperventilating, harsh breaths going in and out his nose as he sucks on Cas’ tongue.

“Bite,” Cas groans, baring his throat so that it’s completely open and vulnerable to Dean’s teeth. Dean doesn’t need telling twice, sniffing and licking and searching out a spot. The wolf howls happily, joining in the search. Dean’s orgasm is building rapidly at the base of his spine, so he quickly decides and seals his mouth over the spot.

“You, too,” Dean groans against Cas’ neck, baring his own throat at the same time. Cas whimpers and noses at the skin, finding a place of his own. The wolf rolls onto its back and whines.

Dean feels Cas’ body tense up at the same moment that his orgasm reaches its tipping point, and the two of them clench their jaws and sink their teeth in at the same moment.

Never in his life has Dean had a stronger orgasm. It punches through him, relieves him of every conscious thought, picks him apart and scatters the remnants across the stars. His nerves feel everything and nothing all at once, which doesn’t even matter because all that seems to exist in Dean’s world is the searing warmth dragging him and Cas towards one another.

That’s what brings him back. One minute Dean is floating through the universe, blown to pieces, and then the warmth calls him home. Slowly he crawls his way back to his body, sensations coming back one at a time.

Every muscle in his body is coiled and tense. There’s blood in his mouth, dripping down his chin. His neck aches like a bitch. His knot is swollen and nestled inside Cas, who is clinging tight to him. Dean loosens his arms where they’re wrapped tight around Cas’ torso, smoothing his palms over Cas’ back and shoulder blades. The water around them feels almost cool, compared to the heat of Dean’s body.

Cas unhinges his jaw first, removing his teeth from Dean’s neck as Dean does the same. They pull back to look at each other, and Dean can’t see himself but he’s sure that what he’s seeing on Cas’ face must be reflected in his own. Blue eyes fogged over with lust and satisfaction, lips red with blood and swollen and bruised from kissing. Cas’ hair is a wreck too, but that’s not new.

With a damp hand Cas wipes the blood from Dean’s mouth and chin, doing the same to himself. When they’re clean he presses their lips together, slow and warm and gentle. Dean’s stomach churns, emotions bubbling inside of him.

“I love you,” Dean whispers against Cas’ lips, I love you he spells on his skin with his fingertips, I love you he sends through their mating bond, I love you he writes with his tongue.

“I love you,” Cas whispers back, and it’s too much. Dean can’t hear it. Cas shows him instead.

Dean’s knot lasts at least twice as long as usual. Neither of them cares. They whisper things that get lost to the cave, get swallowed up by the steam. They map each other’s mouths for the hundredth time. They hold each other close, in a way they couldn’t have before. Not until they learned what it was to lose each other.

They crawl out of the water when they can. Dean burrows them in no less than five blankets, hiding their tangled limbs under soft cotton and fleece.

“My fingers are pruny,” Cas complains sleepily. Dean kisses the wrinkled pad of each finger.

“Better?”
Cas hums, and gives Dean’s fingers the same treatment.

“Thank you, puppy.”

“Always, kitten.”

***

Dean has no sense of time while they’re in that cave. He knows when the sun sets, because the streams of light fade away and they have to strain their eyes to see each other. Other than that they snack when they’re hungry, they nap when they’re tired. Dean loses track of how many times they end up knotted together. Cas isn’t in heat and Dean isn’t in a rut, but it sure feels like it with how incapable they are of keeping their hands off each other. Cas says it has something to do with oxytocin or something, but all Dean really cares about is that Cas stay within arms reach at all times.

They talk, too. Cas finally verbalizes what he went through with Crowley, which eases a knot in Dean’s stomach. It makes him sick to hear it all, too, but it means that Cas is dealing with it. Getting better.

“Dean,” Cas asks on their third night, as they’re lounging in the shallow pool together. Dean cracks open one of his eyes and twists to meet Cas’ eyes. Cas is leaning against one of the walls, legs spread so Dean can sprawl between them and press his back against Cas’ chest. “Can I ask you a question?”

Cas’ fingers continue to roam across Dean’s chest, but they don’t seem as mindless now.

“‘Course,” Dean sighs, pressing a kiss to the new bite on Cas’ neck. It’s mostly healed, but is still pinker than the older one.

It takes a few minutes for Cas to speak again, but Dean is patient. “Your wolf, he takes over sometimes. Controls your body.”


“What triggers that kind of thing?” Cas asks, hands going still over Dean’s ribs.

Dean shrugs. “Dunno. Usually when I’m upset, or feelin’ some kind of…extreme. Or if he’s got something he really wants to say.”

“Do you…mind it? When he takes over?” Cas’ voice sounds unsure, like he’s self-conscious for even asking.

“Depends.” Dean cocks an eyebrow at his cat, trying to gauge his expression. “Sometimes I need him. And I think, well, my wolf knows me better than anybody. He’s mostly just tryin’ to help.”

Cas hums in acknowledgement, and Dean gives him a few seconds to explain himself before he plans to ask some questions himself.

“The other day,” Cas starts to explain, speaking slowly and deliberately, “my panther took over. Not completely, but he forced me to walk. Led me through the forest when I couldn’t do it myself. And when it was time, he stepped back. I just wonder if it’s wrong.”

“Wrong that it happened,” Dean tries to clarify, “or wrong that you felt good about it?”

A blush colors Cas’ cheeks, and he trains his gaze down at the water. “Both, I suppose.”
Dean twists more in Cas’ hold, trying to face him more directly.

“Nothin’ wrong with leaning on your panther. Little kitty wants to protect you.”

Cas studies him for a few seconds, a small smile spreading across his face. He blinks slowly, and when his eyes open they look...different. Farther away, less familiar.

“We don’t appreciate your names, wolf,” Castiel rumbles, and Dean can tell that it’s the panther that is speaking. He grins and lets his eager wolf step to the forefront, taking the back seat.

“Hello, leopard,” the wolf growls right back, loving the predatory glint in their mate’s eyes. “Have we offended our mate?”

Cas laughs and kisses him, letting the panther melt away. The wolf trots away with a wolfish grin, its tongue hanging out happily.

“Very weird,” Cas sighs, tugging Dean back into position against his chest. Dean settles back easily, happy to get comfy again against his cat.

“Agreed,” Dean sighs. “Can I ask something now?”

Cas hums an affirmative.

“Why’d you want me to bite you again?”

Cas tenses a little bit, which worries Dean just a little bit. He’s not sure what Cas is about to say, but he’s pretty sure he won’t like it.

“Crowley, he injected us with those tranquilizers,” Cas says, and Dean goes tense with anger just thinking about it. “Since the drugs were injected into our necks, he liked to be selective about the injection site. And he knew where my mating scar was.”

Dean pulls away and turns his entire body to face Cas, gently tilting his chin to examine the original mating bite. It doesn’t look any different, not that Dean really expected it to. Still something unpleasant curls in his stomach, and the wolf growls low and angry.

“Cas…” Dean starts, but he doesn’t know what to say. He smooths his thumb over the scar. Cas captures his hand on the second path, raising it up to his mouth and kissing the palm of Dean’s hand.

“Crowley is dead,” he says, voice shaking a little bit, like he’s convincing himself as well as Dean. He moves Dean’s hand to the fresh bite on the other side of his neck. “And no one will touch this, except you and me.”

Dean kisses him, feeling Cas’ fingers trace the new bite on Dean’s neck at the same time. Their mating bond buzzes.

“Should’ve made him suffer more,” Dean mumbles, pushing his fingers through Cas’ hair. “He got off too easy.”

Cas’ lips twitch at the very corners. “I meant to ask about that. That night was…a blur. I remember coming back to myself enough to call out to you, but not much else until we were back in the bunker. Even that I remember more like a dream, since I wasn’t really there.”

“Michael killed him,” Dean answers, trying not to dwell too much. Those days before Cas really came back aren’t easy for him to think about. “Quick. One snap.”
Cas raises his eyebrows. “Not you?”

“Nah,” Dean shrugs. “Michael lost as much as I did, if not more. All I cared about right then was getting to you. Spending any more time on Crowley seemed like a waste. Even if I was making him hurt. Wasn’t worth it.”

Cas kisses him with surprising force, pulling Dean into his lap. Dean groans and straddles his thighs pressing their bodies close together. It feels a little backwards, but Dean definitely isn’t objecting to Cas’ fingers kneading his ass cheeks or the way their hips are rolling together.

“You are everything to me, Dean,” Cas says against his lips, a smile tugging at the corner of his mouth. “Everything.”

“Back at’cha, baby,” Dean grins, diving back in to seal their mouths together.

Dean definitely, definitely never wants to leave this cave.

Chapter End Notes

I am terribly sad to say that we probably only have one or two chapters left. It feels...surreal. So now is the time that you guys get to ask any questions I haven't answered already, and I'll do my best to resolve them before the end.

Wow. What a journey it's been.
Chapter 42

Chapter Summary

"They’re friggin’ poop factories, man.”

Chapter Notes

I’m back! phew. Thank you all for your patience with me, life is so hectic at the moment. A terrible time to not have time to write, considering how close we are to the end here. I’m going to stop estimating how much is left, but it’s not much. Consider this part 1 of the ending, I suppose.

Note the relatively large time jump here! I say relative, because it isn't really all that long but it's significant. I didn't feel like it was long enough to permanently pair people up, but there's a whole lot of hinted at pairings/mates floating around in here. Just about everybody got their happy ending, or is on their way to it. I know there's stuff to wrap up so keep in mind: part 1. Loves y'all bunches and bunches, as always.

about a year

Dean has changed a few dirty diapers in his life. Sure, he was young when Sam was born, but he was one of those big brothers that wanted nothing more than to help out with the baby. So Dean used his tiny fingers to clean Sam up, and Mary always fixed the diaper after he inevitably put it on wrong. Whatever, Dean was a baby himself. Four, maybe five years old at the time.

Sam got out of diapers quick, too. Kid grew up too fast for his own good. Still, Dean saw his fair share of… unfortunate messes. Gross, but not the worst thing in the world. Sometimes a baby’s digestion just gets a little screwy. Little Dean never had a problem with dirty diapers, or a little spit-up on his shoulder while he burped his baby brother.

Big Dean has been trying to have the same chill attitude, or whatever.

It’s not working.

“What the hell do you feed this kid, Sammy?” Dean growls, shielding his sensitive nose from the overwhelming smell wafting off the boy in front of him. ‘Course he got Mason again. Mason’s diapers are downright explosive.

“Nothing, Dean,” Sam snaps at him, stripping off Liam’s diaper and flinching away at the smell himself. “They’re still nursing.”

Dean scoffs. “Yeah. Nursing. They’re friggin’ poop factories, man.”

Sam shoots him a scathing glare, but it’s been a long time since that look had any effect on Dean.
“Missouri says it’s normal.” Sam goes back to his diaper changing, and Dean dives into his own mess. Mason is grinning toothlessly up at him, and Dean grumbles at him even though he can’t fathom being angry at the tiny pup in front of him. Dean is gonna need to have a talk with Missouri—their resident fertility and pup expert—about what exactly she means by normal.

“Yeah yeah, smile away, dude,” Dean sighs, tossing the soiled diaper into the trash and whipping out some wipes. “Bet you feel way better after that mess, huh?”

“Gross, Dean,” Sam mumbles, and Dean can hear the eye roll. Dean just chuckles under his breath.

They finish cleaning the twins up in silence, changing them back into their onesies when they’re done. Mason is making grabby hands with his chubby little fists, which means that they probably have about seven minutes to get a bottle in his hands before he goes into full meltdown mode. Dean slips on his little knit beanie and blows a raspberry on his tummy, doing his best to distract him while Sam finishes up with Liam.

When he’s done, Sam scoops both boys up into his arms and slips out of the bathroom with Dean in tow, leaving Jess asleep in their bed and heading out towards the dining hall. Dean grabs the two pre-prepared bottles on his way out, and follows Sam down the tunnel.

“Jess looks wiped, Sammy,” Dean muses while they walk, laughing at the picture Sam makes with Liam nestled against his chest and Mason tugging on his ridiculous long hair.

“Yeah,” he sighs sadly, snapping his teeth playfully at Mason’s fingers. “Night patrol really screws up our schedule, since she gets stuck with the boys all night.”

“Tellin’ you, the Council would give you more time off if you asked them.”

Sam rolls his eyes, and Dean knows this is just going to be an echo of a conversation they’ve had a million times before. “You mean if I asked you?”

“Not Council yet,” Dean argues, though its half-hearted. With the number of meetings they make him attend these days, and the new responsibilities, he’s sure starting to feel like one of them.

“They’re grooming you, Dean,” Sam argues right back, taking absolutely none of Dean’s shit. “Admit it.”

Dean chooses to ignore him. He knows what they’re doing, but that’s a whole barrel of shit that he doesn’t feel like dealing with today. “Maybe you just need to wait ’til things are easier, ya know? With the pups.”

“The boys are six months next week,” Sam sighs, his shoulders seeming to sag a little bit. It only lasts a second, before he adjusts his grip on the babies and tightens up his back. “That’s how long I’ve been out. I can’t wait forever. Besides, if things were going to get less exhausting, I think they would have by now.”

“Yeah,” Dean concedes, not willing to argue much right now. Besides, Sam isn’t totally wrong. Things in the forest have been quiet—silent, even, in regards to human contact—for a long time, but this is what he does. Sam’s a Hunter, he protects. Dean can’t expect him to stay out for so long. “Fine.”

The dining hall is quiet when they get there, how it always is before the mid-day shifts end. Patrol two ends at the same time as the sentry shift, so pretty soon there should be a bunch of shifters arriving back at the Bunker for lunch. Wolves for sure, probably some leopards too. The cats like to come have lunch after the long, eight hour sentry shifts on the perimeter, so there’s usually a few
leopards hanging around in the dining hall waiting around for the shift change.

Like Lilith, today. She’s with Meg, who is cradling Lilith and Lucifer’s cub in her arms. Bea is younger than Sam’s boys, still struggling to support the weight of her own skull. She’s a sweet baby though, and way quieter than the twins were at her age. Dean assumes that Lilith’s presence means that Lucifer is on sentry, which is unusual but not unheard of. The three Arch leaders are still young, so they like to join in the rotation every once in awhile. It keeps them active in the pack, lets them put a finger on the pulse of the Host.

Dean feels the same way about the Pack, and it’s a huge part of why he still goes on early morning patrols instead of handing them off to the younger alphas. He likes to keep track of his pack, of how everybody is doing day to day. Like Meg, for example. Dean is still waiting on the day that she shows up with a fresh mating bite on her neck, but it hasn’t happened yet. She is perpetually covered in Ruby’s scent though, so he figures it’ll be soon.

Michael is at the table next to them with Bobby and Rufus, the three of them having some kind of discussion over god knows what. Probably means that Anna is here with Sariel, too. Dean’s parents are sitting close together off to the side, and he only barely spares them a glance.

Dean and Sam make their way over to where Charlie is sitting with a grumpy looking Balthazar and a very clearly exasperated Hannah.

"Ooh, gimme!" Charlie coos as soon as they're close enough, reaching out her hands for one of the boys. Liam grins and twists towards her, and Sam lets her scoop the baby out of his arms. "Hello, little fella," Charlie smiles at him, and Liam babbles right back. Mason, not to be out done, tries to join in, much to all of their amusement.

"Alright, chatterbox," Dean chuckles, setting the bottles on the table and taking the other pup out of Sam's arms. "C'mere. Sammy, go get some food before you drop."

Sam nods, giving Dean and Charlie both thankful glances before going off in search of food.

“I’m never, ever having cubs,” Balthazar says under his breath, pushing his food around his plate. “Sam looks downright awful.”

Hannah shoves him and glares, but it does nothing to deter Balthazar’s attitude. “What? He does. Just because you lot won’t say it out loud.”

Dean rolls his eyes, and Charlie pretends to cover up Liam’s ears. “Don’t worry, Liam. The mean old kitty doesn’t matter. He doesn’t know what he’s missing out on.”

Liam hasn’t got a clue what Charlie is going on about, but he giggles anyway. Mason grins automatically. Dean and Hannah have their own laughs at Balthazar’s expense, while he grumbles about how he isn’t “old”.

Sam arrives back a moment later with a heaping plate of food, and Dean can see the sisterly concern painted all over Charlie’s face.

“You’re looking kinda beat, Sam,” she comments lightly, letting Liam tug on the ends of her hair. Mason is chewing on Dean’s fingers, so the hair pulling is probably the better alternative. Dean is just thanking his lucky stars that Mason hasn’t thrown a fit over the bottle yet. “You sure you and Jess don’t need any help with the boys?”

“Nah,” Sam waves a hand at her, speaking around a mouthful of food. Usually Sam is more of a delicate eater, but he sure as hell isn’t holding back now. “We got Mom, and Dean, who is basically
“Shut up,” Dean grumbles at him, shooting Sam a glare. He doesn’t need his dumb little brother wounding his tough guy image, thank you very much. “I’m the one keeping your kids fed while you stuff your face. You’re welcome.”

Sam gives him a boyish grin, his cheeks puffed up and full of food. What a huge nerd.

Mason starts to fuss, so Dean figures it’s time to get the boys fed. Charlie helps him get the two of them situated, one baby balanced in the crook of each arm. The twins are used to being fed together, so they don’t mind being switched around. Dean holds a bottle in each hand, letting the pups suck eagerly on the tips of the bottles. Liam’s eyes immediately droop half-closed, while Mason blinks dazedly up at Dean with his little fingers curled around the bottle. Dean’s heart does a weird little flutter, so full of love and warmth he can hardly stand it.

So thank god it gets interrupted. He does not need that shit right now.

Two more bodies join the table, and Dean glances up to see Lisa and Matt pressed so close that there’s hardly a hair’s breadth between them. Lisa’s cheeks are flushed and Matt is looking a little glazed himself, so even without the overwhelming scent of sex wafting off of them it wouldn’t take much to recognize the post-coital glow.

“Hey guys,” Lisa smiles brightly, apparently talking for both of them since Matt doesn’t seem capable of speech quite yet. “Wonderful day, isn’t it?”

Charlie snorts. “Yeah, wonderful.”

Dean laughs right along with her. “Orgasms do that, don’t they?” he nudges Charlie with his knee, careful not to jostle the babies. “Make the sun shine a little brighter.”

“Make the sky a little bluer,” Charlie sighs dreamily, staring dramatically into the distance. “Make water taste a little sweeter.”

Lisa rolls her eyes. “I would smack both of you,” she warns, “but Charlie is too far away. And Dean, you’ve got puppies.”

“Like a suit of armor,” he winks at her, getting a weak glare and a barely concealed smile in return. He can tell how happy she is, with Matt, and that makes him happy. He doesn’t know the guy very well, he only joined the Pack a few months prior, but Dean likes him. He helps out on patrol, he treats Lisa well, and he looks at her like she hung the moon. She deserves that, for somebody to look at her that way. She deserves somebody special, and Dean won’t be surprised when a mating bite shows up on her neck either.

