The Precipice of Change

by Sa_kun

Summary

The Precipice of Change: Harry Potter was human, but the Master of Death is not. The arc in which Harry is the Master of Death and Gabriel is his mentor.

Who ever said figuring out the whole "Master of Death" business would be easy?

Notes

Spoilers for Harry Potter and Supernatural.
Beginnings

It took Harry almost four months before he realised he that the ring on his finger with the shiny, smooth black stone in its centre had been the very same stone he lost in the Forbidden Forest. Well, Harry amended, the ring he had sort of been under the impression he had thrown away, because, obviously, if the ring was on his finger then it never had been tossed aside, now, had it?

He wasn't sure if he ever took it off even in his sleep. He knew he kept it on in the shower.

The ring was sitting on his left index finger – in other words, not on his wand hand. Harry wasn't sure why, exactly, but it was important that the hand the ring was worn on wasn't the same hand that wielded the Elder wand. When he wielded the wand.

If he used a wand at all.

The Invisibility Cloak had never whispered or revealed the dead to him. It had always just been a cloak that made him invisible. But ever since Harry had brought all the Hallows together, well.

The wand wasn't whispering to him any more.

The stone wasn't showing him visions of the dead.

But now, once that he was aware of always carrying the Hallows on his person, well. Now, he didn't get how he could've been ignorant of them for so long.

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It started small, about a week or two after Harry fully understood that he was the Master of Death, sort of. The title he really could do without, honestly.

It was in a Muggle house on the outskirts of London. The air around it looked sickly, grey and bruised and just wrong. On the porch outside a little girl was sitting, hugging a stuffed toy to her chest.

No, Harry thought, not a girl. An echo of a girl. Where her left eye should have been was a gaping wound, ragged and bloody, as if something had blown it out of her face.

Why the feeling and instinct came as easily and natural as it did, Harry wasn't sure, but at the time it felt like the most obvious action in the world to just reach out and cup the girl's cheek.

"Am I going to Mummy?" the girl asked in a sleepy voice. "I miss my Mummy."

Harry smiled. "You're going to see Nana and Grandpa, sweetie. Mummy will be with you soon."

"Promise?"

"Promise," Harry said, knowing it was the truth, just as he had known the girl's maternal grandparents were already dead, waiting in the afterlife for the girl. Time would pass differently there, he knew; most likely the girl wouldn't know just how long it would take before her mother died as well. Twenty-six years, a shiver down his spine promised.

"Now, I want you to close your eyes and sleep," Harry whispered. The stone reacted to the situation, to the slumbering magic of what was happening.
The ghost of the small girl faded out of view. As she did, the air around the house became clear and light.

As Harry stood up, he realised the cloak was wrapped around his shoulders and neck. He couldn't remember putting it on.

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Instead of going back to Hogwarts, trying to be an Auror, playing Quidditch or being talked into seeing Ginny again by most of his friends, Harry barricaded himself in the Black family library every spare moment he could find. The books had little information on the Hallows, beyond what had been in the Beedle Bard tale, but what little information they contained hinted at something more, something… different.

Harry wasn't all together sure he liked it, because, well. When was different ever good?

That incident with the little girl had opened his eyes in a way he'd never thought possible. Everywhere he looked, the air was misplaced and wrong. That first week after having… Having done, what, exactly, to that little girl? Sent her on, as he'd got the feeling he did? Killed her, even though that made him feel ill and wrong? But that first week Harry had dispelled seven echoes, as he'd come to call them, because they felt nothing at all like Wizarding ghosts, at the local Muggle library.

The first time he visited the library afterwards, he noticed how much kinder and happier everyone inside the building was.

Muggles were, while ignorant of an entire world centred around magic, extraordinarily talented at amassing information. They collected mythologies and tales and legends in huge quantities. Harry found himself Apparating over the entire country either buying books in some half-forgotten antiquarian bookshop, or borrowing them from a library. Harry had, of course, sent the echoes located in the new libraries he discovered on their way as easily as he had first dispatched that little girl.

Harry was building a library of his own, collecting every book he could find that in some way handled death, Death – capital letter – and the legends that had grown up around the two concepts.
Chapter Summary

The thestrals like him.

It was during yet another visit to yet another library – this one located in Amsterdam – that something new happened.

*Something* happened.

Fact: Thestrals can only be seen by those who have witnessed someone die.

Fact: Dementors suck souls out of people.

Thestrals looked like skeletal horses of death. Dementors *brought* death. The creatures had similarities in looks and abilities: both beings could fly, for one. For another, Harry realised that he had always felt somewhat drawn to both creatures – more so than any of his friends had. Then there was the Veil, the voices Harry had heard on the other side…

If there was one thing Harry had come to understand about the Deathly Hallows it was that they wouldn't work for just anyone. Dumbledore may have had control of the wand, but the stone had rejected him. Harry had survived certain death as a baby, as a teenager. Harry had *been* on the crossroads that led to the other side, wherever that was, but had ultimately chosen to come back. He was probably more connected to death than any other wizard alive at the moment.

What happened wasn't that someone suddenly appeared in front of him to tell him exactly what he needed to know, no. What happened was that Harry started to accept that he wasn't who he had been before: before he mastered the Hallows.

Guiding the echoes to let go and move on gave him more peace than anything ever had before in his life.