The conversation wanders off, and Dean floats in and out of listening. He’s paying more attention to the pups in his arms, to their rapidly drooping eyelids. He watches the room, too, seeing his pack ebb and flow and breathe all around him. The leopards and the wolves, all of them his family.

Anna and Layla appear a few minutes later, two pups holding onto Layla’s fingers and a shifted Sariel padding along at their feet. Anna and Layla are smiling and laughing as they making their way over to where Michael is sitting with a few members of the Council, the two pups scurrying off to find their parents in the large hall. Layla offers a small wave in Mary’s direction, but stays at Anna’s side. The two of them have grown closer and closer every day, working together to raise the young cubs together as best they can.

The Pack and the Host have integrated, to a certain extent. There’s still this pervading idea of us and
them, no matter how much intermixing happens. Dean and Cas are still the only inter-pack mates, which isn’t entirely surprising. Still, they’ve all agreed that the packs need time to grow together, and that starts with the pups and the cubs.

Dean is sort of absentmindedly watching the room around him when Sam interrupts his thoughts. Or lack thereof.

“You’re good with them,” he comments, nodding at the pups in Dean’s arms. Dean shrugs.

“You knew that already, little brother. I take care of ‘em all the time.”

“I know that,” Sam runs a hand over Liam’s head, smoothing the brown flyaways that are so different from Mason’s blond curls. Dean is grateful every day that they aren’t identical twins, because he’d never tell them apart. “I just wonder, sometimes.”

Dean raises his eyebrows. “About?”

“You and Cas. You know,” he hesitates, just barely. “You ever talk about this? With each other? Or with Missouri?”

Dean’s heart clenches. He shrugs it off, tries to act as uncaring as he can. Like it doesn’t bother him that he and Cas don’t talk about pups, or having a family, or that nothing has come of the heats they’ve spent together. Because Cas is important to him, and if having Cas means not having pups then he’ll deal.

“I mean, whatever, right?” he mumbles, thankful that everyone else at the table seems distracted with other conversations. “Cas never really wanted pups anyway. S’probably just not meant to be.”

Sam looks at him with those sad puppy eyes that Dean hates, and Dean is reminded of exactly why he doesn’t talk to Sam about this stuff.

Because he hasn’t talked to Missouri, even though she’s the pack expert on pups and having pups and fertility and all that. But he has talked to Layla, who spends the entirety of her time taking care of the pack’s pups and nestling under Missouri’s wing, learning from the elder wolf.

And sure, Layla had smiled and stroked his hair and done whatever it is that omegas do to soothe away the rough edges of an alpha’s bad mood, and she had used gentle, hopeful words like she always does. That didn’t change the fact that the word she was skirting around was “no”. No, Dean would probably not have pups of his own. No, Dean and Cas probably wouldn’t spend months, years being woken up by crying in the middle of the night. No, Dean would probably never see his mate holding a baby in his arms while saying “Dean, meet our baby girl”.

So yeah, Dean doesn’t really talk about having pups of his own. Not with Sam, not with Cas. Layla never brought it up again, after that first time. Mostly, Dean is fine with it. He helps out with Sam’s pups and in the nursery and he holds Cas at night and he’s okay with that. He’s happy.

“Quit lookin’ at me like that, Sammy,” Dean chuckles, letting those thoughts melt away. “Me and Cas, we’re good the way we are. Alright?”

Before Sam can answer there’s an echoing racket from the hallway as patrol two and the sentries arrive back at the Bunker. A jumbled mix of shifters file into the dining quarters, most of them a little dirty and dressed in ratty shirts and sweats. It’s mostly wolves, but there are some leopards mixed in there too. Along with them comes a flood of pheromones, all of their animals riding high from being out in the forest, from the hunt. It’s a little nauseating, but Dean is used to it. Used to the pumping adrenaline and the overwhelming scents.
As the shifters wander in they peel off to find the others who are waiting for them. Friends, mates, parents, anybody. Lucifer goes straight to Lilith and Bea, stroking his cub’s whitish blonde hair and nuzzling Lilith’s temple. Ruby appears behind him a second later, slumping down next to Meg. Their meeting is less affectionate, with Ruby carelessly tossing an arm over Meg’s shoulders and stealing a few fries off her plate. It seems like nothing, but Dean doesn’t miss the way that Ruby inhales deeply, like she’s soaking Meg’s scent into her pores.

Dean tears his eyes away from them in time to see Gabriel stumble in, his hands all over Bela. It’s a little surprising, since they’re usually more hush hush about their little affair. The drama surrounding Gabriel and Balthazar’s escapades was enough to distract everybody for a while, and the two of them went on letting everybody believe that they were just screwing each other. Which, to be fair, wasn’t completely off path. Gabriel and Balthazar were totally fucking the entire time, they were just also fucking Bela. Usually at the same time.

Not everybody knew about their trio for sure, and the three of them just let the rumors fly. Gabriel definitely got off on everybody whispering about him. So Dean is more than a little surprised to see them being so obvious with one another, especially with Balthazar sulking across the table from him.

And now that he’s paying attention…Balthazar is doing a little more than sulking. There’s annoyance and aggression melting off of him in thick waves, and he refuses to even look in the pair’s direction. Instead he lets Hannah pull him closer and sticks his nose under her jawline for a brief moment. Her shoulders are set tight and stiff, protectiveness oozing out of her stance. Dean’s never really understood the relationship the two of them have, but in that moment it feels a lot like him and Jo, something almost sibling-like in the way they curl towards each other.

Although, it doesn’t escape his notice the way that Gabriel’s eyes darken before the alpha forces his gaze away from Balthazar and back to Bela.

“Trouble in paradise?” Dean says low, real concern peaking for the alpha. He doesn’t have a fucking clue what’s going on with the two of them—or three of them, fuck if he knows—but whatever it is doesn’t look like it’s going well.

Balthazar glares at him. “I’d kindly ask you to butt the fuck out, wolf.”

Dean doesn’t push, and Gabriel resumes his pawing. Awesome.

Of course, Dean forgets all about that when he inhales and smells bark and Christmas. He has to resist the urge to twist around in his seat, because the boys are finishing their bottles and so close to finally being asleep, Dean couldn’t bear to disturb them.

Cas appears at his side a few moments later, ducking out from under Jo’s arm and straddling the bench between Dean and Charlie. His cheeks are flushed and his blue eyes are smiling, plus there’s that distracting bare chest and hair just as ruffled as it had been that morning. Dean is always grumpy about Cas leaving their bed for sentry duty at the ass crack of dawn, but he’s always worse when Cas looks warm and rumpled on his way out the door.

Before Cas even opens his mouth Jo is starting her retreat, pulling Charlie along with her. “So sorry, guys. I gotta borrow our friendly neighborhood tech genius here for a mo’. Official Pack business. You know how it is.” She tosses Dean a wink, and he just rolls his eyes at how not subtle she is.

Of course Charlie is rolling her eyes too, but it’s a fond gesture and she isn’t resisting as Jo pulls her to her feet. “Dude, they all know we’re fucking. You still reek like me from this morning. I mean not that I’m complaining, but—”
Jo tugs Charlie in against her chest, wrapping an arm around her waist and clamping a hand over her mouth.


The table laughs, and they all let the two of them escape without further harassment. Now that is a mated pair that Dean approves of. Of course, they aren’t mated yet, but Dean would put money on them being the next ones. It took them a while to get there, but once they did… yeah. They’ll definitely be next.

Dean feels lips against his temple, and he turns his attention back to the leopard next to him. His fucking gorgeous mate, who looks even more beautiful when his animal is riding high and he’s feeling free.

“Hello, Dean,” Cas says against his skin, his slim fingers pushing into Dean’s short hair. Dean hums happily, leaning into the kisses that Cas peppers along his jaw and hairline.

“Not in front of my kids,” Sam grumbles at them, finally pushing his emptied plate away. Dean is honestly pretty surprised he packed away that much food. Surprised, and kinda proud?

“Apologies,” Cas chuckles, fucking gazing at Dean with so much love in his eyes that Dean wants to make him look away. It’s disgusting, honestly. Totally disgusting, and he fucking adores it. “Where’s Jessica?”

“Asleep,” Dean hums, removing the emptied bottles from the boys’ mouths. They are well and truly asleep now, that’s for sure. “She needed a break from motherhood.”

“Mmm,” Cas hums back at him, seeming distracted as he strokes his fingers through Dean’s hair. “You look wonderful with an armful of pups.”

“You sayin’ I don’t look wonderful all the time?” Dean grins, pleased at the warmth of Cas’ body pressed up against his side. His wolf has been quiet all afternoon, but it never fails to react to Cas’ proximity.

“You sayin’ I don’t look wonderful all the time?” Dean grins, pleased at the warmth of Cas’ body pressed up against his side. His wolf has been quiet all afternoon, but it never fails to react to Cas’ proximity.

“Asleep,” Dean hums, removing the emptied bottles from the boys’ mouths. They are well and truly asleep now, that’s for sure. “She needed a break from motherhood.”

“Mmm,” Cas hums back at him, seeming distracted as he strokes his fingers through Dean’s hair. “You look wonderful with an armful of pups.”

“You sayin’ I don’t look wonderful all the time?” Dean grins, pleased at the warmth of Cas’ body pressed up against his side. His wolf has been quiet all afternoon, but it never fails to react to Cas’ proximity.

“Asleep,” Dean hums, removing the emptied bottles from the boys’ mouths. They are well and truly asleep now, that’s for sure. “She needed a break from motherhood.”

“Mmm,” Cas hums back at him, seeming distracted as he strokes his fingers through Dean’s hair. “You look wonderful with an armful of pups.”

“Not at all,” Cas teases right back, never missing a beat. “For example. You look particularly wonderful when you’re asleep in the morning, drooling all over my pillow.”

Dean snorts. “I aim to please, kitty cat.”

“As much fun as this is,” Sam jumps in, dragging Dean and Cas’ attention away from each other, “watching you two flirt, I need to get the boys down for a nap. Hopefully catch a few minutes myself.”

Dean agrees, carefully helping Sam shift the boys into his arms. They don’t wake up, even through all the noise in the dining quarters, which Dean is pretty envious of. He wishes he could just fucking sleep through anything. He also wishes he got midday naps every day, but here he is.

As soon as Dean’s arms are empty Cas finds himself a place inside of them, straddling Dean’s lap and burying his nose in Dean’s throat. He doesn’t seem to care about anybody else around them, so neither does Dean.

“Hey, Cas,” Dean breathes out heavily, stroking a hand down Cas’ spine. “Missed you today.”

“Me too,” he sighs, pulling back a little bit and pressing a kiss to Dean’s lips. “I hate having to get up
and leave you sleeping in the morning.”

“You and me both,” Dean grunts, kissing back a little harder. Cas smiles against his lips.

“You only say that because you like morning sex,” Cas hums, dragging his nails against the stubble on Dean’s cheeks.

“Not gonna deny that,” Dean laughs, “but I like mornings with you too.”

“Sap,” Cas teases, pulling back and smiling at him.

“You love me.”

“That I do,” Cas chuckles low, nosing at the mating scar on the left of Dean’s neck. “You wanna get out of here?”

Dean feels a low growl erupt out of his throat. “I thought you’d never ask.”
Chapter Summary

"Gotta say though, aren't you glad our mating wasn't that dramatic?"

Chapter Notes

Wow so this is...the ending? And I'm going to keep this brief because I think I'll cry if I don't. What a fucking incredible journey, guys. I can't say thank you enough times for all of the patience and love that I've been shown by you guys, because I'd be saying it for the rest of my life. So I'll just say one big THANK YOU, and hope that you guys know just how much I mean it.

Every person who commented, who left kudos, who even opened this story and read the first chapter. To those of you who were here from chapter one, and to those that are just now finding this at chapter forty-three. To those of you that fell in love with these two right along with me, and for those of you who are sad to see them go. This one's for you. This whole fic is for you.

Thank you.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“One of us is definitely the alpha here,” Dean manages between bruising kisses, stumbling backwards as Cas pushes him into their room and slams the door behind him. Another second and he’s flat on his back, the full weight of his mate sprawled on top of him.

“Certainly one of us,” Cas mumbles, scraping his teeth along Dean’s jawline. Dean’s hands find their way to Cas' hips, pulling their bodies flush together in the dark. He can never find it in himself to mind when Cas pushes him around like this.

The quiet space of their room is filled with the sounds of heaving breaths, the quiet snaps of cotton tearing as they tug at each other’s clothes. They move together with a familiarity that soothes every one of their rough edges; Dean knows just where to press his thumbs inside Cas’ hips to get him to rock back on Dean’s cock, Cas knows just how to arch his back to entice Dean into thrusting up harder. Dean’s hand automatically finds the place on Cas’ scalp that makes him cry out and crumple when tugged on, and Cas drags his mostly-blunt nails down Dean’s chest just hard enough to leave light red lines.

It’s fueled by Cas’ adrenaline and the ache Dean has for his mate when Cas leaves for lengths of time. They clutch at each other and the feeling of being tied together after they both come finally erases the unhappy curl of Dean’s stomach.

“Fuck morning sentry,” Dean rumbles, pulling Cas in tight with arms around his waist. Cas cups Dean’s face and strokes his hair in response, and Dean knows he’s being petted by a cat but it’s his cat so it’s acceptable. “Hate it when you leave.”
Cas chuckles and presses deeper into a kiss, swallow the pitiful moan Dean lets out as he comes again, still buried inside his mate.

“You had a dream last night, didn’t you?” Cas asks, his tone dampening the mood around them. Dean reluctantly nods.

“That obvious, huh?” He catches Cas’ gaze, those blue eyes studying every inch of his face with an unmatched intensity.

“I know you well enough.” Cas touches their foreheads together and brushes his thumb against the nape of Dean’s neck. “You always squeeze just a little too tight, and your voice is more…growly.”

“The wolf.”

“Mmm,” Cas hums in agreement. “Dean asks me to stay in bed with him, mumbles into his pillow and holds onto my fingers,” he says quietly, and Dean blushes. Cas makes him sound downright romantic. “The wolf tells me to stay. Rolls on top of me and tries to sound tough. Sometimes you whine, and sometimes you growl when I leave.”

Dean can’t help but smile at that, because it’s true. He always wants his mate around, but sometimes one half of himself is stronger than the other. Sometimes Dean wants Cas in his arms, and sometimes the wolf wants his panther. And the same is true for Cas, he knows that for sure.

“When you dream,” Cas sobered up again, “you do all of these things. You growl at me to stay but you whisper please against my lips.”

“Cas…” Dean exhales, squirming under the attention. He knows that Cas observes him it’s just…odd when he points it out.

Cas ignores his complaint, shushing him with a drawn out kiss.

“Would you like to tell me about it?”

Dean is about to open his mouth to say no when Cas rolls his hips in Dean’s lap, tugging on his knot and drawing a low groan out of his throat.

“Now?” Dean says low, his hands following the roll of Cas’ hips as their lips fit together.

Cas grins and arches his back, rolling his hips a second time. “Yes, now. Tell me.”

“The usual,” Dean manages, panting against Cas’ neck and dragging his nails down his shoulder blades as one, two more climaxes ripple down his spine. “I don’t get there in t—ah!—ime. Fuck.”

Cas grins and tugs sharply on Dean’s hair, bending his neck back to expose his throat. Dean groans into it, practically whimpering as Cas sucks a hickey onto his throat. Cas sets his attentions on Dean’s mouth next, easily parting his lips and molding their mouths together.

“You don’t save me,” Cas whimpers, and Dean feels his cock start to harden between their bodies. His own dick is doing the same, even as his knot starts to deflate. He doesn’t mind, that just means he gets to fuck Castiel in earnest again.

“No. You’re dead.” Dean growls and thrusts up into his mate’s body, the memories of the dream fading even as he tries to recall them. He’s grasping at the threads of the nightmare, but they’re slipping through the fingers that are clinging to Cas’ body.
“I’m okay,” Cas assures him, moaning and panting against Dean’s mouth. “You found me in time. You saved me.” Dean nods, his chest heaving. “Leave it behind. Be here with me.”

That’s all it takes. In one smooth move Dean flips Cas onto his back, Cas’ legs coming up to settle on Dean’s hips. He braces his elbows on either side of Cas’ head and buries his face in Cas’ neck, thrusting short and deep into the warmth of his body. It’s wet and messy, a combination of Cas’ slick and Dean’s come, but none of that matters. Cas is stroking the nape of his neck and whispering and moaning into Dean’s ear and the last remnants of Dean’s dream melt away.

Dean squeezes him tight as Cas whimpered his name, pushing his thigh just barely closer to his chest to press deeper.

“Mine, my panther, my mate,” Dean groans against the damp skin of Cas’ neck, his voice rough and wrecked, scratchy in his throat.

“Yes,” Cas moans, nails digging in to Dean’s nape. “Mine. My Dean.”

Dean sucks Cas’ earlobe into his mouth, traces the shell of his ear with the tip of his tongue.

“My Castiel.”

***

They’ve been dozing for a few hours, wrapped in each other’s arms. Kissing lazily, talking softly about whatever comes to mind.

“At what point,” Dean chuckles, pressing a kiss to the back of Cas’ palm, “does it become unacceptable to lay around in bed?”

Cas hums and cracks open one eye. “Why do you ask?”

“Pretty sure it’s past dinner.”

“Past dinner?” Cas says dryly. “And you haven’t complained about needing food yet?”

Dean growls at him. “Shut it, cat.”

“Sorry, puppy,” Cas sticks out his bottom lip dramatically. “Was I too mean to you?”

“Whatever,” Dean snorts. “We gotta get up to movie night. And get some grub first.”

“We’re going?” Cas sighs, staring at the ceiling.

“Kinda have to,” Dean rolls towards him, rubbing his nose against Cas’ shoulder. “Missed last week, cause someone refused to put clothes on.”

“Hate to break it to you,” Cas laughs, ruffling Dean’s hair affectionately, “but that was you. I tried to drag you out naked but you said no, so.”

Dean smiles up at him. “Busted. But we gotta go. You know how the younger ones get.”

Cas hums quietly, the sound weighing heavy in the air. Dean gets it, the exhaustion. So much of the pack is falling onto them already, even after such a short time. And less so with the leopards, but the wolves need quality time with their alphas on a regular basis. Aka, the Pack needs quality time with Dean and Cas on a regular basis. It’s…awesome.
And not because Dean doesn’t love their packs, because he does. He just also loves his mate. And one of them is getting more quality time than the other, at least recently. Not being able to bum around their room or the treehouse is getting old, fast.

“I do,” Cas finally responds. “I get it.” A gentle hand cups Dean’s cheek. “I’m not the only one who wants time with you.”

“Time with us, baby,” Dean corrects. “Both of us.”

***

Dean and Cas both hear the voices around the corner before they see the source of the words. They share a quick look, smiles on both of their faces as they press themselves against the stone wall to eavesdrop. The Bunker is quiet, everyone already up in the nursery or tucked away in their rooms for the night, so the pair arguing in the main hall probably thinks they’ve got some privacy. Hilarious.

“I’m going home, Gabriel. To my own bed.”

Balthazar. And he sounds more pissed off than Dean has ever heard him. The leopard is usually so blasé. Dean glances at Cas, raising his eyebrows in question. Cas just frowns and shakes his head in response.

“Really? Everybody under the age of seventy five is up in the nursery, and you’re going home? Really, Bal?”

Balthazar snorts. “Apologies, alpha. I wasn’t aware you cared quite so much.”

There’s a low growl, and both Dean and Cas’ eyes blow wide. Dean, for one, has never heard Gabriel growl like that, not out of frustration. Dean has to cover his mouth to muffle his laugh while Cas presses against him to listen closer.

“I don’t give a shit what you do, Bal.”

“Good.”

Two steps echo down the main hall, then a heavy thud that sounds like a body hitting the wall. Dean and Cas inch closer to the corner.

“I don’t give a shit,” Gabriel growls, “but don’t you dare antagonize me.”

“Or what?” Balthazar practically purrs. “Will you punish me for it?”

Dean snorts, and this time it’s Cas’ hand that covers his mouth to muffle the sound. Cas glares at him, but there’s a smile hiding at the corner of his mouth.

“Why are you acting like this?” Gabriel snaps, his voice lower and more dangerous than usual. Balthazar must really get under his skin, because Gabe never gets frustrated like this.

“Haven’t the foggiest idea what you mean, darling.”

“Shut the hell up. Like you weren’t all over Hannah earlier. Ever since the other night, with Bela—”

Gabriel stops speaking abruptly, and Dean wishes he could see what Balthazar did to cause the sudden pause.

“You’re still angry.”
“Nice try, Gabby, but no luck. I can’t be bothered with your...kinks.”

Dean can hear the eye roll in his voice. “Yeah. Right. And the way you stormed out after has nothing to do with any of this.”

Balthazar doesn’t respond, but they both hear a sharp exhale. Dean and Cas exchange another look, and Dean finds his fingers winding around Cas’ automatically.

“So. Do I have to drag it out of you? Or can you be honest for once?”

“Me be honest? That’s laughable, Gabriel. You want honesty, then you can go first.”

“I’ve been honest, Bal. Since the beginning. Since you came up with this fucking idea—”

“Oh right. My idea.”

Another thud, as Balthazar assumedly hits the stone wall once again. “Listen.” There’s no give in Gabriel’s voice, no room for Balthazar to argue an inch. “I don’t give a shit about any of this. Never have. It’s stress relief, someplace to stick my knot when my leopard gets too riled up. That’s it and you know that.”

“Of course, perfect Gabriel doesn’t give a rat’s ass about anyone except himself. Gabriel doesn’t need anyone, Gabriel doesn’t care about anyone. Gabriel has a heart of fucking stone. Better not fall for Gabriel, because Gabriel doesn’t give a shit about you—”

A throaty snarl, and Dean knows an alpha’s command when he hears one.

“Shut your mouth, Balthazar, or I’ll do it for you.”

“Why? Because it isn’t true? Because you aren’t a heartless bastard?”

“You know I’m not. I—”

“Then why did you let her bite you?”

Silence falls, and Cas squeezes Dean’s hand tighter. Dean never would have eavesdropped if he knew the conversation they’d be having, but it had seemed so innocent at first. He fucking regrets that assumption now. They shouldn’t be hearing this, but it’s too late for them to sneak away.

“That’s what this is about? That stupid bite?”

“Don’t act like it means nothing,” Balthazar snarls at him. “She’s a beta, and she marked you.”

“It didn’t even break the skin, Bal,” Gabriel’s voice softens. “It’s not even on my throat.”

“You’re an alpha. Alpha’s don’t let overeager betas mark them whenever they feel like it. Not unless it means something.”

A heavy sigh. “I don’t care about all that dominance stuff. You know that. And its fading already so who gives a shit anyway?”

“So if I bit you, if I tried to mark you like you let her do, you’d let me? You wouldn’t struggle, just like you didn’t struggle when she put her teeth on you? You’d fucking purr for me like you did for her?”

A pregnant pause seems to stretch for minutes. Dean is barely even breathing. Cas presses his
forehead to Dean’s chest and closes his eyes. Dean wishes he wasn’t hearing this.

“No. I wouldn’t.”

“That’s what I thought.”

Dean expects to hear Balthazar’s retreating footsteps, or more yelling, or something. Instead he hears another low thud, and the wet sounds of lips meeting and a quiet, possessive growl.

“You don’t get to play-bite. You bite me,” Gabriel pants, his voice rough with emotion, “you better mean it. And be ready for a bite of your own.”

More noises, including a low purr from one of the two of them.

When Balthazar speaks again, it’s so quiet that Dean isn’t even sure he heard it. “Don’t say it if you don’t mean it, Gabe. Just don’t.”

“I mean it.”

It sounds like they’re kissing again. Dean curls an arm around Cas’ shoulders and grins down at him, still trying not to burst out laughing. Cas just shakes his head and kisses the bolt of Dean’s jaw quietly. It takes a few minutes for the lovebirds to vacate the main hall, but the stumbling footsteps when they do leave are pretty unmistakeable. Dean considers walking out to interrupt, but Cas shakes his head. He supposes it is a pretty pivotal moment in their relationship, but still. They’re gonna make Dean and Cas miss the beginning of the movie.

“I’m quite sure we shouldn’t have listened to that,” Cas laughs as soon as the pair is gone. “Should we never mention it aloud ever again?”

“Agreed,” Dean sighs, hooking an arm around Cas’ neck and dragging him towards the nursery. "Gotta say though, aren't you glad our mating wasn't that dramatic?"

Dean grins, but the look on Cas' face shows just how unamused he is. "Ah yes, no drama whatsoever. I certainly didn't suffer while waiting for you to pull your head out of your ass."

"Hey!" Dean splutters. "I--"

Cas pulls him down into a kiss, ignoring Dean's indignant growl. "Shush, puppy. You can't win this one."

"But I--"

Cas rolls his eyes. "Shush. Let's go. It’s probably already started.”

***

Dean has to leave for patrol before the movie is over. He’s about two seconds from not leaving at all, just staying curled up here with his pack instead. Cas is asleep, draped across his lap, and purring. Adam is asleep against Krissy and Layla, Jess has her chest pressed back against Sam’s chest and a baby monitor in her hands. Jo is staring blatantly at Charlie and stroking long strands of red hair. Dean wishes he could take a picture of her expression, because that is some true mate shit right there.

He wonders briefly if it’s anything like how he looks at Cas.
“Baby,” he says softly, threading his fingers through Cas’ messy bedhead. “Wanna let me go?”

“Absolutely not,” Cas mumbles low in his throat. “Want you to stay. Go to bed with me.”

Dean almost whines.

“Be back by midnight,” he whispers, trying not to disrupt the movie watchers. Even though mostly everybody is asleep or getting ready to leave like him. The nursery does that to people, puts ‘em right to sleep. “You get some sleep without me. I’ll be there when you wake up.”

Cas groans and sits up, placing a sleepy kiss on his lips.

“Sleep?” Cas blinks blearily, clearly still half asleep. “Who needs it. I’ll stay up and wait.”

“Course you will,” Dean chuckles, kissing the palm of his mate’s hand.

The tunnels of the bunker feel particularly cold after the warmth of the nursery. Although the temperatures are dropping, the days getting shorter and shorter. A few soldiers trail behind him, looking sleepy-eyed, and he finds Benny already waiting at the main exit. Dean nods at him in greeting, getting a brief nod in response.

As much as Dean doesn’t want to head out on patrol at the moment, it feels good to let his wolf out. He’s been feeling itchy lately, too big for his skin. Maybe it’s a rut coming up, maybe it’s the nearness of the full moon. Whatever it is, a little run through the forest will do him some good.

Dean’s bones crack and his muscles stretch, hair sprouting down his spine and teeth lengthening inside his mouth. The wolf howls triumphantly, and Dean lets it out once they’re outside.

Dirt and twigs crunch beneath his paws. The forest is quiet this time of night, and the only thing he hears after splitting off from the others is the pounding of his own feet and his own panting breaths.

He’s running northeast tonight, and he can already smell Uriel up in check one. The wind is in his favor this evening, throwing all the scents his way. Not that there are many; his forest is clean, pure, safe. His family, his packs, they are safe.

Dean slows his pace to a jog. As much as he wants to get home to his mate, he needs to sink into his forest. Tune in to the scents and sounds. There’s no need to rush home, not with the knowledge that Cas will be asleep waiting for him.

And asleep he is, despite his earlier claims. Dean’s chest aches at the sight of Cas curled into his side of the bed, body twisted in a way that’s distinctly feline. He’s dirty and a little sweaty from patrol, but he doesn’t care. Cas’ll probably yell at him, but all he wants is to climb into bed with his mate.

“Kitten,” Dean murmurs, touching a hand to his cheek. Cas’ nose twitches, and a slow purr starts up in his chest. “Hey.”

Cas doesn’t respond, inching far enough over in the bed so that Dean can slide in under the comforter. Dean sinks into his warmth, letting his arms wind around Cas’ torso.

“You didn’t shower,” Cas mumbles, words slurred together.

“Nope.”

“You got in our bed, without showering. Again.”

Dean grins at the deadpan tone. His cat is a grumpy motherfucker sometimes.
“Yep.”

Cas makes a frustrated noise in his throat.

“Damn dog.”

***

Castiel still has nightmares. It’s the main reason why Dean doesn’t take patrols after midnight, even if the stubborn wolf will never admit it. Castiel knows.

They never catch him by surprise, never catch him off guard. He knows them from the second he enters the dream, from the sickly cool feeling of fear trickling down his spine.

He still remembers what that place smelled like. Death, and blood, and so much fear Castiel was sick from it. Pain, misery, a sick kind of happiness on the rare days it melted off their captors’ skin. Castiel remembers what the metal of his cage felt like under his paws, remembers the faraway coldness of Anna’s eyes in the cage next to him. Castiel remembers Crowley’s clown-like grin as he watched him through the bars, how it only grew when Castiel showed his disobedience towards him. Castiel remembers the pained cries of Rachel when they killed her.

Dean doesn’t know about that.

All of this comes back to him, like he’s still there. Like Dean never found him. And maybe that’s the true part, maybe the real dream is being in the den with his mate. Maybe Castiel never made it home, maybe he’s still in Crowley’s cage and his moments with Dean are a tranquilizer-induced dream. Maybe this, the cold, the dripping dread of this place, maybe this is what’s real.

But then Castiel wakes up, a cold sweat on his skin as Dean cradles him in his arms. He always buries his nose in his mate’s throat, tries to drown the memory of the scent of death with the fresh, warm scent of Dean all around him. Castiel must have been moving a lot tonight, because Dean is already awake. He shifts Castiel into his lap, sits up and holds him close while stroking his spine.

“You’re safe,” he coos into Cas’ ear, quiet and warm. “I got you. You’re safe. You’re not there anymore, they can’t hurt you. You’re with me. You’re safe.”

Castiel shivers in his embrace, letting the last tendrils of his sleep wash away. Dean rumbles a low growl until Castiel relaxes in his arms, keeps repeating those words for as long as Castiel needs to hear them. You’re safe. I’m here. You’re safe.

“You can’t scare my dreams away,” Castiel sighs, nuzzling the mating bite on the left of Dean’s neck.

“Beg to differ,” Dean snorts, growling a little louder. “Watch me try.”

And he does. And it totally works.

Castiel still has nightmares. Less frequently than before, and fewer each week.

Dean is always there to scare them away.

Chapter End Notes
On the subject of time stamps, there will be a couple (or one big one, who even knows anymore). I imagine I'll post them here, because making a separate work sounds like something I don't want to do. If mpreg isn't something that you want to read about, consider this your ending. If that is something you enjoy, read on my friends. The first part will be posted sometime soon, and at random intervals after that until I'm finished telling everything that I want to tell.
Timestamp #1

Chapter Summary

“Zero sounds awfully low. I think that last one might have taken.”

Chapter Notes

Let the sex-filled family building floof begin! Please heed the time jumps :))

**Warning:** mpreg lies ahead. proceed at your own risk/pleasure.

---

*five years or so later*

“We were supposed to talk to Missouri.”

“We didn’t talk to Missouri.”

“Nope.”

“What if—”

Cas silences him with a kiss, and all Dean can manage is a soft whimper against his mouth.

“That’s a very big if,” Cas murmurs, and it’s clear that he’s going for calm but he lands more in the vicinity of desperate. “And one we can deal with later.”

Dean rests their foreheads together, trying to ignore the rut burning through his veins. Cas’ proximity is enough for the moment, but his instincts are practically begging him to rip his mate’s clothes off.

“If you get pregnant—”

“If you get pregnant—”

“That’s a very big if,” Cas runs a gentle hand down Dean’s cheek. “We’ve talked about this, puppy. What’s got you so worked up?”

Dean drops his gaze and fiddles with one of the many blankets laid out underneath him. “You never wanted pups, before. Or, I guess, you weren’t hoping. Now…”

“I want a family,” Cas sighs. “With you. You think that changes things?”

“I want a family,” Cas sighs. “With you. You think that changes things?”

“Maybe?” Dean shrugs, like this isn’t the most important moment of his young life, like his insides aren’t squirming around in knots at the thought of having pups of his own. “Maybe, y’know, fate, or whatever, it was waitin’ for you to get on board. Or somethin’.”

Cas chuckles lightly. “Or something?”
“Yeah. Or something. And if you change your mind…”

Dean lifts his eyes, and they stare at each other for three long seconds. Then the floodgates open, and Dean finds himself flat on his back with an armful of panther. Cas trails kisses along his neck and jaw, mumbling against Dean’s skin as he goes.

“I’ve lost count of how many heats I’ve spent with you,” he rumbles, his voice rough with lust. “Every three months for five years. Do you honestly believe that the possibility of my getting pregnant never crossed my mind until now?”

It all sounds so stupid when Cas spells it out like that.

“Not really, no.”

“And do you think I’d see our child, or even feel it growing inside me, and decide that I didn’t want it anymore?”

“Hell no,” Dean almost smiles, because the idea really is laughable. Cas would love their pup with everything he has.

“Good,” Cas hums. “Now stop worrying and fuck me.”

Dean’s rut amps up to level twelve at those words, a snarl tearing out of his throat. In one smooth motion he rolls and flips Cas onto his stomach, pinning his mate down with the weight of his body. Cas whines and arches his back, pressing his ass back against Dean’s crotch. His erection slides against the slick on Cas’ cheeks, and Dean can feel how his dick twitches with interest. He wants, needs to be buried inside his mate. Right now.

But first.

Dean leaves a trail of gentle bites and hickeys all down Cas’ back as he goes, the wolf pleased with the blatant claim. Cas squirms and whines underneath him, but Dean keeps him pinned.

Dean licks over the dimples in Cas’ lower back, nips at each ass cheek before spreading them with his hands. He can’t resist tasting, not with Cas laid bare beneath him. And Dean is thankful that they are in the treehouse, far from anyone else, because he doesn’t want them hearing the sounds of ecstasy pouring from Cas’ mouth.

“Please, Dean,” he whimpers, trying desperately to push his hips back towards Dean’s mouth. “More, need you, god need you so bad.”

Dean growls low against his puckered hole, the leaking slick making him almost delirious with its sweet, familiar taste. A few more broad licks and Dean is plunging his tongue into Cas’ body, licking him open to prepare him for the knot that Dean is itching to pop. Cas’ knuckles go white against the blankets beneath him, Dean’s fingers digging in to the soft skin of his ass.

“Mine,” Dean growls, letting the vibration press right against Cas’ body. “All mine.”

Cas moans, desperately nodding against a pillow. “Yes, yours, all yours, my alpha, please fuck me, alpha.”

“Nice to hear you say please,” Dean grunts, still licking away at Cas’ slick soaked hole. His cock is throbbing between his legs, but the slick on his lips is enough for now. “I like it.”

“Fuck,” Cas groans, squirming a little bit. “Need you, Dean, need your knot. Please, baby. I’m so
"hot, so hot…"

Dean relents, running his nose up Cas’ spine and into his messy hair. He slots their hips together so that his dick is laying in the crack of Cas’ ass, sliding it up and down teasingly.

Normally, Dean would take his time. Slide in inch by inch, draw every different whimper and moan out of his cat before bottoming out. Because he likes to be gentle with Cas, when they have the time. To show him with his hands just how much his cat is loved.

But a rut is not the time for gentleness, and no way would Cas allow it with his heat. Because Cas in his heat likes to be \textit{fucked}. Held down, Dean pounding into his ass with all the force he’s got. And Dean never hesitates to give him what he wants.

One hand slides into Cas’ hair at the crown of his head, pulling sharply to bend his neck as Dean licks and bites at the long column of his throat. Cas’ eyes flutter shut, color high in his cheeks and his pink lips damp and parted.

With one long thrust Dean bottoms out, pushing past the tight ring of muscle. The heat of Cas’ body envelopes him, and they both cry out together.

Dean’s thrusts are long and hard, growls coming out muffled against Cas’ nape. He saves all the words that his wolf wants to say, because his mouth is too busy tasting his mate’s skin. It’s damp with sweat, hotter than usual from the heat, flushed and warm under Dean’s hands. Cas’ scent drives him wild on a normal day, but that’s got nothing on what it does to him when Cas is in heat, or when Dean’s in a rut. And the times when their cycles match up…well. This happens.

“\textit{Harder,}” Cas whines, “\textit{fuck, harder alpha hard—hnnnnnggh fuck—}”

“Got you, baby,” Dean rumbles, fucking into him harder, his instincts screaming for him to give his mate whatever he wants.

“Want all of you, want \textit{everything}…”

“I’m yours kitten, it’s all yours,” Dean grinds deeper, making Cas moan as his cock brushes against his prostate.

“Want your pups, want to be filled up with our babies—”

“\textit{Fuck!}”

Dean’s knot swells faster than it ever has in his \textit{life}, and he comes seconds later as Cas clenches around him from the force of his own orgasm.

There’s several minutes of heaving breathing before either one of them speaks.

Dean barely manages to roll them onto their sides, Cas’ body completely limp against him. Another orgasm rips through him at the slight tug on his knot, and Dean’s vision blacks out for a few more seconds.

“Baby,” Dean says quietly, kissing the knob of Cas’ spine right at the base of his neck. Cas just hums in acknowledgement. “You mean that?”

“Mean what,” Cas mumbles, his voice slurred. He grabs one of Dean’s hands and nuzzles his palm, slotting their fingers together.
“Fuckin’ cat,” Dean chuckles, getting a quiet, feline growl in response. “The pups, kitten. That you talkin’ or is that the heat?”