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The thestral found him when Harry was busy following the sickly trails in the air through a forest that, while as deep and dark as the Forbidden Forest, was supposed to be entirely Muggle. It butted him on the back of his head, then proceeded to snuffle his hair.

The instinct to giggle was hard to supress.

"Hey, hey," he protested softly.

The thestral nickered lightly. It was a young one, a foal, all gangly and long-limbed and unsteady. It came forward again and rubbed its snout against Harry's neck and shoulder. Despite its appearance of a skeletal, leathery horse with wings, it appeared this young thestral was quite cuddly. So with a small grin, Harry reached up and began petting the animal down its neck.

The next time something touched his hair, not all that much later, it was the mother of the thestral so delightedly pushing against Harry's hands.
It was huge, easily towering over him. It gave Harry an assessing glare, then snorted and proceeded to lie down on the ground and curl up.

According to the Ministry, these creatures were violent, dangerous and unpredictable unless domesticated.

"Surprise, surprise, they told a lie," Harry muttered.
Chapter Summary

Harry sets the dementors free.

The beginning of the end to Harry's stay in the UK came when he read about the Ministry's decision to execute the dementors that had been rounded up in the battle at Hogwarts. The news made Harry sick to his stomach. Something pulled at him from the inside, something that wanted Harry to save the dementors. To protect them, cherish them, take them in.

Harry didn't understand.

The dementors had been one of his greatest fears ever, but this?

What with dispelling echoes, feeling his magic expand and transform into something new and a little bit scary, getting friendly with thestrals and running around reading up on death lore, this latest development didn't take him by surprise as much as it once might have.

His magic, now more sentient than it had ever been before, wanted him to save the dementors. Urged him, in fact. If he closed his eyes, he could almost see an ancient langue written under his eyelids, asking, begging, promising, urging. It never ordered or demanded, it felt ancient and shy, but not dangerous, dark or evil. In its own way, the faintly glowing lines of blue text felt like a long lost friend. It was almost as if it was something he should've remembered, something he'd once known.

Or maybe something the Hallows had once known. Sometimes Harry wasn't sure where he ended and the Hallows began any more. He had begun to understand, though, that the Hallows retained memories of the previous time that they had all been in once place. Harry was mostly sure that he was the second person on earth to have successfully mastered the Hallows. In a way, perhaps even the first, because the former master was the very same person who had created the Hallows in the first place.

The text was something he had been seeing, if that was the right word for it, more and more often recently. It wasn't Latin, it wasn't Greek, it wasn't English, Gaelic or any other language Harry had managed to scour up in the libraries around the country. The letters weren't even from the Latin alphabet, which on its own was kind of strange, but no matter how many languages Harry found written down in dictionaries and books, none of the alphabets ever matched.

So, saving the dementors it was, then.

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Saving the dementors had, in hindsight, been ridiculously easy. The cloak kept him hidden, kept him more than invisible to the witches and wizards that had gathered in the open field where the 'execution' was to take place.

Harry had always wondered how you killed a dementor. He knew now.

In the centre of the field, the Unspeakables had placed the Veil. It was grander in daylight, and the
familiar pang of grief it brought Harry was less intense than it had been the last time Harry had seen the Veil.

For the first time with his eyes open wide, Harry could see the text he sometimes saw in his dreams, sometimes when he closed his eyes while feeling uncertain of what to do.

The text was alive, writhing around the Veil as if trapped. And it was, Harry realised. Narrowing his eyes, Harry stepped as close as he could – which, given that he was virtually undetectable, was pretty close – and moved a hand to the Veil, touching the cold stone.

The Veil was tethered, captured, a magical artefact being used in fashion it had not been created for. The Ministry was abusing it, had been for centuries. There were heavy chains of light and crawling, oily magic keeping the flowing lightly blue script in place, almost as if to prevent the Veil from calling out for help to whoever would listen, to whomever could help.

Without thinking, Harry severed the magical chains.

The Veil sung, its song loud, clear and deathly beautiful.

The Unspeakables tensed and pulled their wands. Because, the second Harry had severed the ties that kept the Veil shackled, the dementors had all flocked around Harry.

The first dementor Harry touched in his reflexive step backwards to protect himself from getting his soul sucked out, faded away in a blinding flash of light. One by one, the dementors crowded closer.

They all transformed.

Instead of dark, skeletal, rotting creatures of fear and death and evil, they all changed. The closest Harry could liken them to now were large octopuses of light.

"Oh."

After that, he stopped resisting and held out his arms. The chant, more a thought or a sense, really, didn't stop until the dementors had all been touched.

Harry Potter was the Master of Death and, just like any other master, the Master of Death needed minions. The dementors would collect lost souls, would guide the deceased to the next great, big adventure. They would guide the souls and echoes and ghosts through the Veil, Harry realised with a sharp pang of clarity.

As the Master of Death, the Veil was *his*.

With a thought, the Veil disappeared.

Just before chaos erupted, Harry disappeared as well.
Harry moves to a new country.

Harry’s new house was an old cottage – cabin, the estate agent had called it, but Harry didn’t agree. It was a cottage made of wood. It had a largish basement that had been cleared out with one flick of Harry’s wand. The empty space at once cleaned itself. The floor was scrubbed until the paved stone almost gleamed grey. He painted the walls white, fixed up some old oil lamps to fasten against the walls – electricity didn’t work in such close proximity to the Veil. Across the ceiling, he strung up long swathes of brightly coloured cloth. Mostly, it was silks and velvet and linen. Not one black. The colours were bright and happy, giving a life to the room that it had otherwise lacked; stone was cold, after all, no matter what you did with it.