Cas nestles back against his chest. “Both? Less than an hour ago, Dean. I told you less than an hour ago. I’ve told you a thousand times before that.”

“I know,” Dean says quietly, “I just—”

“And I’ll say it a thousand more,” Cas twists his neck just so, nosing at Dean’s temple, “until you believe me. If I have to put your hands on my pregnant belly and whisper in your ear all night long, I will.”

Something sharp and desperate flares up inside Dean’s chest at the thought, at the very idea of Cas, pregnant with their pups. Or cubs. Or anything that the universe saw fit to give them. He doesn’t let the feeling take root, lets it slip away like he does every time it happens.

“Don’t talk like that. You know what Missouri is gonna say.” Dean sighs, tucking his nose against Cas’ neck. “Same thing Layla said. Our chances are basically zero.”

“I don’t know about that,” Cas hums, still sounding thoroughly fucked out and content. He takes both of Dean’s hands in his own, moving them until Dean’s palms are flat against his stomach. Cas’ stomach is smooth, muscles relaxed under the skin. Still, Dean can’t help the instinctive calm he feels. “Zero sounds awfully low. I think that last one might have taken.”

“Stop it,” Dean rumbles, even as a smile tugs at his lips. His rut sizzles at the base of his spine, but he can ignore it for a few more seconds.

“And if it didn’t…well. You’ll have to really mean it this next time.”

Dean growls and rolls until Cas is underneath him, his rut flaring up for another go. They are still tied together, but there’s loads of things that Dean still has to work with.

“You asked for this,” he says right into Cas’ ear, nipping at the lobe as he does. Cas just grins.

“Fuck yes I did.” He whines and pants a few times, Dean’s knot tugging at his rim. “Come on, wolf. Breed me.”

***

When their respective cycles end, they finally go talk to Missouri.

She says exactly what they thought she’d say.

“You boys got a couple’a things goin’ on,” she hums as she bustles around her room. “One, you’re shifters. Not great for fertility. Two, you’re an alpha omega pair. That one’s helpin’ ya. But three, you ain’t even the same species.”

The two of them exchange a knowing glance at that, both of them doing their best to repress their smiles.


Her eyes flick between the two of them, like she’s sizing them up. Although she does seem to be looking through them somehow, which is a strange enough feeling to have.

“You recently have a heat, sweetheart?” she says, taking a step towards Cas. He nods without
hesitation. She smiles warmly at him. “I can see that. Dean, honey, you take a look at that mate of yours. An’ you tell me what you see.”

Dean turns to face him, looking him over carefully from head to toe. His hair is damp, from their morning shower. He looks a little more tan than usual, but not by much. His cheeks are pinker, probably will be for a few days. Perks of the heat. His blue eyes look bright and awake, probably due to the eighteen plus hours they’d slept the night before. But there’s nothing out of the ordinary about the way he looks. Dean always thinks Cas looks gorgeous, but that’s about it.

“I just see him. What am I lookin’ for?”

Missouri sighs the most put upon sigh Dean has ever heard. “I swear, you boys can’t even see what’s right in front of you.”

They exchange looks again, but neither of them has got a clue what she’s on about.

“I can’t say if y’all will have a family,” she hums, cupping each of their cheeks simultaneously. “But I can tell you how he glows. Now, maybe he just loves you, Dean. Maybe you love him. Or maybe it’s somethin’ else.”

Dean’s heart stops. “You mean...?”

She waves her hand and turns away from them. “I don’t mean nothin’. Just tellin’ you what I see.”

“Thank you,” Cas says softly, one of his hands dropping absently to rest on his stomach. Dean meets his gaze, and sees his own hopeful fear reflected in Cas’ eyes.

“Yeah. Thanks.”

***

two months later

Castiel is sitting high up in the trees, waiting. A cool breeze brushes against his cheeks, ruffling his hair. Dean had his hands in it that morning, so Castiel can only imagine the state it’s in now.

He wishes he could shift, wishes he could prowl along the branches with only his tail and claws for balance. He wishes he could climb higher, jump further, feel stronger. But he won’t.

Castiel’s hands drop down to his stomach.

It’s flat, like it’s always been. With a little imagination Castiel can pretend like there’s something growing there, inside of him. That his belly is stretched and round around a new life. Castiel lifts his shirt to examine the expanse of skin, like maybe he’ll see something if the clothes are out of the way.

He’s been feeling perfectly normal. He’s been sleeping a little bit more, but that’s Dean’s fault more than his own. How is he expected to drag himself out of bed when his wolf is so willing to stay curled around him? And then there was the pie incident, over a week ago. They’d been eating dinner, the scent of pie hitting Castiel’s nose from across the dining hall. Normally it’s a scent he would react well to, but his stomach had decided to empty itself instead. Dean had looked personally offended. And then there’d been that one night, when Castiel had an overwhelming desire for pickles and peanut butter around 3:15 in the morning. He’s pretty sure Dean was too exhausted to even question it.

They’re all just...isolated incidents. Castiel’s body does strange things, sometimes. So what if he
At least, that’s what he tries to remind himself. Because there’s the other side of the coin; always the other side. The part of him that knows that fatigue, nausea, cravings, these are all early symptoms of pregnancy. And at most he’s two months along, so too early to really show. So it really comes down to one last question.

His heat.

Mating cycles aren’t an exact science. Castiel generally has a heat every sixty days or so, give or take a few. Dean’s ruts are far less predictable, ranging from fifty-seven to seventy-one days in between. Depends on the state of the Pack, if he and Castiel have been fighting more than usual, how the wolf is feeling. The month that Dean got promoted to Council, the same month that Castiel spent most of his time out in the forest instead of the Bunker because the politics were driving him so insane, Dean’s rut hit after only thirty days or so. Dean always came to find him out in the treehouse every night, but emotions were running high. So sometimes their cycles line up, and sometimes they don’t.

Dean had his rut last week. Nine days ago, to be exact. It wouldn’t have lined up perfectly, since Dean’s rut was a little early, but they should have overlapped. Castiel’s heat was due eight days ago.

And right now, sitting up in the trees, counting the minutes until the end of his sentry shift, Castiel feels perfectly normal. He doesn’t feel like he wants to crawl inside Dean’s skin, doesn’t feel the need to be fucked into a mattress until he can’t walk straight. His skin isn’t hot, his senses aren’t heightened. Dean had smelled delightful, as usual, when Castiel climbed out of bed that morning, but he didn’t smell like ambrosia, not like he does when Castiel is in heat.

Dean also let Castiel leave mostly without a fight, which never happens right before a heat.

So all signs point to…

Castiel stills his hands on his belly, stares down at the flat skin.

He hasn’t shifted in two months, because of this. There’s no science behind it, no reason for Castiel to believe that it makes a difference, but he can’t bring himself to do it. To tear his body apart when there might be something so precious inside. So he hasn’t shifted, hasn’t drank any of Balthazar’s home brew, hasn’t eaten fish or stood in front of the microwave.

Because maybe, just maybe…

A smile spreads across Castiel’s face.

Yeah. Maybe.

***

Castiel goes to find Missouri first thing, as soon as he’s off sentry. Dean is probably waiting in the dining quarters and worrying, but he’ll be able to feel that everything’s okay through their bond. Hopefully.

Missouri’s room is right next to the staircase to the nursery. Hers is the only room outside of the main tunnel, and Castiel has never been sure exactly why. Even Pam has a room with everyone else. Still, Missouri is special. Castiel knows that for sure. He knocks softly on her door, waiting for acknowledgement before entering.

“Come in, Castiel.”
He shakes his head and opens the door.

“Hello, Missouri,” he says softly, closing the door behind himself. If he didn’t know better he’d say that Missouri was an omega, with how soothing and calming the scent of her is. He does know better, and he still thinks of her that way. “How have you been?”

She waves a hand at him and shuffles over until there are only a few inches between them, her soft hands cupping his cheeks. “Sweet child, lay your worries down.”

Castiel’s knees threaten to collapse under him, but he’s stronger than that. Terrified, but strong.

“I’m fine,” he nods, not even bothering with a smile. She’d see right through him.

Missouri hums, her gaze dropping down to Castiel’s stomach for a split second. “Fine. We don’t believe you for a second.”

The words sink like a boulder to the pit of Castiel’s stomach. “Um. We?”

Another smile, and her fingers petting his hair. Exactly three people in his life are allowed to pet him like this. Anna, Mary, and Dean. And now, apparently, Missouri too. He doesn’t mind it.

“That life inside of you,” she speaks slowly, carefully, like she’s waiting for Castiel to freak out. “So new to this world, and already it knows you.”

Castiel feels his heart rate pick up, does everything in his power not to hyperventilate. “So. I’m…” he trails off. Can’t say the words out loud.

“Yes, you are.”

His eyes burn, tears trying to burst out. Happy or panicked, he doesn’t know. His stomach is churning and his thoughts are racing and he can’t even decide if he’s excited.

“Tell me, sweetheart. What worries you?”

The words leap out of his mouth before he even realizes what they are. Thoughts and feelings he didn’t know he had, not until they come to life in the quiet space of Missouri’s room.

“What if I do something wrong? What if something happens, and I can’t…? Or if I get sick, and…I don’t know how to be a parent, how to raise a child. And Dean, he…”

Castiel chokes on a sob. Panic creeps up his spine and he’s clinging to Missouri and trying to get all of these things out of his head before they can get their claws in his brain.

“Dean doesn’t know?” Missouri asks, once Castiel is quiet enough for her to speak. Castiel just shakes his head. “He’ll find out soon, whether you tell him or not.”

Logically, this is something that Castiel knows. His scent has probably already changed, and in less than a month he’ll start to show.

Assuming nothing goes wrong.

“This is big,” Missouri murmurs. “And this is scary. Something might happen, before birth, during birth, or after. And I could sit here and talk away your fears all day long, and this would still be big and scary. But you don’t need that, do you?”

Castiel shakes his head. “I don’t need comforting lies.”
Her face softens. “Then let me give you some truth. You and Dean, you have a bond like none other. You’ve created this child, against all odds. Do this together, raise this child together, and that will be enough. I can promise you that.”

Missouri’s words are still ringing in Castiel’s ears when he curls up in bed that night. Dean is exhaling puffs of warm breath against Castiel’s collarbone, his nose buried against Castiel’s throat. Castiel knows he’s asleep, because the arms around his waist have loosened and relaxed. His breathing is even, and he’s oozing the scent of happy, mated alpha. It’s Castiel’s second favorite scent. Castiel is lazily pushing his fingers through Dean’s short hair, staring at the ceiling as sleep continues to elude him.

In the morning. He’ll tell Dean in the morning.

***

For the first time in a long time, Dean wakes up alone. The other side of the bed is cool, so Cas has been gone for a while. He racks his brain, tries to remember if Cas had sentry this morning, but he’s pretty sure that’s not the case.

He quells his disappointment, because Dean is spending most of today in a long-ass Council meeting, and he’d been hoping to spend a quiet morning with Cas before heading down there. These meetings always fucking suck, but apparently that’s his luck today.

Dean is just pulling on sweats and a flannel when the door to his room pops open and Cas strolls in, laughter falling from his lips and a gummy smile on his face. Balthazar is behind him, stopping to lean against the door jam. They’re both sweaty and a little dirty, Cas’ shirt hanging off his shoulders.

“Morning, puppy,” Cas turns that smile on him, ruffling his hair as he walks past and flops down on their bed.

“Mutt,” Balthazar grins lazily. “A pleasure.” He tosses a wink in Cas’ direction, and Cas starts laughing again.

Dean hears himself snarl, sees his hand slam the door right in that stupid, pompous face. Then he turns on Cas, growling low in his throat. Not threatening, but loud enough to make it clear that he’s not happy.

“What the fuck. Balthazar, Cas? Really?”

Cas blinks innocently at him, and Dean has to look away. “I don’t—”

“And don’t you fucking do that,” Dean snaps, pointing an accusing finger at him. Cas holds up his hands in surrender. “None of that calming, omega shit. Not right now.”

“You know I can’t help it,” Cas snaps right back at him, his face turning stormy and his eyebrows knitted together. Dean tears his gaze away again. “What is up with you this morning?”

Dean snorts. “Up with me? That’s real great, Cas, askin’ me that. You’re the one who was up with fuckin’ Balthazar at the asscrack of dawn.”

“Need I remind you that Balthazar is mated, Dean?” Cas growls at him, and Dean hears the bed creak as Cas gets to his feet.

“Probably wouldn’t stop him,” Dean rumbles, the wolf baring its teeth and raising its hackles. It wants to go spill some of Balthazar’s blood, but that’s not socially acceptable or whatever, so Dean
“And,” Cas continues, “need I remind you that I go running every week with Balthazar, and you’ve never cared before?”

“I know that, I—”

“Then why do you care now?”

“I don’t know!” Dean snarls, turning on Cas and stepping right up into his face, their noses almost touching. Cas doesn’t so much as blink.

Slowly, Cas raises his hands until they are resting on the sides of Dean’s neck, his fingers threading into the short hair at Dean’s nape. Dean’s frantic breathing, the racing pulse of his heart, they both slow down simultaneously. Cas waits.

“What’s going on?” Cas softens, easily meeting Dean’s gaze.

Dean inhales slowly, takes in Cas’ scent. He smells like sweat and Cas and the forest, but nothing else. He notices for the first time how tired Cas looks, the dark bruises under his eyes and the heavy blinking of his eyelids.

“You look so tired,” Dean almost whispers, guilt icing his veins. Cas steps a little closer until their torsos are pressed together, lets Dean settle his hands on Cas’ hips.

“Baby,” Cas insists. “Tell me what’s wrong. Why you don’t trust me right now.”

Dean’s arms curl around Cas’ body, and he presses forward to capture his mate’s lips.

“I don’t know. Just don’t want you near him.”

Cas pulls back and studies Dean’s face, his blue eyes piercing right through him. There’s something there, some flash of understanding, but Dean doesn’t want to ask.

“Sit down,” Cas says, in that tone of his that sounds like a suggestion but really isn’t. Dean obeys, without a thought otherwise. He sits with his back to the headboard, stretching his legs out while Cas straddles his lap. Cas kisses him, long and deep, a reassurance, he’s sure.

Dean’s hands move instinctively around Cas’ waist, but Cas stops him.

“Hey,” he hums, sitting back so they can look at each other properly. “Give me your hands.”

Dean turns his palms up and offers them to his mate, without question. “Alphas,” he continues, his voice shakier this time. Dean hasn’t heard him sound like that, hasn’t heard fear in his voice, not in a long time. “They have protective instincts. Set off by certain triggers.”

“Kitten,” Dean says gently, “I’m an alpha. I know that.”

Cas hums and wraps his fingers around each of Dean’s wrists. Slowly he pulls them forward, settling them on his torso. Well, no. Not on his torso. On his stomach. The wolf perks up hopefully, but Dean doesn’t let his mind go there.

“Then you know what those triggers are.”

Dean nods. “Most of ‘em, yeah.”
"Like when your mate..." Cas trails off, but Dean doesn't want to fill in the blank. Cas hesitates, his tongue flicking out to wet his lips. He takes a deep breath before restarting. “I’m not in heat.”

Dean’s stomach flips over, but he clamps down every brightening flare of hope in his chest. The wolf is bounding around in circles, howling triumphantly at the sky, but Dean is stays lost in Cas’ eyes. “Yeah, I know. Sometimes it’s late.”

“Not this time.”

They stare at each other for a few more seconds, and Dean swears that the rapid beating of his heart is echoing in Cas’ chest.

“Are you—”

Cas nods short and curt, his eyebrows pinching up in the middle. Like he’s worried, like this is anything but the happiest day of Dean’s life.

“I think so.”

Dean raises a hand to cup his stubble covered cheek, his thumb soothing out the tough wrinkle that formed between his brows.

“Tell me what’s wrong,” Dean murmurs gently, stepping a little closer.

The corner of Cas’ mouth twitches, and Dean swears that those are tears forming in his eyes.

“Nothing is wrong. Absolutely nothing is wrong.”

“Then wh—”

“I thought maybe...” he trails off, struggling to find words. “Maybe something could go wrong. Maybe I would lose it, and how much that would hurt you. Maybe I’ll be an awful dad, or I’ll get fat and you won’t love me when all I want to eat is pickles and peanut butter.”

Cas’ bottom lip quivers just slightly, and Dean is grinning when he kisses him quiet.

“You,” Dean captures his mouth again, parting Cas’ lips with his tongue and licking along the roof of his mouth. “Are the biggest,” Dean pants, groaning long and low into Cas’ mouth as his cat digs his nails into the flesh of Dean’s neck. “Idiot,” he barely manages, and Cas answers with a whimpering moan. “Ever.” Dean’s hands slide across Cas’ torso, palms flat against his skin, but they never stray far from his belly.

“We’re having a cub,” Cas whispers softly, speaking directly against Dean’s mouth. “And it’s ours. It’s our baby.”

Cas kisses him. Really kisses him, tastes his lips and scruff and nibbles on his lips. Dean melts underneath him, groaning into Cas’ mouth.

“You’re pregnant. Fuck you’re pregnant.” The words roll of his tongue, easy as pie. Dean wants to shout them to the heavens, scream them into the forest until his voice gives out.

Cas, on the other hand, goes still against him. “I hadn’t…said it out loud yet.”

Dean blinks at him, dazed and so fucking happy he can’t keep the grin off his face.

“C’mon. Say it. Out loud, right now.”
Cas looks down, stares intently at where Dean’s hands are resting on his stomach. He moves one hand to rest on top of them, leaving the other on the side of Dean’s neck.

“I’m pregnant,” he whispers, head snapping back up as soon as the words leave his mouth. There’s a gummy smile on his face, his cheeks pink and his blue eyes bright and fucking shimmering. “I’m pregnant. We’re having a baby.”

Dean grins and kisses him, languid and loving and lingering far longer than usual. “Yeah, sweetheart. We’re havin’ a baby.”

A low moan pulls out of Cas’ throat. “We have to thank Missouri.”

Dean snorts. “She was right. You’re glowing.”

It’s the first time since Missouri said it that Dean doesn’t get a punch to the gut for repeating it. Instead it sends a shiver down Cas’ spine. He surges forward with renewed intensity, licking into Dean’s mouth as much as he can. Dean growls and lets his mate work him over, lets Cas grip his chin tight and direct him where he wants him.

“Hey, Cas?” Dean manages, just barely. Cas hums, but otherwise doesn’t waste his breath on speaking. “How do you feel about making twins?”
“Give me your hand.”

Warnings for mpreg, and pregnancy sex, and //very// brief mentions of labor.

I think you guys are gonna like this one. I didn't put specific time jumps in, but each one of these takes place at different stages of pregnancy. They're chronological, so hopefully you can tell approximately how far along Cas is in each one pretty easily.

And apologies for any misinformation, I have never //been// pregnant myself so I'm sure there's a whole host of things that I've gotten wrong. Just give me some slack, ok? Loves y'all.

In Castiel’s humble opinion, there really are ups and downs to being pregnant.

For example. His body hurts, almost all the time. In strange places too, joints and muscles that he isn’t used to aching when he lays down at night. Missouri has assured him that it’s normal, multiple times, but his limbs feel wiggly when he runs and no way he should have so many gas bubbles in his belly, right?

And then there’s the morning sickness, which shouldn’t be characterized by “morning” nor “sickness”. Because it doesn’t happen in the morning, and it’s more like unrelenting nausea than it is actual vomiting. He’s been feeling better lately though, so maybe he’s through the worst of that.

He also feels incredibly, uncomfortably bloated. All the time. Castiel has never considered himself to be vain, and he isn’t starting now. But his body just… has a different purpose, for the time being. He’s used to being a predator, being lethal, and he couldn’t be farther from that right now. Instead he’s soft, and vulnerable, and he’s growing a child inside himself.

It’s taking some getting used to.

The exhaustion, that’s been difficult too. One minute he’s wide awake, the next he feels like he’s been run over by a truck, or like he hasn’t slept in five days. He’s had to step off sentry because of it, which he can’t say he’s too sorry about. Dean certainly isn’t sorry.

Dean, whose alpha instincts have been absolutely off the charts ever since he found out. Castiel can’t really blame him, even if he does get tired of being treated like china all the time. He gets it, he does, he just…

Dean doesn’t hug him as tight, doesn’t fuck him as hard, won’t wrestle with him in their nest, and is only barely okay with Castiel wandering out in the forest alone. Not like their territory is a fucking
fortress, or anything. Not like Castiel can’t handle himself, thank you very much. Not like he needs some overprotective, overbearing alpha telling him what to do and what not to do like he’s some kind of child—

Castiel huffs and cuts off that train of thought. He picks at the bark of the thick branch he’s laying on, then gives up and lets his arm hang free. His belly looks round from this viewpoint, but he can still see his feet. So that’s something.

And maybe he’s moping. Maybe he picked a random tree, far from the den, and climbed as high as he could. Maybe he walked through two different streams, and intentionally confused his trail, so that Dean wouldn’t be able to find him.

They had a fight, that morning. Castiel hardly remembers how it even started. All he knows is how it ended, and that was with Dean smashing a mug of hot coffee against the opposite wall as Castiel stormed out the door.

“Oh,” Castiel murmurs to himself. Hot coffee, that was it. Castiel wanted a second mug, and Dean said that more than one probably wasn’t good for the baby. Which would have been fine, if Dean hadn’t also told him that the sunny-side up eggs were a no go, and limited his bacon intake to three pieces. He wants as much bacon and eggs and coffee as he damn well pleases, and he wants his mate to stop treating him like he’s breakable.

Suffice it to say that right now, Castiel isn’t really in the mood to be pregnant.

There are good parts, too. Dean has an even harder time keeping his hands to himself, and there’s something perfectly soothing about having Dean’s warmth at his back and Dean’s hands on his belly. Not to mention Castiel’s libido, which has been thrown into overdrive. And he’s never felt quite so close to his mate, to the love of his life, as he does right now.

He’s also never felt quite so frustrated by him, but that’s beside the point.

And none of that even touches on the miracle inside him. And it’s theirs. He feels it grow every day, and it’s incredible.

But he doesn’t think about that right now. Because he’s grumpy, and he deserves to throw a tantrum if he wants to. A short tantrum, but a tantrum nonetheless.

Short, because it takes a little over an hour for Dean to find him. Asshole.

“You ready to talk now?” Dean calls up from the ground. Castiel can’t see him through the layers of leaves, but he can hear the exasperation that is most likely displayed on his face. “Or you just gonna snarl at me some more?”

Castiel snorts. Double asshole.

“You took you long enough.”

Castiel can hear Dean’s long-suffering sigh. He’s not afraid to admit that it’s satisfying.

“I left the Bunker twenty minutes ago,” Dean fires back, clearly still frustrated. “Real cute, you tryin’ to hide out here. You clearly think highly of me, with your shitty attempt at hiding your trail.”

Castiel huffs and crosses his arms across his chest. Triple asshole, then. The panther is purring, because their mate really is quite impressive. He talks a big game, but the trail they left wasn’t an easy one. And he found them without breaking a sweat. Castiel refuses to be impressed.
“I never asked you to come find me,” Castiel grumbles. He has no intention of apologizing, if that’s what Dean is looking for.

“Eat me, Cas.”

Castiel glares up into the trees. Dean can’t see him, presumably, but they know each other well enough. He can picture the look on his mate’s face, and Dean can probably do the same for him.

“I’m not coming down.”

“Fine.”

There’s a soft thud, which is most likely Dean planting himself at the bottom of the tree.

“I don’t need you to be my guard dog,” Castiel growls at him, his frustrations bubbling over. “I can take care of myself, Dean.”

“Yeah, well, you’re being reckless,” he grumbles back, clearly trying to keep his own growl out of his voice.

“So if I wasn’t pregnant, you’d still think it was reckless?”

Dean seems to snap, a snarl ripping out of his throat that sounds far more like the wolf than it does Dean.

“Yeah, Cas, I would. Because I already almost fucking lost you once, and every goddamn time you leave there’s a chance I’ll lose you for good.” He exhales heavily, and Castiel wants to be angry but there’s a clenching in his chest that he can’t ignore. “But I’m not gonna keep you locked up inside, I would never do that to you, okay? Just, is it too fucking much to ask to not lose you both because some shithead thought you would be an easy target?”

Castiel takes a deep breath, and climbs down.

Dean is sitting on the forest floor, his back against the trunk of the tree and his head in his hands.

“Dean,” Castiel sighs, and his wolf only barely lifts his head enough to meet his gaze. Castiel crosses his arms, feeling the swell of his stomach under his forearms. “I’m not doing this for nine months.”

“I know. I just…” he trails off, and Castiel doesn’t miss the way Dean’s eyes linger on his stomach.

“Is it so bad to want you safe?”

Castiel rolls his eyes. “No, it’s not. When you treat me different because of it…”

“Yeah. I—yeah.”

“And when you tell me I can’t eat bacon…”

Dean snorts and drops his head into his hands again. Castiel tries to keep the smile off his face.

“Sorry. About that.” Dean runs frustrated fingers through his hair, and curls further into himself. Castiel feels a little guilty, knows he can’t entirely help himself, but still. He doesn’t mind putting Dean through his paces, every once in a while. “Are we done fighting?” Dean says softly, his voice cracking just slightly.

“I think so,” Castiel hums, reaching down to pull Dean’s hands away from his face. “As long as you’re sorry.”
“You know I am.” Dean rolls his shoulders back, and it’s a relief to see him uncurl and open back up to Castiel. “C’mere.”

Castiel goes easily, straddling Dean’s lap and pushing his fingers through his mate’s already mussed hair. He presses their lips together, feels the relief in the immediate response from Dean, in the way he clings to Castiel’s back.

“Want to really apologize?” Castiel whispers, meeting Dean’s eyes. Dean licks his lips and nods. “You can fuck me into our mattress tonight?”

Dean laughs and growls, capturing Castiel’s lips with one arm around his waist and the other hand sliding around to rest on his rounded stomach. Castiel leaves one hand resting on Dean’s jawline, feeling their mouths move together, but he can’t resist moving the other to thread together with Dean’s own.

“Nest is closer,” Dean rumbles, grinning against Castiel’s mouth.

Castiel *purr*. “Good idea, puppy. *Good* idea.”

***

It should be illegal for Cas to wake him up in the middle of the goddamn night. Seriously.

“What,” Dean groans, pushing Cas’ hand away and burying his face under the pillows.

“Dean *wake up,*” he hisses, smacking Dean with the palm of his hand with what Dean considers to be *wildly* unnecessary force.

“Go away.”


It’s the urgency in his mate’s voice that gets his eyes open. Dean rolls over and squints at him in the dark, trying to puzzle out why the hell Cas is sitting up with bright eyes like it’s morning. He’s sitting with his hands on either side of his rounded belly, his legs crossed in front of him, staring down at it like it’s the first time he’s noticed it’s there.

“Kitten,” Dean hesitates, sitting up slowly, “what’s wrong?”

The panic shooting up his spine is like ice. He’s waiting for Cas to say that there’s blood, or he felt something *pop,* or maybe he can’t feel his legs, or—

Cas turns to him, a gummy smile on his face.

“Give me your hand.”

Dean offers his wrist hesitantly, still not sure what’s going on. “Why?”

“You have to feel this,” Cas hums, smiling at Dean in that way of his, the way that Dean is positive he doesn’t deserve. He takes Dean’s hand and places it on the curve of his stomach, just to the side of his protruding belly button. Six—almost seven—months in and Dean still is awed by the sight of his mate pregnant with their pup.

“Feel wh—”

Something brushes against his palm, something *inside* Cas’ stomach.
“What the fuck!” Dean pulls his hand away, staring with wide eyes. Cas is still smiling at him, his shoulders shaking with quiet laughter. “Was that…?”

“Yeah,” Cas exhales, nodding excitedly. “Yes. It’s our baby.”

Dean scrambles across their bed, sitting right in front of Cas so he can get both hands on his belly.

“No fucking way,” Dean breathes, his mind racing and his body vibrating. He can smell Cas’ happiness in the air, can smell the soft warmth of their pup, and practically taste the sweet enticing scent of his pregnant mate with how strong the scent is. He spreads his fingers out across Cas’ stomach, trying to feel as much as he can.

That is, until Cas’ makes a pained hissing sound.

“Shit, I’m sorry, did I—”

“No, no,” Cas chuckles, replacing Dean’s hands on his bump and laying his own palms on the backs of Dean’s hands. “I just got a particularly poorly placed kick. I’m fine.”

“Cool it, baby,” Dean speaks to Cas’ belly, leaning in close. “Lots of important stuff in there.”

“Like my vital organs,” Cas hums. “Your voice makes it happy.”

Dean glances up at him, rolling his eyes. “Her, not it.”

“You don’t know that,” Cas replies simply, staring back down at his belly.

Dean is distracted from replying by movement under his palms. A foot, a hand, hell even a knee, he’s got no idea. But it pushes against his hand through Cas’ skin and holy shit that’s their pup in there.

“How long has she…?”

Cas shrugs. “This noticeably? Not long. I’ve just…I don’t know. Thought it was my stomach making noise not…this.” He smiles, and his eyes are so bright they’re infectious. “She woke me up.”

“Lots more of that coming,” Dean chuckles, drifting his fingers lightly across the stretched skin of his mate’s belly. “That why you woke me up too?” Dean winks, getting a light shove in return.

“Shut up. This is your future, puppy.”

“Yep,” Dean grins, wide and the happiest he’s been in…ever? Maybe? Although it is the middle of the night, so. He leans down to press a kiss to Cas’ stomach, feeling a little limb press up to meet him. “I can’t fucking wait.”

***

All of the shitty things about being pregnant, all of the sickness and aches and moodiness, Castiel would take it all for one thing.

The sex.

To be fair, there has really never been a time when Castiel didn’t just want Dean. His sandy hair, a little too perfectly spiked in the front and begging to be messed up. The scattered freckles across his nose, his cheeks, the tops of his shoulders. Muscles, more thickly defined than Castiel’s, giving Dean the feeling of being dense, compact. The perpetual stubble on his cheeks, longer or shorter depending on the day. And his scent. It’s like being in heat, except it’s all the time and Castiel wants
nothing more than to wrap himself up in Dean’s cocoon and stay there forever.

And all of this, it really doesn’t help with the dreams. Castiel has had a few dreams about Dean in the past, but never dreams like this. Never this often, either.

Yet here he is, for the fourth time this week, awake in the middle of the night because…

“Dean,” he whines, trying to inch closer. He can’t get far, because his gigantic belly is in the way.

Dean mumbles something unintelligible, burying his face further into the pillows of their bed. Castiel tries again, reaching across the empty space between them to get his hands on Dean’s skin. Dean leans into the touch, turns easily to kiss the bare skin of Castiel’s wrist.

“Kitt’n?” he mumbles, barely blinking open one eye. “Wha’n’matter?”

With only a little bit of struggle Castiel manages to move into a sitting position, gently pushing Dean onto his back to straddle his hips. Dean grins.

“Horny bastard.”

Castiel growls and buries his nose in Dean’s neck as best he can, inhaling deeply. His bump is kind of in the way, but he’s trying. The scent of oak and chestnuts floods his senses, the taste of Dean on his lips as he licks and nibbles at the skin of his throat.

“I blame you,” Castiel mumbles, not willing to pull his mouth away to speak, “for smelling like this.”

“S’okay,” Dean chuckles. “You can fuck me in the middle of the night anytime.”

Castiel purrs, long and low and seductive. “Oh, really?” he tugs on Dean’s hair, gets his neck bent so expose even more skin. “I can fuck you anytime?”

“Shaddup,” Dean grumbles, even as his body arches up to meet Castiel’s. “Don’t tease. We both know you’re too tired for that.”

Castiel kind of has to hum in agreement. He is way too exhausted for any activity that is that… strenuous. But after the baby comes...

“You sure this is okay?” Dean presses, settling his hands on Castiel’s hips. Castiel feels a rush of slick, and an overwhelming urge to feel Dean inside of him right now. “We can move. Your back…”

“Probably okay,” Cas nods, even though yeah, his back is kind of achy already. “Give me your knees.”

Dean shifts easily, bending his knees up and planting his feet on the bed to give Castiel something to lean back against. Castiel sighs happily, both from the support on his back and the feeling of Dean’s cock resting between his cheeks.

“If you’re sure.”

“I am,” Castiel nods, letting out a pleased noise as he rocks his hips back. “And I know this is your favorite.”

Dean blinks sleepily up at him and grins, catching his bottom lip between his teeth. Castiel’s heart positively flutters.

“You’re too good to me, baby.”
With a little coordinated shifting they get lined up, Castiel’s abundance of slick easing the way as he sinks down onto his mate’s cock. He lets out a long, whimpering moan as Dean slides into him, feeling Dean’s fingers tighten on his hips. Every nerve ending feels like it’s firing at maximum capacity—something about increased blood flow, or whatever—and Castiel already knows he won’t be able to handle this for long.

Dean groans and rocks his hips gently up, doing the work and letting Castiel relax back against his knees. His hands slide around and settle on Castiel’s fully round stomach, smoothing over the skin of his bump and dragging his thumb over the protruding belly button.

“Kitten,” he moans, and Castiel whines at the neediness of his voice. “Look at me.”

It’s the thing he misses most about not being pregnant. The intimacy, being able to cling to each other during sex, being able to kiss Dean’s full lips, being able to suck marks into the skin of his neck as they move together. But this is a fair substitute, keeping their eyes locked and really seeing each other.

“You feel so—ah!—so good, D-Dean, so, so…” he whimpers, his brain forgetting completely where it was going. He feels so warm, so full all over, Dean stretching him out and holding him together all at once. Dean’s rough hands on the soft skin of his stomach, callouses scratching blissfully across the skin. Their scents tangled together, the smell of mates and love suffusing the dark space of their room.

“You too, sweetheart,” Dean groans, pressing in deeper. Castiel thinks he might have brushed his prostate, but everything feels so good he can’t even tell. “You’re so fucking gorgeous like this, filled up with my pups, stretched wide around my knot…”

Castiel feels a tug on his rim as Dean speaks, knowing that it’s Dean’s knot swelling as they move together. And he doesn’t often take advantage of this particular kink, doesn’t often goad Dean into breeding him, but there’s a time and a place.

“Fill me up, I’m all yours,” he moans, grinning at the low growl coming from Dean’s chest. “Everyone said it was impossible, but look what we made,” he moves his own hands to cover Dean’s there they rest on his stomach, threading their fingers together. “All yours, alpha.”

Dean curses low in his throat, his thrusts picking up as his knot swells. Castiel feels himself approaching his own release, letting Dean move their hands down to stroke his cock. Castiel’s body launches into orgasm, taking Dean right along with it as his knot swells to tie them together. Castiel can feel Dean’s release inside of him, and it settles some primal urge in his gut.

And it’s all fuzzy and after-glowy and wonderful, right up until the baby goes nuts.

“Ow,” Castiel hisses, doubling over as the baby takes a swing at his kidneys. Dean laughs, tossing his head back and grinning like an idiot. “Not funny.”

“Kinda funny,” he chuckles, letting go of Castiel’s fingers to prop himself up on his elbows. “Little stinker is tryin’ to ruin the moment.”

“It worked,” Castiel pouts, laying his hands on the sides of his belly. He loves this little cub, he just does not love when this little cub punches him in the ribs.

“Nuh uh,” Dean challenges, rolling his hips enough to tug gently on his knot where it’s buried inside Castiel. He can’t help but shiver as Dean pumps him full with another round. “Just a little interruption.”
“Incorrigible,” Castiel shakes his head, though he’s feeling warm and pleased and the urge to purr is overwhelming.

Dean just hums and ignores him. He shifts forward as much as he can, focusing his attention on Castiel’s bump. The baby is moving around, a side effect of Castiel’s increased heart rate, and he knows that Dean can’t help himself.

One hand is propping him up, the other spread wide against Castiel’s belly. He’s moving along the center line, mouthing wet kisses and licking at the stretched skin as he goes. The baby presses up against the skin every once in a while, and Dean smiles every time.

“You look like you’re going to explode,” Castiel smiles softly, amused at the pure contentment oozing out of Dean’s skin. Like his happiness can no longer be contained inside his body.

“Feels like it, too,” he chuckles, continuing his worship without pause.

“Just wait ’til they’re actually here.”

Dean hums in agreement. Without being asked he snags a small tub of lotion from he bedside table, Castiel’s favorite. It smells like lavender and rosewater and it makes him want to curl up and sleep all day.

“I can’t sleep sitting up,” Castiel comments, sort of mourning the loss of Dean’s lips on his skin.

“So?” Dean shrugs. “It’s your favorite.”

Castiel doesn’t argue. Dean relaxes onto his back so he has full use of both arms, taking a generous scoop of the lotion and spreading it across Castiel’s stomach. It’s cold at first, but it warms easily under Dean’s hands. With practiced movements he rubs it all across Castiel’s bump, spreading underneath and back towards his hips where the worst of the stretch marks are. Castiel hated it when they first appeared, but Dean could only ever marvel at how beautiful he looked.

What a sap.

Dean continues his attentions for a while, long enough that Castiel feels himself drifting off under his practiced fingers. He’s warm and there’s lavender in the air and there’s something pleasurable about Dean’s knot keeping them tied together, even if Castiel does wish he could lay down and fall asleep.

After he’s satisfied Dean moves to Castiel’s shoulders and arms, working his way down to his hands and massaging the muscles as he goes.

“My hands aren’t the sore ones,” Castiel mumbles sort of blearily, getting sleepier and sleepier with each moment.

“I’ll get to your feet,” Dean chuckles, tugging on Castiel’s wrist and kissing the thin skin there. “When we can move.”