Harry turned the inside of his basement into his very own Chamber of Death. Only, Harry saw it more as the portal of the life beyond. There was nothing inherently evil about the Veil, after all. It was just a Veil.

The ground level of Harry’s cottage contained most of his living quarters. There was a kitchen, a bathroom, a sitting room and a study. The first floor contained his bedroom, though Harry suspected most of the previous owners had used the first floor in its rightful capacity of an attic. Harry had built the stairs himself with the help of magic. In the corner of his study there was now a spiral staircase.

His bedroom attic was spacious, but not huge, with a slanting roof. The ceiling was covered in large wooden beams, all of which Harry had darkened with wood stain so that they all looked new and fresh. The rest of the ceiling as well as the walls he'd turned white with a tap of his wand. The only splash of colour so far was that the two shorter walls had both been turned into a deep, beautiful purple.

From the beams Harry hung lanterns and lamps, none of them powered by electricity. Underneath the larger window by the right hand wall he placed a sofa and a small table, by the other wall directly across the rectangular wall, Harry placed his bed. It was a low bed, almost directly on the floor, but it was wide and one of the best Harry had ever found. Despite the fact that the floor was a polished wood as dark as the wooden beams above him, Harry placed a large, round woven rug beneath the bed. Besides, it was always nice to step on something a little warmer in the mornings.

Harry managed to fit an armoire as well as a bookcase and an armchair in the room before deciding he was done. He had shielded off the stairs by a simple screen with a painted rising phoenix on it. Mostly so he wouldn't accidentally fall down the stairs if he ever sleepwalked. There wasn't a railing.

The cottage had come with land, despite the fact that it was located in the middle of a forest, sort of. He had a huge back garden, all grassy and mossy with small hills and dips. Already he could spy several thestrals moving along the grass and running among the trees. Further to the west, where the grass ended and the trees began, was a creek that led to a small tarn. The water was icy cold, the pond deep and still. It was on his lands as well. Harry had set up a perimeter with magic, but he knew the thestrals would guard the borders as well.

They were loyal, and they were vicious.
They had decided that wherever Harry went, they would follow. At first, a lot of them had partnered with the newly transformed dementors, and more still where finding their companions to this day. The ones that remained were Harry's flock, it was where the thestrals came when they wanted to breed, when they wanted to play and mate.

Not too far from Harry's remote cottage was a place called Rowena. It had made him a bit wary, yeah, but then Harry had shrugged it off. He was in America, in the middle of a forest, all alone. Besides, his house was much closer to a town named Sioux Falls. He was in South Dakota, in the United States.

It would be okay.
Outsides

Chapter Summary

Harry decides to undertake a new experiment: how to drive a car.

Harry had a project. He'd had several so far: travel the world, move to America, find a house – or cottage, as it turned out – move in, decorate a bit, get comfortable, set up the Veil, and so on. His latest project had been to build a greenhouse. It wasn't big, but it was his. Potions had never been his strong forte, but there was a nifty, lesser known branch of magic called Herblore that was rather useful to him.

From the plants he could make incense, small bags of protective herbs, cleanse rooms, houses, buildings and lands, all depending on how much he used, and how powerful the plant. He could infuse it, make teas and ward his house.

Besides, the blue text liked it.

Harry had realised by now that the blue text had something to do with the Hallows. Possibly from their creator, possibly from the last one to Master them.

So his greenhouse outside, not too far from his little cottage, was filled with beds and tables, the soil rich and new and just waiting for the seeds and plants to grow.

But that wasn't what his latest project had to do with. No, Harry had decided that he needed to know how to drive. He was twenty-three years old, living as a Muggle among Muggles, sort of. More to the point, he was living in the middle of a forest in the middle of nowhere at the end of a gravel road. Yeah, he may not have had a lot of neighbours, but the fact he couldn't drive and yet had a motorcycle… Well, some might find that a little strange.

Sirius had left him the bike. Harry had let Hagrid keep it for a while, but Hagrid had convinced Harry to take it sometime before Harry left England to travel around the globe. Before he settled down in this rural part of South Dakota, Harry had done his best to see the world outside of England. Most of it had been Muggle, but there were pockets tucked away with Magical people in most places. The Antipodes, for example, had more witches and wizards than the UK. Africa was rife with magic, as was most of everything between India and Japan, although none of it was the kind of magic Harry was used to. In that part of Asia, the magic had altered a lot from country to country as well.

So, this day, about a month after Harry first moved in, Harry shouldered a rucksack and tucked in a knapsack and a few bottles of water as well as the latest book he was reading. Outside, a new, if used, bicycle was waiting for him. It would take him almost two hours, but he would reach his destination. He did it every week, not only to buy food and supplies, but also to let the people of the city see him and know that he was still alive.

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"Oh, fuck you, bitch!" Harry ground out. "And you, too, you buggering hole; don't think I can't see you!" he declared, pointing an accusatory finger at the not-so-innocent hole on the ground. It had
been just sharp and deep enough to flatten the front tire of his bike.

"S'just a hole, kid," a man behind him drawled.

Harry whirled around. "It broke my bike!" he protested. "Look! I can't buy groceries now, much less
get home!"