“We should sleep,” Castiel protests weakly, even as his body sags further under Dean’s fingers. “It’s the middle of the night. Not a good time for foot massages.”

“Are your feet sore?” Dean asks gently, his voice soft and low and pleasing to Castiel’s ears. Castiel cracks open his eyelids to study Dean’s face.

“Yes,” he nods, because, yeah. They’re always sore.
“Then it’s a good time for foot massages.”

Castiel opens his mouth to protest again, but Dean quiets him with a thumb against his lips. His hand smells like lotion.

“We’ll sleep in. I’ll skip the meeting if I feel like it. Now shut up, and let me take care of you.” There’s no room for argument, Castiel knows that. No matter how soft Dean’s green eyes may look.

“Stubborn wolf.”

Dean just grins, and continues with his work.

Castiel falls back asleep that night while Dean is rubbing his sore feet. It feels wonderful, and he’s sure to tell Dean as much. Probably more than once, but he’s sleepy and feeling overwhelmed with how much he loves his mate.

When he wakes up in the morning Dean is curled around him, his nose tucked into the tuft of hair behind Castiel’s ear. His arms are wrapped protectively around Castiel’s middle, and he’s breathing so deeply that Castiel isn’t sure that he could wake him even if he wanted to. Their whole room smells like lavender and rosewater, and sex, and judging by the faint noises coming from outside it’s not early.

Castiel hums and lets himself drift off once again. The rest of the world doesn’t need them quite yet. They can have this for a little while longer.

***

Dean and Castiel had been sitting in their bed in the den when Castiel fell asleep with his book in his hands. He never used to have that problem, but the little baby in his belly seems intent on sucking out all his energy these days. Castiel already slept a significant amount more than his mate, but Dean never complains. He sleeps the best in Dean’s arms, so sometimes he puts in the extra effort to convince his mate to join him in bed. It’s easier, now that he’s the size of a whale. Dean likes to be near his mate and his pup at the same time, and it doesn’t take much to convince the big tough alpha to come cuddle.

The rest of the Pack, particularly Jo and Sam, are endlessly amused by it. Castiel loves it, though, and he knows his wolf does too. No matter how much he grumbles.

That’s how he ended up asleep with his book forgotten on the floor, sprawled between Dean’s legs with his back against his mate’s chest and his nose tucked against the slope of his shoulder. His body rouses itself slowly, but Castiel carefully regulates his breathing when he feels one of Dean’s rough palms stroking across his swollen belly. He must have pushed Castiel’s t-shirt out of the way, because it feels like skin on skin. It isn’t the first time.

“Hey baby girl,” Dean whispers, and Castiel tries not to smile. They have no reason to think that their baby is a girl, but Dean is adamant. “You’re quiet today. Saving your strength? We’ll get to meet you soon.”

The pup shifts in Castiel’s stomach, one foot pressing against the skin. Dean chuckles and rubs his palm over the little limb.

“Careful, baby. Daddy’s sleeping. I’ll see you soon.”

Their pup quiets down again while Dean hums for a few moments.
“Cas says he doesn’t know what you are, but I think you’re gonna be a cat like him,” Dean says, and Castiel can hear the smile in his voice. Missouri told them it’d be more likely for them to have a wolf than a leopard but again, Dean is adamant. “You smell like a cat. That’s probably good, too, if you turn out like him. You wanna be like Cas, not like me.”

Castiel raises his head at that, kisses the bite scar on Dean’s neck.

“She’ll be like both of us. And she would be equally lucky to be like you.”

Dean leaves one hand on Castiel’s stomach, uses the other to cup his jaw. And in true Dean fashion, he ignores what Castiel was really trying to say.

“So you agree it’s a girl now?” he grins, the warmth in his green eyes almost overwhelming. Castiel just shrugs and stares down at his belly, running his hands over the rounded sides.

“What should we name her?”

Dean presses a kiss to his temple and makes a thoughtful noise, sighing softly.

“Something tough. Our little girl is gonna rule the world.”

For the entirety of the pregnancy Dean has been sort of shifty about names. Castiel hasn’t said it out loud, but he’s pretty sure it’s mostly to do with the likelihood that Castiel could lose the baby. Miscarriages are far more common in shifters than in humans, even after the three month mark. With their due date less than two weeks away, though, Dean is more willing to broach the topic.

“She’ll break a few hearts, too,” Castiel chuckles. “If she looks anything like you.”

“No damn alpha is gonna get their hands on her,” Dean growls, and it sounds a lot like his wolf but Castiel knows that was 100% his overprotective mate. “Besides, you’re the hot one, kitten.”

Dean tilts Castiel’s chin up with a finger, making a pleased noise low in his throat when Castiel presses closer. He’s too tired for much more, though. And his back is aching like hell. He settles back down and nuzzles at Dean’s neck, his mate returning his attentions to Castiel’s swollen belly.

“She likes that,” Castiel hums, purring at the roughness of Dean’s palms. The scent of happy alpha and happy mate is overwhelming.

“Yeah?” Dean says, a wide grin on his face. Castiel just hums and closes his eyes. “God I can’t wait to meet her.”

“Me too. Then you can carry her sometimes.”

“That the only reason?” Dean laughs. Castiel opens his eyes, twists to cup his mate’s face and smiles.

“There may be others.”

“I love you, kitten. I love you so goddamn much.”

Castiel walks his fingers across every inch of Dean’s face, tracing his lips and jaw and memorizing every freckle. They don’t break eye contact the whole time.

“And I you, puppy. You are my everything.”

Their baby is born eleven days later. The labor sucks, if you ask Castiel. And Dean is so hyped up, snarling at absolutely everybody, that Missouri can hardly even get near Castiel to help out. She ends
up swatting him on the nose and marching right past him, and the look of utter confusion on Dean’s face makes Castiel laugh right through his next contraction.

She takes her time, too. Half a day and the entire night, and Castiel is thoroughly convinced he needs to sleep for several days when it’s all said and done. Dean looks awful too, but not nearly as bad as Castiel feels. She is healthy and beautiful and has big blue eyes, which Dean is more than a little excited about, but Castiel isn’t confident that they’ll stay that way. The tuft of dark hair, though, he’s pretty sure that’ll stick around.
Hey y'all long time no seeeeeeee

So this isn't quite all of what I have, there will be at least one more timestamp. I mean who knew I had so much, right? And I wanted to post all of it at once, but it isn't all ready and I wanted to get some stuff out to you guys. So. Couple of notes, just be reminded that shifters don't have their first shift until age 2ish, so Dean and Cas' daughter hasn't shifted as of yet. Dean calls her a pup, Cas calls her a cub, that's just habits and doesn't mean anything about what she's going to shift into. It //will// be one or the other, so. This is all just a collection of moments that came to me that I wanted to share, so I apologize if you wanted to see more or see something different, but this is what I have to share so I hope you all enjoy it!

“It’s your turn.”

Dean groans and shoves his face into his pillow. “No way. Got up last time.”

“I gave birth to her,” Cas mumbles, tugging the comforter out of Dean’s grasp and wrapping it around himself. “It’s your turn when I say it’s your turn.”

“Dick,” Dean sits up and rubs at his eyes, already feeling his eyelids drooping. He glares over at the Cas-shaped lump in bed next to him, rolling his eyes at his mate. “You’re not allowed to use that excuse for forever.”

“Fine. I carried her for nine months. It’s your turn.” Cas stretches out a leg and gives Dean a push, one that Dean is entirely unprepared for. He feels his balance tilt sideways, and he makes a last ditch grab at the comforter as he tumbles off the side of the bed.

Dean lands on the floor in a tangle of blanket with a loud thud, followed by a yelp as Cas hits the floor next to him, dragged down by the comforter. He can’t see Cas’ face, but he’s seen his cat’s “why the fuck did you wake me up” face, so. He’s pretty sure he knows what Cas looks like.

And he can’t help but laugh.

“I fucking hate you,” Cas grumbles, tugging at the comforter that’s tangled around them. “I seriously think you are one of my least favorite people. On this entire planet. Living and deceased.”

Dean laughs harder. “Go get the baby,” he manages, clutching at his stomach.

Cas hits him in the face with a pillow. “Fuck you.”

Dean stays sprawled on the floor with the blanket over him until the crying stops. Then he finally emerges, blinking in the dark to see Cas sitting cross-legged on the bed, their pup in his arms. Dean’s heart swells.

“See?” Dean grins at him. “Piece of cake.”
Cas glares at him. “I hate you.”

“Yeah,” Dean sighs, “I know. Love you too, kitten.”

Dean climbs up on the bed and wraps the comforter around Cas’ shoulders, ruffling his messy hair and taking in the dark bruises under his eyes. She’s not crying anymore, but she’s snuffling and breathing unevenly so it’ll be a little bit before she’s conked out again.

“Let me take her,” he offers, easing the tiny baby out of Cas’ arms. Cas lets him do it, blinking slowly and pulling the comforter tighter around his shoulders. “Go back to sleep.”

Cas shuffles across the bed until he’s positioned behind Dean, laying his cheek flat against Dean’s back and winding his arms around his waist. “Mmm.”

Dean chuckles, smiling at how content his body is at the moment. Pup in his arms, mate at his back, darkness and warmth and the scent of home all around them. Perfect.

“You can sleep horizontal, ya know. I got her.”

“I know you do,” Cas assures him, but he doesn’t move. Instead he starts to purr, slow and quiet and sleepy. They sit together in silence until she’s asleep again, only the sound of Cas’ purring and the embrace of Dean’s arms to comfort her.

When Dean stands up to put her back down in her crib Cas curls into his space, immediately dropping off to sleep. Dean sighs and shakes his head, smiling fondly down at his pup.

“Sweet dreams, Marley,” he whispers, resisting the urge to brush her dark hair off her forehead. She’s got a ton of it, for a baby. “Try to let us sleep this time, huh?”

Dean climbs back in bed beside Cas, curling around his warmth and feeling the purrs in his bones. He doesn’t resist when Cas pulls him closer, burying his nose against the back of Cas’ neck. And he sleeps. Blissful, peaceful sleep.

Well, peaceful. For a few hours.

***

“You comin’?” Dean calls from the doorway, halfway out with Marley in his arms. She always looks so small when he holds her, supporting her with just one big hand.

“Maybe,” Castiel responds as he disappears into the bathroom. “I need a shower, and a bed. Take a bottle!”

Dean appears in the doorway a moment later, a grin on his face. “Kitten,” he sighs, shaking the full bottle that’s already in his hand. Marley smiles and babbles at him, her green eyes practically sparkling. They hadn’t stayed blue for long, and although they were beautiful before Castiel is partial to the new shade. “I’m not new here. I know I gotta feed our kid.”

Castiel rolls his eyes. “Out.”

Dean winks at him and makes a comment about wanting to join in the shower, but he lets Castiel close the door anyway. The door to their room opens and closes a moment later, and Castiel is left with only the sound of the shower hitting the floor. He strips quickly and steps under the spray, hissing as the water hits his skin. It’s almost too hot, which is just perfect.
For a few minutes he just stands under the water, letting it wash over his tired body. The exhaustion has racked up so much that he barely remembers what it was like before he was tired all the time. His panther has been particularly grumpy about it, having gotten accustomed to sleeping for hours and hours with no interruptions over the years. Dean quickly learned not to wake him, but Marley has no such reservations.

Slowly he rinses off, scrubbing shampoo into his scalp and rubbing soap across his skin. It’s peaceful, the quiet of the shower. So he stays in until his fingers start to prune, in no rush to leave his bubble.

After drying off and pulling on sweats and a t-shirt he convinces himself to shuffle up to the nursery where Dean took Marley, walking quietly so as not to interrupt the movie that’s playing. It’s almost over, but he doesn’t want to miss the entire thing.

There’s a mixture of wolves and leopards piled up in the space, all sprawled across each other in all kinds of odd positions. He spots Dean, unsurprisingly, at the center of the room. He’s asleep with his head pillowed on Charlie’s stomach, who in turn has her head in Jo’s lap. Jo is absently pulling her fingers through Charlie’s red hair, occasionally letting her thumb brush the mating scar on her neck. More surprising is the fact that Dean is shirtless, Marley laid flat on his chest with his shirt laying over her like a blanket.

Castiel approaches carefully, stepping around a mixture of sleeping and half-asleep shifters all around him. The ones curled up near Dean make space for him automatically as he gets close, giving him room to sit next to his mate and his cub.

“Hi,” Jo greets sleepily, yawning almost immediately.

“Hello,” he smiles back, keeping his voice low. “Is there a reason he’s unclothed?”

Jo laughs quietly and nods. “Marley was fussing. Bare skin fixed her right up.”

“Mmm,” Castiel hums, shaking his head at his wolf. His heart couldn’t possibly be more full at the sight, the two of them fast asleep together in the middle of their pack. But then Dean makes a small noise, his heavy eyelids dragging open to reveal unfocused green eyes. He blinks sleepily a few times, then smiles wide and slow.

“Cas,” he mumbles, wrapping his fingers around Castiel’s wrist. He tugs gently on his arm, just enough so that he can place a kiss in the center of Castiel’s palm. “Hey, baby.”

Castiel’s chest wants to explode. “Hello, Dean.”

“We missed you,” Dean mumbles, his letters slurring together as he falls back asleep. Castiel smiles softly at him, thankful that he made it up here for the last little bit of the movie.

His hot shower was heaven, and getting some extra sleep tonight would’ve been amazing, but…

Castiel brushes his fingers gently across Marley’s dark curls, keeping his fingers twined together with Dean’s as his mate falls back asleep.

“I missed you, too.”

***

Dean drags himself out of bed at the literal ass-crack of dawn. His cat makes an unhappy noise and starts to purr miserably, automatically curling into the warm space in their bed.
It never gets easier leaving him in the morning.

Dean pushes the messy, dark hair off of Cas’ forehead and presses a kiss to his slack lips, already wishing that patrol was over so that he could climb back in bed.

Somehow he drags himself away and over to the crib to check on their pup. Their gorgeous, perfect, incredible daughter Marley. Who is, currently, sleeping on her chest with her thumb in her mouth and her diapered butt sticking up in the air right along with her crazy-ass hair. Dean smiles.

Let it never be said that his little girl ain’t a lady.

He resists the urge to pet her head, because Cas will give him hell if he wakes her up early. She’s been waking up in the middle of the night again lately, so the fact that she has only woken them up once so far is a goddamn miracle. Could be dreams, could be something else.

Dean shuffles down to the main entrance, running into a bleary-eyed Jo and a far too peppy Garth. He pulls off his sweats with a jaw-cracking yawn and shifts slowly, kind of enjoying the pain. He feels Cas wake up as the bond ripples, but the edges of his consciousness are still fuzzy with sleep. The wolf curls sleepily around the bond and tries to coax their mate back to sleep. Dean is pretty sure it doesn’t work that way, but Cas is asleep again in less than a minute anyway.

***

Morning patrol is the bane of Castiel’s existence. He’s pretty sure that Dean shouldn’t be running that shift since he is Council and all, but Castiel isn’t one to complain about the duty Dean feels towards his pack. Castiel has to take the graveyard shift sometimes, but he’s been slacking lately because of the baby.

Still he forces himself out of bed relatively early, more for Marley’s sake than his own. Her sleep schedule has been off, and he’s doing his best to get it back on track. Dean and he both think it’s because her animal is nocturnal, but she hasn’t shifted yet so it’s hard to be sure. Though they both agree that they think she’ll be a leopard, like Castiel. The purring is a pretty good sign.

Castiel slides out of bed and pulls on black sweats with one of Dean’s flannels over his bare torso, automatically snuffling at the warm fabric. It smells like oak and chestnuts like his mate, and it’s a poor substitute for the real thing in the morning but it’s something. It usually helps with Marley too, tricking her senses into believing that Dean is with them too. Makes her less fussy. He drags a hand through his hair but doesn’t bother looking in the mirror, already knowing that it’s going to be hopeless.

When he gets over to the crib, Marley is already awake and staring up at him with big, familiar green eyes. He smiles down at her and she giggles, kicking her tiny little feet inside her footie pajamas. They’re soft and white with little bees on them, and they are her absolute favorites. He sees himself in that gummy smile, which continues to be a weird sensation no matter how many times he sees it.

“Morning baby girl,” he says, reaching down and scooping her up to settle against his hip. Her hair is equally as messy as his own, and he thinks about leaving it but she’s already fussing with it so he’s better off dealing with it now.

“All right, hold on,” he says, setting her on the edge of the bed. He reaches into the bedside table to find two little ribbons, one bright pink and one blue. Marley smiles and starts babbling at him, her curls bouncing around and her little hands reaching for the ribbons. “Honey,” he says, giving her a look. “Can you sit still for Papa?”
She shakes her head and makes popping noises with her mouth, grabbing for something with her hands. He knows what that means.

“I know what you want and it’s not in there,” Castiel says warmly with a smile, shaking his head at her. She just smiles and shakes her head right back. “Alright little princess, sit tight.”

Castiel wanders quickly into the bathroom to grab her blue pacifier from next to the sink, thankful that Dean had cleaned it the night before. Marley’s eyes light up when she sees it, more popping noises coming out of her mouth. She takes it happily when he offers it to her, her green eyes going slack and a happy purr emanating from her chest. Now that half-awake green gaze, that is all Dean. He can’t even count the number of mornings he’s woken up to that exact look on his mate’s face.

Marley is cake to deal with after that. Castiel lays her back to change her diaper, snapping up her pajamas once she’s clean. Then he sits her up and uses the ribbons to pull her hair off her face, in two little pigtails that he’s pretty proud of. He has never had to style hair before, but he thinks he’s getting fairly good at it.

Once he’s done he scoops her up again, resting her on his hip and heading out in search of breakfast. She leans a cheek against his shoulder and fists her hand in Dean’s flannel, and he can hear her scenting it. The happy purr that follows must mean that he made a good choice in putting on something that smells like their wolf.

“I want Daddy here too,” Castiel sighs as he shuffles towards the dining quarters. Their bond is still rippling and tastes like the forest, so he knows Dean hasn’t shifted back yet. They’ve got some time to wait.

That is definitely Castiel’s least favorite part about this whole shared territory situation they have going on between the Pack and the Host. Patrols take about three times as long, with so much more area to cover. It means they’re safe though, so it’s worth Castiel being annoyed at his mate’s absence for a few hours.

It’s fairly quiet when he arrives, most of the inhabitants opting for a later breakfast than what he’s going for. Jess is there, though, her feet tucked up underneath her and a book on the table in front of her.

“Good morning, Castiel,” she says with a smile, pushing blonde hair off her shoulder. “And good morning to you too, little one.” Her voice is softer for Marley, and it makes her blush and bury her head in Castiel’s neck. He feels her little fingers curl around his nape, one fistful of hair and one full of flannel.

“Oh, you’re shy this morning are you?” Castiel chuckles as she heaves a sleepy sigh.

“She just wake up?” Jess laughs, a knowing smile on her face. Castiel sighs and nods. “I’ll grab her a bottle?”

“Please.”

Castiel gets his hands on some dry cereal and some fruit while she’s gone, settling himself at Jess’ table. Marley stays glued to him until Jess reappears with a bottle of milk in hand, at which time she promptly abandons him. She smiles and reaches out her arms to Jess, who looks to him for permission. Castiel hums and hands his cub over.

“Be my guest,” he breathes, taking the opportunity to roll his shoulder and stretch out his arm. “She adores you.”
“That’s because I’m lovable. Dean on patrol this morning?” Jess asks, adjusting Marley on her lap and supporting just the end of the bottle while Marley leans back into her chest. She really does love Jess, and Sam too. Though that’s no surprise.

“Mm,” Castiel hums, popping a chunk of cantaloupe into his mouth. “Where are Sam and the boys?”

“Rabbit hunting,” Jess says with a laugh. “I can’t imagine it’s going too well.”

Castiel laughs right along with her. “Already? Sam isn’t wasting any time.”

“Oh no,” she says, “not at all. But they’re boys, and any opportunity to wear them down is one I’m open to.”

That’s definitely something that Castiel can understand. “I can’t imagine having two of her.”

“Of course, you couldn’t spoil her nearly as much if there were.”

Castiel huffs and crosses his arms.

“We do not spoil her.”

Jess outright laughs at him. “Oh, please. You and Dean? I mean if Dean wasn’t bad enough on his own. Plus the whole pack loves her.”

Well. She’s not totally wrong.

“It’s no fault of mine that Dean is incapable of saying no to her. Especially when she does the puppy eyes.”

As if on cue Marley puts down the bottle and stares at Castiel, like she’s waiting to see what else he has for her. He offers up the bowl of dry cereal and she bounces happily, grabbing a handful and only getting a few of them into her mouth.

“Trust me, I know about the puppy eyes,” Jess says with an eye roll of her own. “I swear Sam taught the boys the day they were born.”

“I have a feeling you’ve stopped falling for it,” Castiel chuckles. Jess nods emphatically while Marley gets more cereal in the vicinity of her mouth.

They sit together until Castiel finishes his own small breakfast, and until Marley starts squirming on Jess’ lap. It’s been a couple of hours, so he expects Dean will be coming back soon. Jess excuses herself to go find her mate and pups, and Castiel takes Marley down towards the main entrance to burn off some energy.

The two of them park themselves in the main tunnel, mostly because it’s open space and Marley likes to be in the middle of all the hustle and bustle going in and out of the den. So Castiel sits on the floor and crosses his legs, Marley sitting facing him. He hasn’t changed out of his sweats and flannel, and Marley is still in her footie pajamas with her pacifier in her mouth, but nobody seems to mind.

And really, it’s amazing how fast time passes when she’s staring at him like that with those big green eyes that look just like Dean’s, like he’s something incredible. He offers small movements that she can copy, holding his hands up or pulling on his ears, tilting his head from side to side. That one makes her giggle around her pacifier.

Then he feels the bond ripple, humming happily.
“Daddy is back,” he says, smiling at her. She grins and turns to the door, waiting for it to pop open. Garth comes through first, looking tired but still waving emphatically at her. Jo comes trotting in after him, still as a blonde wolf with muddy paws, her tongue lolling out of her mouth. She walks right up to Marley’s outstretched arms, nudging her cheek and letting Castiel’s cub hug her muzzle. She looks outrageously small next to Jo’s giant form, but she doesn’t hesitate to wrap both her arms around Jo’s elongated nose.

When Jo jogs away Castiel pulls her to her feet, holding on to her hands to help her stand while she bounces in place. It’s a couple more seconds before Dean comes around the corner, walking with that easy, confident gait that comes so naturally to him. He’s bare chested and sweaty and a little bit dirty, his hair mussed and his cheeks pink and his freckles standing out even more than usual. Castiel thinks the same thing he always thinks when he sees Dean: that his mate is goddamn beautiful.

Dean can’t help the dopey grin that spreads across his face, the sight of his mate and his pup causing warmth to bloom across his chest.

“There’s my baby girl,” he rumbles, scooping Marley off her feet and blowing raspberries on her cheeks. She squeals and giggles and squirms like crazy, her antics making Cas chuckle as he pulls himself to his feet.

“Hello, Dean,” Cas hums, letting Dean wrap an arm around his waist with his free arm while the other supports Marley on his hip. “We missed you this morning.”

Dean grins and presses forward to lick into Cas’ mouth, pressing him gently against the wall behind him. Cas whimpers almost inaudibly into his mouth, pressing impossibly closer for a split second before pushing at Dean’s chest.

“Puppy, not in front of the children,” he admonishes, fake-scowling at Dean with narrowed eyes.

“She doesn’t care,” Dean snorts, glancing at a very pleased Marley on his hip who is smiling around her pacifier. “She look like she cares?”

“She doesn’t know any better,” Cas chuckles, humoring Dean for a few kisses before pushing him away again. “She just likes that we’re both close to her so she can smell us both.”

“Oh huh,” Dean huffs a laugh. “That why you’re wearin’ this?” he winks, tugging at Cas’ (Dean’s) flannel.

“Of course,” Cas’ mouth twitches at the corner, the very beginning of a smile that he doesn’t intend to show. “Strictly for Marley. No other reason.”

“Oh mmm hmmmm,” Dean hums, pressing Cas’ harder against the wall and letting his eyes drag over his body. “Sure.”

Cas inhales a shaky breath, the scent of his slick hitting the air.

“You know, Marley could use her nap,” he suggests, which probably isn’t a lie. Her eyelids are looking droopy. “And you could use a shower.”

Dean wiggles his eyebrows. “The sexy kind of shower?”

“Now, Dean,” Cas sighs, rolling his eyes hard. Dean laughs and lets Cas steer him towards their room by his shoulders, mumbling to Marley about how ‘Papa is such a hard ass’. She’s got no idea
what he’s saying, but she giggles sleepily nonetheless.

She falls asleep in Dean’s arms before he can even properly lay her down in her crib, and he spares a moment to watch her even breathing. Cas molds himself against Dean’s back, slipping his arms around his waist and hooking his chin over Dean’s shoulder. Dean sighs and leans his head against Cas’ scalp, rubbing his palm lightly over Cas’ hands on his stomach.

They’re quiet for a few moments before Dean speaks.

“Her hair looks like shit.”

Cas scoffs and bites his shoulder playfully. “Get in the shower, asshole, or you won’t have time to fuck me before she wakes up.”

Dean snorts, grabbing the baby monitor and practically drooling after his mate as he follows him into the bathroom.

“Sir yes sir.”
End.

Chapter Summary

“Go clean up your daughter, please.”

“Oh, so when she’s caked in mud from your play day then she’s my daughter?”

Chapter Notes

Wow, y'all. This is the end. I know this is a long time coming, and I could explain myself but I won’t waste your time. Just know that I left a little part of me with this story, and I hope somebody out there enjoyed it. This project means a lot to me, as do these characters and every single one of you who read it. For anyone who left kudos, know that you kept me going. For those who left comments, know that I read and smiled over every single one (even if I didn't get the opportunity to respond, I still appreciate it so much).

Without further ado, here it is. The ending.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Castiel is napping on his favorite rock, the sun bright and warm and wonderful above him, when he hears footsteps headed towards him. He recognizes the familiar footfalls, the warm and inviting scent of mate on the breeze. What worries him, though, is the sniffling tears of his cub.

He sits up just in time to see Dean stroll out of the trees, their little girl in his arms. There’s a stormy look on his face, and Castiel can tell by the tension in his frame that his wolf is trying to hide how angry he really is. That, and the fact that their cub is draped in one of Dean’s t-shirts with exactly one fluffy sock barely hanging on to her foot. She’s so small still, and the cocoon of her father’s scent would usually do the trick to soothe her unhappy animal. Not today, though. This must be pretty serious.

“Hey sweetheart, you want Papa?” Dean says gently, in the soft tone that he saves exclusively for their daughter. Marley raises a dark, curly-haired head and blinks teary green eyes at Castiel. His heart breaks.

She doesn’t answer, just reaches her little hands out towards Castiel. He gives Dean a look and stands up, taking his cub out of his mate’s arms. She clings to him and cries, babbling some incoherent words into his shoulder. He pets her hair and strokes her shivering spine, giving her all the comfort that he can manage.

“Marley, honey, what’s wrong?”

She keeps babbling, and he doesn’t catch a word of it. Her language is good for a 3-year-old, but she isn’t showing it now.
“Sorry,” Dean sighs, stepping closer and bracketing Marley in with his body. Castiel is sure it’s a subconscious action on his part. “I know you needed some time off. But she was friggin’ inconsolable, and she kept crying for you.”

Castiel had come out here to nap while Marley spent some time with the other pups, since he’d been up with her all of last night. Her animal is developing rapidly, and the instinctive urge to stay awake at night and sleep during the day is one that she’s struggling to ignore. Castiel had the same problem when he was young. But as tired as he is, and as nice as the afternoon sun feels on his skin, he can’t be upset that his cub needed him. Their daughter is specific in who she wants to comfort her, and it switches all the time. Sometimes she needs Dean’s fiery protectiveness, sometimes she needs Castiel’s coolheaded comfort, sometimes she needs both. Apparently today it’s Castiel.

“It’s okay,” he says gently, laying a hand on Dean’s arm. “I thought she was in the nursery?” he says, since Marley is apparently unable to tell him anything. She’s stopped crying, and appears to be sucking her thumb now, which is progress at least.

“She was,” Dean sighs, looking angry again. “Some of the older kids came by to play chase with the little ones. The little shi—uh, I mean the pups—they said she couldn’t play because she isn’t a wolf like them.”

Castiel holds back a growl. Things between the packs aren’t perfect, but they are generally good. Castiel had thought that they were past this already, past the invisible boundaries that each side had insisted on drawing at the beginning. And even though the rational part of him knows that this is just kids being kids, he feels no less angry about it. The nursery has been good for her as a place to spend time with the other wolf pups, just like Anna’s house is good for her as a place to spend time with Sariel and Bea, the other leopard cubs. Anna even invites the wolf pups over, sometimes, when she has extra hands at home and is feeling particularly hospitable. It frustrates him to see something good go so sour, even temporarily.

“They’re dumb kids, but they upset her. She’s not old enough to understand it all yet, but she felt left out I think.”

Castiel sighs and nods, rocking back and forth to soothe her. “Where were the boys?”

Dean laughs at that. Sam and Jess’ twins, two rowdy little seven-year-old boys, are like Marley’s unofficial big brothers. With their help, she has somebody looking out for her at all times. And it helps that they seem to have inherited their father’s stature.

“They were there. Pelting the little punk with Legos when I left. I think Mom was pretending not to see it.”

Castiel smiles and turns his attention to the girl in his arms.

“You feeling better, baby girl?”

Marley nods, but doesn’t raise her head.

“Want to tell me what happened?”

She lifts her head finally, her curly hair sticking up in all directions. She definitely got that from Castiel.

“Kitty,” she says with an impressive pout, pointing at herself.

“Is that a bad thing?” Castiel says. Marley nods and frowns, rubbing at her eyes. They aren’t as dark
as Dean’s, more of a pastel, but Castiel was pleased when they changed. He’d been right that the blue was temporary, and it blows him away to see the little bits of his mate in their daughter. The pout on her lips now is definitely from Dean. “I’m a kitty too,” he says, giving Dean a look when his mate bites back a smile. “Is that bad?”

“No,” she shakes her head, her curls bouncing. “Bu…”

Castiel raises his eyebrows when she doesn’t continue. “But?”

“Why?” she says quietly, turning her body towards Castiel like she doesn’t want Dean to hear her. Dean takes a step back, and Castiel knows how much it kills him to do it. Castiel sighs, his heart breaking for his little girl.

In truth, it would’ve been hard on her either way. They knew that even before she shifted for the first time, revealing herself as a tiny black panther kitten. With their family split between two packs, she would always feel out of place in one of them. Castiel hopes that one day it won’t be like that, but that time isn’t here yet.

“Because you are special. You are our miracle. And this is what you are. And there is nothing wrong with you.”

“Daddy’s a wolf,” she says, sniffling, although it sounds a lot more like “woof” than “wolf”. Castiel nods.

“Daddy is a wolf. A big bad wolf.” Dean snorts, and Marley lets out a little giggle. “You want to be like Daddy?”

Marley nods shyly. Castiel isn’t terribly surprised.

“You can be like Daddy. Can you growl like Daddy?” Marley bears her teeth and lets out a little rumble. It’s unmistakably feline, but she seems pleased with herself. “Can you howl like Daddy?”

She does that too, and it brings a real smile to her face.

“Bark too,” she says, demonstrating her ability and barely pronouncing the “r”. “You try.”

Castiel does, though his is a pale imitation, and her smile grows. He hears Dean laugh too, which gets Marley’s attention.

“Daddy you!” she says, twisting in Castiel’s arms again. Dean steps towards them and offers her a little yip, his amused smile wide. “Now growl,” she says, bouncing in Castiel’s arms. She almost get’s the “I” that time. Dean obliges her, and she surprises them both by growling right back at him.

“There’s my little puppy,” Dean laughs, ruffling her hair. She giggles and turns back to Castiel, cupping his cheeks with her hands. Her green eyes are bright and happy, and Castiel is relieved to see the sadness melted away.

“But guess what?” Castiel says, trying to refocus her attention. Because this is a real issue, their daughter not wanting to be a leopard. And if they don’t deal with it now, who knows how it might affect her later on. “Leopards have lots of cool things that wolves don’t have.”

“No,” she says, pouting again. It’s fake this time though, so Castiel doesn’t worry too much.

“I promise. You like to climb, right?”
She hesitates before nodding slowly, and Castiel has to bite back a smile. She’s so much like Dean it baffles him. They can barely keep her out of the trees now that she has some developing motor skills at her disposal, and here she is acting like she doesn’t love it and being a martyr about it. She’ll be a hell of a teenager, he knows that already.

“Wolves can’t climb, not like us leopards can. Daddy is terrible.”

“Hey!” Dean protests, and Castiel just smiles. Marley stops pouting, but she doesn’t smile yet.

“We can see better at night, too. And we are much quieter.”

“Mason an’ Liam are loud,” she says, a tiny smile playing at her lips. Castiel laughs, because it’s true. The boys didn’t inherit any stealth from Sam or Jess.

“And we get to have a treehouse,” Castiel says conspiratorially, knowing already that it will win her over. They have a room in the den, along with Castiel’s treehouse (which has some new additions, of course), and they tend to switch back and forth depending on the day. When Marley was a baby the den was easier, because putting an infant up in the trees wasn’t easy or safe, really. Now that she’s a little older, they tend to spend more time there. Castiel prefers it, and he knows his daughter does too. Their animals prefer the fresh air. And he knows for a fact that Dean prefers their nest to the relatively confining bed that they share in the den.

“Our tree’s good,” she says, smiling.

“It is. Being a leopard is good, huh?”

She smiles at nods, wrapping her arms around his neck and hugging him tightly. “Love you, Papa.”

“I love you too, honey bee.”

He pets the back of her head and catches Dean’s eye, smiling softly at his mate. Dean has his arms crossed across his chest and his shoulders rolled back, every bit the picture of the big tough alpha, but Castiel knows so much better.

“I love you,” Dean mouths at him, a deep, affectionate warmth in his eyes.

“I know,” Castiel mouths back. Dean rolls his eyes, but the smile is worth it.

***

They spend that night in the treehouse, at Dean’s suggestion. He doesn’t say it, but he’s pretty sure Marley needs it after that day’s drama. Cas seems to get it.

She has her own little version of a nest there, situated above theirs in the tree. It would’ve been easier to build the extension on the same level, but Dean had insisted. He wanted to make sure that anybody coming up had to go through him first.

Their pup is asleep up there right now, exhausted from the day. Dean doesn’t blame her. Dean and Cas are in their own nest, curled around each other and kissing lazily. No matter how much time passes, Dean can never get enough of his mate. The rest of their lives isn’t friggin’ long enough, especially now that they have Marley. He loves his daughter more than anything, but sometimes he misses these quiet, intimate moments with his mate. She’s started staying in her room all night though, so that’s definitely something. It’s easier to get handsy when your kid isn’t in bed with you.

“Think she’ll be okay?” Dean mumbles against Cas’ lips, moving to kiss down his throat. He spends
an extra couple of seconds on the mating bite.

“I do,” Cas sighs. “She has us.”

“More like she has you,” Dean says. He feels terrible about how little he helped her today. He knows that sometimes she just needs Cas, but Cas had handled it so easily and part of him feels like he should’ve been able to do the same. Sometimes this whole parenting thing just doesn’t come easy to him, not like it seems to with Cas.

“Dean,” Cas says, and Dean can hear the chastisement in his voice. “Stop it. She needed me today, she might need you tomorrow. Remember that nightmare she had?”

Dean almost shivers at the memory. He isn’t even sure what Marley’s nightmare had been about, she’d been too hysterical to tell them, but his wolf had surfaced immediately at the sound of their cub’s terrified cries. He’d held her and rocked her for hours before she calmed down and fell back asleep, while Cas had just sat there feeling useless. She’d needed the security of his alpha, and no matter his intentions that wasn’t something that Cas could’ve given her. Dean had seen the sadness in his mate’s eyes that night, but they’d curled up together and slept late into the next day and all traces of it were gone when they woke up.

Now every time she has a nightmare Dean wraps her up in his arms and growls quietly, just enough that she can feel the vibration but not loud enough to startle her. Cas thinks its the funniest thing, tells him every time that he can’t “growl her nightmares away, puppy”, but Dean does it anyway. He does the same thing when Cas has nightmares, and his cat never complains on those nights.

The rational part of his brain knows that Cas is right. He can’t do everything for her. He just hates feeling useless.

Cas kisses him then, hungrier than before, the feel of his body chasing away Dean’s mood. He appreciates it more than he can say, because his mate knows exactly what he needs. They strip slowly, both of them careful not to make noise as they explore the familiar planes of each other’s bodies. This is easier when they’re at the den, with stone walls between them, but they manage here—even if they can’t do much more than kissing and holding each other.

Cas’ hands move easily across Dean’s skin, carding through his hair with fingers that know every inch of his body. They press declarations of love and endless words of praise into each other’s skin, neither of them willing to let go.

It’s only when the sun starts to slowly rise to turn the night sky grey that they finally fall asleep. Dean knows they’ll regret it later, when Marley turns into her usual ball of never-ending energy, but right now Dean is just happy.

Happy, that is, for about two hours. The pattering of little feet on the wooden stairs wakes him up, but he pulls Cas closer against his chest and pretends to still be asleep, splaying his hand out on Cas’ bare stomach. He’s glad, at least, that they put pants on before passing out.