Just Harry's luck, wasn't it? Because of the man that had just happened to witness Harry's accident,
he couldn't exactly use magic. Or apparate, which, yeah, was magic as well, so.

The stranger narrowed his eyes a little. "You ain't that kid living in that ol' cabin in the middle of
smack-dab nowhere, are you?"

Harry cleared his throat. "I am."

"Whatcha doing on a friggin' bike?"

"I like the exercise," Harry lied. Well, sort of lied. He didn't mind it, per se, but it was more than a bit
tedious.

The man scoffed. "Yeah, right. You need a hand?"

Harry smiled, his eyes at once wide and grateful. "Would you? I'd pay, of course, and—"

"—pay some attention so you know what to do next time?" the man bit off. "Now get your ass in
here, will ya?"

'In here' turned out to be a workshop full of oil, car parts and tools.

"So, um, who are you, then?" Harry wondered, poking a little at something that looked like a
deformed screwdriver.

"Bobby Singer," the man muttered.

"I'm Harry Potter," Harry promptly answered. "I was actually looking for someplace where I could
learn how to drive. You wouldn't happen to know a good place, would you? I'm afraid I don't know
the first thing about cars."

"You ain't got no clue how to handle a car and you've got yourself halfway across the globe to a
forest in fuck all nowhere."

Harry pursed his lips. "I flew. Then I rode my bicycle. Oh, and my godfather left me his motorcycle,
but I don't know how to drive that one, either."

"Yeah? What kind?"

Harry cleared his throat. "Well, it's big and black. And heavy."

"Don't know, do you?"

Harry wet his lips. "It's a motorcycle."
Harry decides to undertake a new experiment: how to drive a motorbike.

Harry spent exactly forty-two hours at Bobby's house that first time he met the man, learning how to drive. Bobby had grudgingly let Harry stay the night. The promise of a home cooked meal and pie was the deal breaker, as well as the following meals.

When Bobby felt Harry knew enough about cars, he gave Harry a ride down to the closest driver exam station and convinced them to let Harry take his driving test.

Harry passed it, of course, and Bobby gave him a ride back.

Back, Harry realised when they didn't make the turn to Bobby's place, to Harry's cottage.

"My bicycle—"

"I ain't letting you back on that thing," Bobby muttered. "'Sides, couple of kids played target practice with it."

"But I don't have a car, Bobby."

"No, but you got yourself a bike, dontcha?"

"But I don't know how to use it," Harry protested.

"What else is new? Ain't that hard."

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It turned out it wasn't that hard, just like Bobby had said. Harry's keen sense of balance, as well as his talent on a broom helped him a great deal when it came to mastering the motorcycle. Bobby had taken up camp in one of Harry's fold out chairs, grabbed a beer out of Harry's fridge – the only beer, as it turned out, because after trying once Harry had declared dishwater a preferable choice – and sat down to watch Harry make a fool of himself.

The first thing Bobby did was make sure the motorcycle was actually in working condition. He taught Harry what to look for as he went, but most of it just went over his head. Mechanics wasn't really Harry's area of expertise. So Bobby filled the gas tank, fixed the oil and the breaks, made sure it started up as it should, and then sent Harry on his way.

Harry drove slowly, carefully, up and down the gravel road several times. The contraption was big and heavy, like he'd told Bobby, but now it was also turning hot, and it vibrated a lot. The noise of the engine was loud and purring and filled all of Harry's senses. Also, the first thing he was going to do after riding the motorcycle to Sioux Falls for the first time was buy a proper helmet. The one he was wearing right now he'd transfigured from a pillow.

He wasn't all that sure of how well it'd protect him. If it'd protect him.
"You need some leather, kid," Bobby called at him, looking on with barely hidden amusement as Harry tried to turn off the motorcycle, then park it.

"Right." Harry gave a none-too-subtle kick at the side of the motorcycle, once he finally got it back into its stationary position. "Leathers," he muttered.
The first few weeks after learning how to drive, Harry would go on day-long adventures. The trips served two purposes:

One – it helped him learn more about the area he now lived it. He learned all the roads, the cities and towns as well as the smaller gatherings of houses. Harry found where houses miles away from civilisation were. He found rivers and lakes and learned how to navigate the forests surrounding him.

Two – Harry got word out. He dispelled echoes, as well as less friendly spirits and angry poltergeists. It seemed that here, unlike the UK, the last two weren't exclusively Wizarding phenomena. Some of his 'customers', of course, never even knew that he had been there, but there were some who, Harry supposed, were sensitive. Those people Harry offered to help, to remove the angry spirit. The poltergeists weren't that common, after all.

One of the angrier spirits he ever dealt with during those first weeks had taken up residence in a house on the outskirts of Sioux Falls. It was the home of an elderly woman known to Harry only as Madame Johnson. Her biscuits were to die for, and her cooking was, if possible, a few notches better.

"How have you been, Madame?" Harry asked after having been let in one early Tuesday afternoon. The day had started out sunny and warm, but had clouded up a bit since.

"Oh, I'm just fine, young man!" Madame Johnson gave him a wrinkly smile. "Come in, come in, we were just about to have us some cake."

Harry took an abortive step backwards. "I didn't know you had company, Madame, I can just come back another time—"

"Oh, nonsense!" she declared. With a grip far stronger than Harry would have attributed to a woman of eighty, she grabbed hold of Harry's arm. "I was just telling Bobby here that I was sure you'd come by any time now. An old woman knows these things," she prattled on. "I even made sure to have some of those shortbread biscuits you like so much ready. Why, I only baked them yesterday!"

"That's lovely, Madame."

"Oh, you! Such a flatterer!"

Harry smiled. "You have a way of bringing out the best in me, what can I say?"

"Kid."

Harry blinked and looked up from Madame Johnson. "Oh. Hi!" He hadn't realised that her guest was the same Bobby Harry knew.
"I was just telling you, Bobby, that I was sure this fine young man would come by any minute now, wasn't I?"

"You sure were," Bobby said, giving Harry a narrow eyed look. "Shoulda guessed you two'd know each other."

"And how is that?" Harry wondered while accepting a dainty cup of tea.

"You're both as batty, that's how."
It had taken Bobby almost five weeks, but Harry finally felt that he had the ‘fine art’ of servicing his motorcycle down pat. Well, as such matters went, Harry felt rather confident that he could refill the gas when he went out, pay for it, as well as check that the oil was at its proper level and that his breaks worked as they should. It was when he finally understood all of this that Bobby introduced him to something else, just as new and frustrating.

“Now, you got the wiring. A phone’s gonna make it hell of a lot easier getting through to you,” Bobby drawled while plugging an old-fashioned looking contraption into Harry’s wall. “Hell, kid, how you pay your fucking bills’ are a freaking mystery.”

“I go to the bank or the post office,” Harry promptly replied, both sounding and looking as if that was perfectly normal. He was sitting on top of his desk, perched like a child, as he watched Bobby fiddle around with the phone.

“Where the hell’ve you been, anyway? Most do it on the internet. Well, unless you’re like, eighty, or something.”

“Will you leave your number?”


Harry blinked. “Connect it?”

“Get yourself hooked up to the phone company, kid!”

“Oh.”
The winters in South Dakota are not terribly attractive. That concluded, Harry takes off on a little "road trip" that sets in motion a chance encounter.

When winter set in, and every day was filled with storms, very little snow, but a lot of rain and sleet, Harry took one look out of the window and said, "Bugger this."

Very carefully – he still wasn't used to handling the plastic contraption, no matter how many times he'd seen others do it – he lifted the telephone from its cradle, then meticulously pressed one digit at a time.

"Who's it?" A voice barked on the other end after six signals had gone through.

Harry cleared his throat. "Is this Bobby? My name is Harry, and you—"

A longsuffering sigh met his ears. "Kid, what d'you want?"

Harry grinned brightly. "Brill! I got through! So, um. I was just calling to say that I'll be leaving for a while. Two months or so ought to do it. Until spring. I hear it's warmer in New Orleans."

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Harry didn't quite make it to New Orleans, though (well, he did, eventually, but not that winter). For the most part Harry initially spent that winter apparating from place to place, using only the coordinates he could get from the map he had taken to carrying around with him. Mostly, he played the part of a tourist, which wasn't that much of a lie, anyway.

The great cities awed him. Yes, he had been to London. He had flown across the globe. But he usually hadn't travelled into the cities, instead having preferred to keep to the countryside and the quaint little villages found there. Chicago threw him. The building in front of him right now was so tall it looked as if it touched the sky. It was huge.

Harry wasn't quite aware he was gaping until a man stepped up next to him, laughing softly. "Something tells me you ain't from around here, buddy."

Harry hadn't quite been aware that he was visible, either, but refrained from pointing that out. Instead, wide-eyed and grinning like a fool as he was, Harry shook his head, unable to look away from the building in front of him. "No, not really. I mean, I heard about skyscrapers and how high they could be, but I didn't fully understand just how high they actually are. It's amazing."

The man smirked, then. "Something tells me you ain't Amish, either," the man continued in a languid, amused drawl. "So. English wizard?"

Harry managed a nod, not finding the comment to be either important or shocking enough to warrant his looking away from the skyscraper. He was pretty certain, after all, that he was completely invisible. "Yeah."
"Fugitive?" The man hummed a little. "There was a verdict way back, wasn't there? About where you wizards aren't supposed to be." His tone hardened a little towards the end, both in warning and in reprimand. "Like, right here."

"Doesn't count if you get away. Besides, I don't like being tethered. And I wanted to see the world."

There was a short pause.

"I'll just pretend that made sense, all right? Doesn't change the fact that you aren't supposed to be here. Upsets the balance and all that, doncha know?"

Harry managed a bitter laugh. "Firstly, if I hadn't left, they would've tossed me out on my ear eventually. As it was, when I finally took off on my worldwide sightseeing tour, my magic was already starting to give them all the creeps."

When it became obvious that Harry had nothing further to add, the man laughed. "Dude, you're supposed to follow up a 'firstly' with a 'secondly'."

"Oh. Right. Well…" Harry pretended to ponder for a minute. "Secondly, it's none of your business."

The man made a loud, buzzing noise. "Nope. Wrong answer."

"Who are you, anyway?" Harry asked, turning for the first time to fully face the stranger that had started up this conversation in the first place. The bloke wasn't overly tall, but then again, neither was Harry. Light brown hair, a little curled at the edges, sort of greenish, sort of tawny eyes, serious face. And, Harry squinted to make sure he wasn't just seeing things, it sort of looked like…wings? Big, impressive wings. They were folded down over the man's back, yes, but they still looked huge. Then again, Harry reflected, in order to hold up the weight of a human(ish) adult, the wingspan would have to be quite impressive.