Cas shifts automatically when Marley snuggles into his chest, wrapping his arms around her and purring quietly. Marley joins in a moment later, her purr quieter and higher-pitched. Dean sighs and smiles at his cats. God he loves them.

“Dean?” Cas sighs, his voice mumbly and tired.

“Yeah, kitten?”

“Don’t look now, but I think there’s a puppy in our bed.”
Marley giggles, and Dean shifts his arms so they are wrapped around both his mate and his cub.

“Papa, m’ not a puppy.”

“A big, scary wolf then,” Dean says, pressing his smile against the back of Cas’ neck. Marley laughs again.

“Nuh uh.”

“What could she be then?” Cas says, playing the part of stumped-parent perfectly.

“A panther!” she says, missing the “h” so it sounds a lot more like “panter”.

Cas twists his neck just a tiny bit so Dean can see the side of his face, raising an eyebrow. “A panther? Is that so?”

“Yeah,” she says happily. “Like Papa.”

Cas hums happily, and Dean doesn’t even try to fight the warm relief spreading across his chest. It would appear that yesterday’s events have passed.

“I like panthers,” Dean says. “We should keep her.”

“Daddy!” she protests, but Dean just laughs and nestles down in the blankets.

The three of them are all quiet for a minute before Marley takes it upon herself to get more comfortable, climbing bodily over Castiel and wedging herself between them. She lays her cheek on Dean’s chest and purrs, and it doesn’t even cross his mind to think about being annoyed by it. Cas sighs and rolls over, blinking sleepy blue eyes at Dean and scooting close until they have a little Marley-sandwich going.

Dean lays there and stares into Cas’ eyes for more than a few seconds. Eventually Cas reaches out a hand and strokes the stubble on his cheeks, a quiet smile at the corner of his mouth. Dean can’t help but smile back, his chest feeling just about ready to burst. His mate starts up that slow, rhythmic purring and Dean doesn’t even stand a chance.

“I know what you’re doing,” he says quietly, trying and failing to sound grumpy about it.

Cas just smiles, not bothering to deny it. “Let’s stay in bed all day.”

The expanse of their future is laid out in front of him, every second that is theirs for the taking. And from where he’s laying, it all looks pretty damn good.

Dean smiles.

“Sure thing, kitten. Anything you want.”

---

Dean hears a twig snap, not far from where he’s standing.

_Shit._

He circles the tree once again, searching for any kind of branch that he might be able to reach from the ground. He curses his terrible climbing skills, not for the first time.
The footsteps get closer.

_Double shit. Shit shit shit._

Dean tries to think of an excuse. Something like “it’s not what it looks like” or “she started it” or “I’ll never do it again, I promise.”

He catches Cas’ scent on the breeze, and just knows that he’s done for. His mate is going to kill him.

_Quadruple shit._

Dean hides behind a tree. Maybe Cas won’t notice he’s here. Maybe—

“Dean,” comes a low voice, rough and sexy as ever. Damn him. “Is there a particular reason why you’re hiding behind a tree?”

_Shit times a billion._

“Uh,” Dean rubs at the back of his neck and peeks out, only barely able to meet Cas’ gaze. “No?”

Cas crosses his arms and squints his eyes, not buying into the bullshit Dean is selling.

“Mmm,” he hums, his eyes flicking over Dean’s shoulder. “Something wrong with this picture?”

Dean ignores the question and grins instead, the flirty smile he uses when he wants to soften Cas up.

“Hey kitten,” he rumbles, slipping an arm around his mate’s waist and pulling him close. “Missed you today.”

A hand pushes against his chest as Cas studies his face, blue eyes squinted suspiciously.

“Don’t even try.”

Dean drops the smile and takes a step back, dropping his gaze to the ground. He’s _fucked._

“The baby?” Cas asks, eyebrows raised. “I assume you haven’t forgotten that you’re supposed to be taking care of her?”

“M’ not _that_ irresponsible, Cas.”

“So where is she?” Cas crosses his arms, rolling his shoulders back and pinning Dean down with his gaze.

The leaves above Dean’s head rustle, but Cas doesn’t look. Not until a tiny little _meow_ drifts down from the branches high above them. Cas’ entire body stiffens.

“She, uh,” Dean mumbles, rubbing at the back of his neck and staring at his feet. “She wanted to climb. And she’s, uh, well she’s better’n me. So I let her go and…well she got a little cocky, I think. ’Cause she couldn’t get down. Thought she was just being stubborn at first, but I think…well she _might_ be a little bit stuck. And I got no claws man! So I couldn’t go up and get her, and I know she’s gettin’ big alright but she’s not that big yet and just ’cause she’s a hot shot leopard I mean what if she _fell_? Ya know?”

“Dean,” Cas sighs, and Dean swears he sees a smile at the corner of his mouth.

“I’m serious, babe!” Dean rambles on, and he barely notices how he’s started to pace back and forth.
“She’s just a cub! She’s just a fucking cub and—”

“Language,” Cas reminds him gently.

“She’s—sorry, uh—she’s just a little cub, and I mean what if you hadn’t come out here to find us? I should’ve been more careful, never should’ve let her climb up a tree that I couldn’t follow, I’m the worst fucki—uh, friggin’—I’m the worst friggin’ dad in the whole world and—”

“Dean,” his mate catches his face in his hands, putting a stop to his pacing and his rambling all at once. “Relax. I’ll go get her.”

“But what if—”

Cas presses their lips together, effectively shutting Dean up immediately.

“What if nothing. I’m here, I’ll go get her.”

Dean blinks at him, panic flooding his chest. “You’re not mad?”

That little smile tugs at Cas’ lips. “No, I’m not mad. We’ve always known that Marley is exactly like you.”

Cas spins away, strips off his shirt and pants and shifts, only chuckling quietly when Dean asks what the heck that’s supposed to mean.

It only takes his mate a minute or so to retrieve their cub from high up in the tree. The panther climbs back down with a little black cub in its mouth, Marley’s feet tucked up while Cas carries her by the scruff of her neck.

Dean scoops her up, and she immediately nuzzles guiltily into the crook of his elbow. He murmurs soft words to her as they start their journey home, cradling her against his chest until she falls asleep purring.

When they get back to the den Dean brings Marley straight to her room, depositing her in the little nest of a bed that replaced her crib when she got old enough. She doesn’t stir, just wrapping her tail over her muzzle and curling into a circle. She looks more like a wolf when she sleeps like that, burying her nose under her tail like Dean’s wolf does when it’s alone.

Cas arms find their way around Dean’s waist, their bond settling once Cas’ shift is finished.

“Perhaps in the future, we can save climbing practice for when I’m there. What do you think?”

Dean huffs quietly and spins in his mate’s arms, gently bumping their noses once they’re face to face.

“Yes. Probably a good plan.”

*** *** ***

Cas is cleaning again. Never a good sign. At least he’s doing it quietly this time.

"Kitten..."

No response. Dean sighs and runs his fingers through his hair, checking to be sure that Marley is still sleeping.

"Come on, man. I said I was sorry."
Cas scoffs and rolls his eyes. "I heard you the first twenty-seven times."

"So? Can you stop giving me the fucking silent treatment?"

"Watch your language around our daughter," Cas snaps. "You know she picks up everything you say."

Dean drags his hand over his face and rubs at his jaw, crossing his arms across his chest.

"This isn't helping."

"Oh, you want to talk about not helping?" Cas glares at him. "What part of 'don't baby her' escaped your understanding?"

"She was crying!" Dean growls. "What do you want me to do?"

"She was throwing a tantrum," Cas growls right back, pushing past him as he moves around the room. At this point Dean is pretty sure he's just moving shit around for the sake of having something to do.

"Whatever. You just want me to listen to her cry?"

"I want you to listen to me when I tell you not to entertain her tantrums! Why is that so goddamn hard to understand that?"

"Watch your language, baby," Dean grumbles, which was absolutely the wrong thing to say.

Cas stomps over to the door and opens it, pointing out into the hallway.

"Get out. Come back when you're done being a child and ready to be a parent."

"One tantrum, Dean? One? So you've never, ever coddled her before?" Dean keeps his gaze on the floor and his mouth shut. He's not about to incriminate himself. "What happens next time, when she expects you to do the same thing again? Are you going to listen to me then? Or are you going to do exactly what I asked you not to do because you obviously know better?"

"That's not what I did and you know it."

"No, Dean, I don't." Cas rubs at his eyes, his shoulders slumping. "We're a team here, and I can't do that if you keep making me into the bad guy."

Dean rolls his eyes. "I'm not doing anything."

"That's a lie and you know it," Cas sighs. God he looks tired. "I need you to be on my side."

"So stop making a big fucking deal out of this, Cas, it's just--" Cas snaps.

"Watch your fucking language, Dean! How hard is that?"

"Apparently fucking difficult, since you're doing just as much of a shit job as I am."
"It's your fault for being a goddamn child!" He makes a frustrated noise, dragging his fingers through his hair. "You make me so fucking crazy, Dean."

Dean snorts. "You drive me crazy too, baby. Trust me."

Cas glares at him. "As much as you may wish otherwise, this is our child, and we're raising her together as a team. Don't make me have this next one alone."

Dean's heart sinks, his eyes dropping to Cas' belly. It isn't completely rounded out yet, since he's only about 6 months in, but it's noticeable and it makes Dean's heart swell.

"Kitten..."

"Don't give me the apologetic eyes unless you mean them," Cas snaps, crossing his arms so that his forearms rest on top of his pregnant belly.

God his mate is fucking mad at him. Dean doesn't know why he picked a fight but he does know that they're both tired and new to this parenting thing and overall not sure what they're doing.

"'Course I mean it," he says, sitting on the edge of their bed and gesturing for Cas to come towards him. "C'mere."

Cas narrows his eyes suspiciously. "I'm not that easy."

Yeah, Dean is going to have to work for this one.

"I'm sorry for being a huge asshole," Dean says, trying not to smile when Cas takes a tiny step towards him.

"And?"

"And I'm sorry for not listening to you about Marley. You're right, I shouldn't encourage her tantrums."

Cas' lips twitch. Another step. "And?"

"And I'm sorry for cursing so much. She'll be cursing like a sailor eventually, but it doesn't have to start so early."

Cas gives him a look that says he's fed up with Dean's bullshit for today. "And?"

"And I'm sorry for picking a fight with you. I was wrong."

He's within arms reach now, so Dean pulls him in by his hips, resting his chin on his mate's pregnant belly.

"And?" Cas says, a real smile hiding at the corner of his mouth.

"And you look really fucking gorgeous when you're pregnant," Dean says, his tone softer with the close proximity. Cas rolls his eyes and cards his fingers through Dean's short hair.

"And?"

"And I love you."

Cas hums, apparently satisfied. "Okay."
With his mate's forgiveness Dean lifts his shirt out of the way, revealing Cas' swollen belly filled with their second pup. Dean runs rough palms over his stretched skin, marveling at the idea that this is his. He presses his lips to the skin, then shifts barely to the left and does it again. He kisses every square centimeter while Cas strokes his hair, his cat purring quietly.

"Are you still mad at me?" Dean asks when he's finished, peering up at Cas through his eyelashes.

"Only mostly."

*** *** ***

"Are you going to help, or just stand there?" Cas huffs, sounding annoyed. Dean squats down on the side of the stream and grins.

"Figured I'd just watch."

Cas glares at him, but it's been a long time since that look at any effect on him. Dean just wiggles his eyebrows.

"They're your daughters. Do you want them to be filthy?"

"Pretty sure it's too late for that," Dean chuckles, pointing at a mud-covered child that might be Page, once you scrape off all of the extra dirt that's all over her. "How'd she even get like that?"

Cas apparently deems that unworthy of a response, trying again to get Page to sit still enough in the water at the edge of the stream so that he can clean her off. Marley is bouncing around on the bank further down giggling, singing something that Dean is pretty sure she's making up as she goes along. She's equally as muddy, but Cas seems more concerned with Page at the moment.

"Sides," Dean grins, deciding to poke the bear that is his mate just a little bit more. "Pretty sure that one ain't even mine."

"You are endlessly infuriating," Cas snaps. He gets tired of that joke real fast. But Page is all Cas, in looks anyway. Those big blue eyes, messy hair, she even does that head tilt and the squinty eyes when Dean is being an idiot. She’s quiet like Cas, too, playful in a far more feline way than Marley. Her big sister might be a leopard too, but Marley has far more wolf in her.

Cas scoops some water into his hands and gently rubs at her cheeks, ignoring Page’s protests as he goes. Her hair is a wreck too, and in dire need of some shampoo. Dean’s pretty sure a shower is going to be in order for both of their cubs tonight.

"There," Cas huffs triumphantly once her face is mostly clean. "See those?"

Dean raises his eyebrows and squints at Page, much to her amusement. She smiles and reaches out her hands to him, clearly wanting to be picked up. Dean rumbles happily and sticks out a hand, letting her tug on his fingers.

"What am I looking at?"

Cas rolls his eyes. "The freckles all over her. Those are all you. And that smile? That’s you. And she definitely got the cuddly wolf gene."

Dean laughs, smiling even harder at the way Page looks back and forth between her parents like she’s trying to keep up with them. She’s little still though, can barely speak a word let alone keep up with Cas’ sarcasm. But his cat is right. The smile on her face is definitely one he recognizes from the
mirror, and the scattering of freckles across the bridge of her nose and the tops of her shoulders look so similar to his own.

“We made some beautiful kittens, baby,” Dean says quietly, hearing Page giggle at his tone. She doesn’t really hear what he’s saying, but the octave of his voice seems to amuse her.

Cas sighs and looks at him, his blue eyes softening and the tiniest of smiles playing at the corner of his mouth. His gaze drops down to Dean’s lips for a moment, and when it drifts back up Dean knows exactly what his mate is thinking.

“Yes, we did.”

It’s a sweet moment, so Dean decides to ruin it a little bit. He licks his lips intentionally slow, staring at Cas’ mouth for way too long.

“Wanna go make some more?”

Cas smacks him. So maybe he deserved that, but whatever.

“Go clean up your daughter, please.”

“Oh, so when she’s caked in mud from your play day then she’s my daughter?”

His mate chews his lip to hide his smile, returning to the handful that is Page.

“Thank you, puppy.”

Dean rolls his eyes. He pulls off his shirt and sweats, wading into the cool stream in the direction that Marley is in.

“How’s my favorite panther?” Dean says with a grin, his wolf sitting tall and proud at the sight of their cub pink cheeked and smiling at them.

“Daddy shhhh,” she says dramatically, practically tripping over herself as she skips down the bank to jump into his arms. He catches her and sits down into the water, scenting her on instinct to make sure she’s okay. “Not so loud,” she whispers conspiratorially.

“Why not?” Dean whispers back, rubbing water over her arms and scraping some of the dirt away.

“Papa an’ Page might hear you and get jealous.”

Dean laughs. “It’ll be our little secret then.”

Marley hums happily and squirms a little bit, but lets him clean her off still.

“Wanna hear what we did?” she smiles, bouncing excitedly.

“You bet I do. Tell me all about it.”

“We went an’ played with Uncle Gabriel first.”

“Oh yeah?” Dean prompts, encouraging her to continue.

“Mnhmm. And we played hiding and we played climbing. Just me and Uncle Gabriel played climbing. Papa stayed with Page ‘cause Page is too little.”
Marley seems to think, as does Dean, that Page is going to be a leopard like her sister. All signs point that way, but she hasn’t actually shifted yet so it’s hard to say. She still has that distinctive baby smell about her, but she doesn’t really smell like puppy breath like Sam’s kids. His and Jess’ third, Maddie, who’s almost exactly two years younger than Marley, had been the worst, and the entire pack had loved it. In any case, Dean hopes she turns out to be a leopard. Marley could’ve gone either way, but Page is all cat. She holds her own with the wolves, that’s for sure, but she’s far too feline to feel at home in a wolf body.

“How’d you end up a mud-monster?” Dean asks, winking at her. She looks way too proud of herself.

“Papa brought us swimming after. The mud is like paint! An’ Papa told us not to but we did anyway.”

Dean reigns in the laughter, because this is a Serious Parenting Moment and probably not behavior he should be encouraging with laughter.

“Marley, you know you gotta listen to Papa when he tells you stuff.” Yeah. Real serious dad voice. Dean’s a pro at that.

“I know,” she rolls her eyes, not looking sorry in the least. Dean’s sorry for teaching her that one. “I wasn’t gonna, but then Papa painted mud on Page’s nose and on my cheeks. And then it was fun.”

Dean snorts, twisting to look over his shoulder.

“Oh, really,” he laughs, giving Cas a look. “It was Papa who started all this. Interesting.”

Cas has the decency to look guilty for about .05 seconds. Then he just shrugs and goes back to Page. What a goddamn hypocrite.

“It wouldn’t be fair to put the blame on any one of us, now would it?”

Dean snorts and sends a half-hearted splash their way. Marley continues to babble at him for a while longer, right up until she’s clean of all the muck and mud. She still needs a shower and some real shampoo, but it’ll do. Page is going to need that shower too.

By the time they’re finished and clean, even Marley’s eyes are drooping. Dean scoops her up on his hip, pushing her damp hair off her face with his free hand. She’s getting heavier every day, but the wolf doesn’t mind the dead weight of their sleeping cub.

“Ready?” Dean grins at his mate, who is still sitting in the mud with a freshly-cleaned Page balanced on his knees.

Cas gives a tired nod, yawning wide when he opens his mouth to speak. “Ugh. Yes, let’s go.”

“Want me to take her?” Dean laughs, offering up his free arm. “You look beat.”

Cas looks up at him with sleepy blue eyes, bottom lip stuck out in a pout, and Dean knows he would give this cat the world.

“Yes, please.”

Dean scoops Page up and settles her on his free hip, balancing the weight of a cub on each hip. She flops against his chest, and like her sister is asleep in seconds. “Now I’m doing all the hard work, up you get. I can’t carry you too.”
“You sure about that, alpha?” Cas purrs, standing up slowly and arching his back in a stretch.

“Yes,” Dean rumbles back at him, feeling his wolf step up to the challenge. The wolf is pretty sure they could do it. “Quit makin’ me want to try. I’d just wake the pups.”

Cas’ lips twitch up in a quiet little smile, his feet carrying him right up into Dean’s space so that he can press a kiss to the tip of Dean’s nose.

“Let’s go home.”

Dean takes in the warmth of his cubs asleep against him, his mate a bare inch in front of him. Their clean, fresh scents swirling around him, melded into his skin, his scent melded into theirs. His wolf has never been more content.

“Yeah. Home.”

***

End.

Chapter End Notes

To all of you who have left comments along the way, or just a comment here at the end, just know that I read every single one of them. It’s hard to find the time (working and being a student) to respond to every one of them, but I do read them and they warm my heart every time. To those of you who went on this journey with me, know that you mean the world to me. To those of you who found your way here later, I appreciate you just as much. Thank you for your kind words, even if I can’t say thank you to each of you individually.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!