"Me?" the bloke grinned. "I'm the Trickster. You can call me Loki," he said, sounding as if Harry was given quite an honour by being allowed to use the name in the first place.

Harry blinked. "Loki?" he wondered. "From the Norse mythology?"

"The one and the same!"

Harry nodded, clearing his throat. "So, technically, you aren't supposed to be here either. What's a Trickster, anyway?"

Loki promptly waved Harry's point and question away. "Not important." The look in the green eyes was deadly serious. "You, on the other hand, are violating quite the number of rules just by being here, kid."

Harry shrugged. He glanced briefly at the skyscraper again before turning back to Loki. "If I tell you, will you answer one of my questions?"

Loki shrugged. "Seems like a fair deal."

Harry smiled. "Brill! Now, I don't know about Norse gods or whatever you are, but I'm hungry."

Loki's grin was as huge as it was bright. "Know just the place," he promised, before snapping his fingers.

The place they materialised in was out in the open, letting in a warm breeze that smelled of salt, sand
and wet grass. It was inside a restaurant that was in the middle of serving breakfast. Harry decided not to think too deeply on the obvious manipulation in time, considering that it had been early afternoon just seconds ago.

"They serve killer waffles."

Harry's eyes lit up. "Chocolate?"

"Any kind you'd want, kid," Loki promised, his eyes also seeming to have taken on a slightly glazed look at the mention of chocolate.

Making sure he was visible to more than just the Trickster, Harry allowed himself to be led to a table. Loki had a hand on the small of his back, more or less escorting him to the table for two outside on the porch. It was shaded by a large umbrella, but Harry felt more connected to the wildlife around him. There was a forest just down the road from the restaurant and, beyond that, Harry could just barely make out the brilliant blue of the ocean. Loki pulled out a chair for Harry, made an exaggerated bow as Harry took a seat, then skipped around to his side of the table and sat down as well.

"So."

"Yeah?" Harry mumbled, distracted, as he looked through the menu. The waffles, served with three types of chocolate as well as a small bowl of syrup and a larger one of whipped cream was beckoning Harry, a lot.

"Why'd you violate the rules?" Loki asked once the waiter had been by to take their orders.

"Didn't know I wasn't supposed to go to the US, for one," Harry said. "But the real reason?" He shrugged a little, then looked to the right. Off in the distance, Harry could make out a scattering of houses. One of them was being visited by a dementor on its flying, skeletal steed. "My thestrals needed a breeding ground. They seemed to like the US the best."

It had been something that Harry had realised over time. It hadn't been until he had settled down in his little house, with the huge area of land attached to it, that the thestrals had started coming to him the way they did. Before they had joined Harry whenever he stumbled across a stray pack or so, but now they seemed to instinctually know where to find him. They treated Harry's lands as their own, and they mated and raised their young there.

Loki looked up, a sharp gleam of knowledge in his eyes. "Your thestrals?" he asked, the question more heavy than it appeared at first.

With a sharp pang of realisation, Harry suddenly knew that Loki knew. "You know," he whispered. "You mastered the Hallows. Aw, man! You're just a kid!" Loki protested in a rushed, low voice.

"You died," Loki stated. "You had to've died, like, a lot, and. Shit, kid, the odds were, like, infinitesimally small!"

Harry shrugged and looked away, something dark and sad in his eyes. "I think I died when I was one. I know I died when I was seventeen. I spent a year hunting down an evil wizard's splintered soul. He'd wanted me dead since before I was born, and…" Harry shook his head. "That was disgusting. He…split his soul so many times just so that he wouldn't die, and in the end I wind up the blasted Master of Death."
The waiter came by again, this time with their food as well as two glasses and a big decanter of orange juice.

Harry poured himself a large glass, then set about smearing the syrup in an even layer across his waffles. Each square he cut out with his knife, he carefully speared with his fork, then dipped it once in one of the small bowls containing melted chocolate, and once in the whipped cream, before putting the small piece in his mouth. He almost moaned. Loki sent him a smug, knowing look.

It was delicious.

"So…you got the thestrals," Loki continued their conversation.

Harry nodded. He methodically chewed the piece of food in his mouth, then swallowed, before saying anything. "Yeah. Then I, um, accidentally did something to the dementors. An improvement, if you ask me. They're all bright and light-ish, now. They seem happier. They ride around on the thestrals and guide the, the souls, I think, or echoes of the dead, I'm not sure."

Loki raised an eyebrow. "Guide them where, Harry?" His tone said that he knew exactly where, but that he still wanted Harry to say it.

Harry cleared his throat. "Well. When I transformed the dementors, the Unspeakables – you know what that is?" Loki nodded, so Harry continued. "They were about to execute the dementors. Something in me…hurt. It physically hurt when I heard that. I think I understand why now, but at the time I didn't. The dementors always brought out my worst memories and…I was terrified of them."

"How were they gonna off the soul snatchers?" Loki wondered, sounding genuinely confused. "And, anyway, wizards don't have that kind of power. The dementors were, like, feeding ondeath."

"I'm not sure. I think they were going to push them through the Veil, which I took, but I'm not really sure. And, since I transformed the dementors they're more like reapers, anyway. They bring peace and hope to families. Whatever they were before… It wasn't natural. Something twisted them into becoming killers."

Leaning back, Loki closed his eyes briefly, before focusing his attention back on Harry – and his waffles. "No, Harry, they needed you to bring them to life. Without someone to guide them, they didn't know what their purpose was beyond sucking souls. They snatched up any soul they could get at, but without the Veil they couldn't dispose them the way they were meant to, so they gobbled them up instead. In the process, they got all twisted and hideous.

"When they were created to aid the Master of Death, well. Let's just say no one ever counted on the greed of wizards. Or on the Master of Death thingie itself. In fact, no one counted on him to ever actually get created. Think that's why they all agreed on letting go of the objects that would get you where you are today. 'Cause no one thought it'd ever happen." Loki grinned. "Ah, sweet fucking, unpredictable, stubborn humanity."

Harry just shrugged and concentrated on eating for a while.

"And, what, that's it?" Loki questioned when Harry was about halfway with his waffles. He was a slow eater, taking pleasure in every bite. Even now, food seemed like a luxury to him, and he knew, if he stuffed himself too quickly, he'd get a stomach-ache and feel sick.

"Sort of. I've sort of been making it up as I go along, but I think I've got a handle on the whole 'Master of Death' deal now. I know when to bow to my instincts. I know that I don't always know
best. For example, I don't know what the dementors are up to, exactly, but I know I have to let
whatever is about to happen, happen.”

Loki frowned. "What's going on with them?"

Harry coughed. "They're, um, going at it like bunnies. Piles of bunnies. The thestrals are catching
on, as well. And them I have to care for. The dementors take care of themselves, more or less."

It was going to be busy, but Harry didn't doubt for a second that he would enjoy it. Loki threw his
head back and laughed.

Harry shook his head and continued to eat. After a while, he became aware of Loki studying him
intently.

"What?"

Loki waved him away, then snapped his fingers. Bowls of fruit appeared on the table, along with
more whipped cream and bars of chocolate. Under Harry's watchful gaze, Loki reached out for a
strawberry, dipped it in the cream, and popped it in his mouth.

Harry swallowed, then went back to finishing his waffles.

"You sure take your time," Loki commented as Harry finished the last of his waffles, busy
demolishing a slice of pineapple dipped in melted chocolate, one nibble at the time.

"You try and see how quick your stomach takes to food after having been starved most of your
childhood," Harry snapped. Quick as lighting, he reached for the strawberries. God or not, Harry
was still the best Seeker Gryffindor had seen in a long time. Loki didn't stand a chance. With a grin
of delight, Harry set about eating the strawberries. They tasted heavenly with whipped cream,
delicious with chocolate. "Mmmm, this is…amazing."

"Hello? Trickster?" Loki grinned and waved his hands at himself. "Amazing powers at my behest?"

Harry matched the grin with one of his own. "Awesome wizard present?" he countered, while lazily
waving his hand to conjure two tall glasses filled with delightfully chilled piña coladas.

"Not bad." Loki raised an eyebrow, looking suitably impressed. "Thought you guys needed to wave
your magic sticks."

"Most do," Harry admitted. "But me? Not so much." It wasn't only since he mastered the Hallows,
either. Harry had been able to make things happen without a wand for a long time. It wasn't
something he had exactly advertised, because in the Wizarding world, 'different' equalled 'dangerous'
which in turn translated into 'dark and evil'. "That's not to say I don't have a 'magic stick', of course,"
he said, making ridiculous quotation signs in the air with his fingers.

With a pleased hum of anticipation, Harry reached for the closest glass of piña colada. He cradled it
in his hands as he reached for the straw with his mouth. It was cold, sweeter than usual thanks to the
excessive use of pineapple juice, while the rum itself was just barely detectable: just the way he liked
it.

"Hey, kid, we both got ourselves a magic stick," Loki drawled, winking.

Harry just shook his head. Not for the first time, he wondered if there was something wrong with
him. He was twenty-three going on twenty-four. To this day, he could honestly say he had never
truly experienced sexual arousal or attraction. He'd been nineteen when he tossed away the
misconceptions that gender made a difference in terms of sex, thinking it would help. But still, there was nothing. Oh, he wanked, no mistake about that, but it was mostly just as a sleeping aid. There was late bloomer, and then there was late bloomer.

Right now, for instance. Loki wasn't bad looking. He was funny and charming and mischievous. He had character. Every once in a while, Harry had the feeling Loki was throwing out not-so-casual suggestions, or out-right flirted with him. But…nothing. There was a depressing amount of nothing on Harry's side.

"No? No takers?" Loki quipped when Harry didn't answer. He waggled his eyebrows. "Boringly straight?"

Harry looked away. Eventually, he shrugged. "I, um. Have no fucking idea."

Loki blinked. Then he leaned forward, squinted a little, blinked again, only to blow out a loud breath. "Well, shit, kid. No wonder. You're like, in the longest damn maturity phase I've ever seen. In a human, of course. Gods and other beings work a bit…differently, you might say. You're barely out of diapers, kid."

"Of course," Harry drawled, rolling his eyes. "Look, I don't mind the no sex bit, okay? It's nothing I crave or long for. Then again, it's not something that repulses me either. It's just…not an option."

Loki laughed. "All I'm saying is, give it a couple of years. You're young, yet."

A chill gripped Harry's heart. "I'm not…going to die of old age, am I? I feel how my magic's changed, changed me, how the Hallows affect me. They talk to me, sometimes, try to get me ready and, and educated. I know they won't stop until I learn it all. But the pace…it's so slow. Too slow," Harry said in a soft voice.

Loki reached over the table and grabbed both of Harry's hands in his. "Look, kid, I can't say I've ever been where you are, but it's not all bad. You'll mature at a rate that will feel natural to you one day. Right now, I get that it's got to feel weird, but I'm not wrong when I say that I'm sure it still feels right to you, am I?" Harry managed a minuscule nod. Appeased, Loki went on. "My kind, we work a bit differently, but it's not unusual for centuries, by human reckoning, to go by, sometimes way more than that, before we start looking around for your equivalent of sex. But you, while somewhat…altered, you're still basically human. If there's one thing I know and love about you humans, it's how you adapt to whatever you're thrown."

"But…all I wanted, was kids and a family. I wanted to love and be loved, but now…"

"You got yourself a family. Granted, they're all either thestrals or dementors, but they're yours, kid. I promise. And I know one thing." Loki squeezed Harry's hands a bit tighter. "Ever since you became the Master of Death, the world's a more balanced place. I didn't get why 'til now, of course, but you're makin' difference already. The world needs its human Reaper, kid, and right now, that's you. The Master of Death, all full of love and compassion and all those other little things that make you humans so precious? Yeah, that's just about perfect."

Harry averted his eyes, his gaze fixed firmly on their locked hands. It felt…safe. Warm, protected, caring. He kind of like it. And, while neither uplifting nor particularly warming, Loki's words helped him put perspective on what was going on with him, and the changes he was going through. It gave him hope for the future. Hope that, maybe, everything would turn out okay one day, despite the way it felt sometimes.

"It's difficult, sometimes, being alone and not knowing what to expect," Harry eventually said.
"Yeah, I get that. How're you feeling right now?"

Harry shrugged. A slightly impish smile crept up on his face. "Honest? Kinda curious how I'd feel curled up on your lap. Just holding your hands makes me feel all...safe and protected."

Loki sniggered. "Oh, you big, baby, you!" he cooed. Harry laughed. "Come to papa!" Loki threw his arms open wide. Behind him, Harry could only just make out the man's wings, twitching, as if they, too, wanted to spread wide, but couldn't.

Instead of sitting down on Loki's lap, Harry went around the table, tapped once on the back of Loki's chair to make the backrest disappear and sat down once the seat was wide enough for the two of them. He sat close, practically pressed up against Loki's side. Harry was still clutching his drink, so he focused on sipping small mouthfuls as he felt first one of Loki's arms come up around him, then one of the big wings encircling him as well.

"Can I ask that question now, by the way?"

Loki shrugged. Harry felt the wing behind him shift a little, until the feathers lay correctly. The motion reminded him of Hedwig. She had shifted like that sometimes, to accommodate for feathers not aligned properly, before straightening them out with her beak. "Sure. Is it naughty?"

Harry pretended to think about that. "Hmm, well, maybe, but not in the way I'm sure you're hoping."

"Oh? Well, now you've got me. Come on, kid, do your best!"

"Okay. So, I was wondering. If you're this Trickster – which I still don't know what that is, by the way – and you say you're Loki, Norse god of...mischief, I think. Right?" Harry felt more than saw Loki nod. Could almost imagine the bemused expression on the man's face, as well. "So. If you're a Norse god, supposedly, from Scandinavian Vikings, then why do you have wings? And don't say that you haven't got any, because I can feel one of them curled around me." As if to prove his point, Harry reached out and trailed his fingers down through the feathers on the inside of the wing. Or was it outside? Touching them, he could suddenly see them as more than shadows. They were steely grey, sharp and pure, except for the tips that looked as if they had been dipped in paint the brightest white.

They felt at once everything like Hedwig's feathers had, and yet nothing at all like hers. The shape was there, still similar even though the feathers were so much larger, but the texture, the feathers themselves were nothing like any feather Harry had ever touched before; they didn't even feel like normal feathers at all. They were smooth, silky and soft. They were hard, inflexible, yet bendy and supple. They felt like electricity running along his fingers, like water and wind and fire, like storms and rains and winds. Like power, pure and unadulterated. Harry sighed and pressed his cheek against the feathers.

It felt like home.

"Kid," he heard Loki finally say, as if an eternity later and a lifetime away. "You're not supposed to see my wings. Hells, you shouldn't even be able to touch 'em without burning your hands off, or your eyes out! They're, like, way more invisible than you could ever hope to fathom."

"I always see stuff I'm not supposed to," Harry mumbled. "It's a knack I have."

Loki snorted.

"So...you're not Loki?"
"Oh, I'm Loki, all right. I'm the Trickster and a bunch of other things as well. But, I'm not gonna say who I was first, okay?"

Harry considered that for a moment. "Okay. Just. Could you visit sometime, maybe? You know where I live, right? I bake a mean chocolate cake, I mastered the art of fudge when I was a kid, and I'm venturing into sweets. Also, if you want, we could fly together. I love to fly."

"Kid, you don't got any wings."

Harry laughed. "I've got plenty of thestrals and I kept my broom. I can fly. It's the greatest feeling in the world. I never feel more free than when I'm high in the air, reaching for the clouds."
Years

Chapter Summary

In which stuff happens and Harry falls off a thestral.

When Sam and Dean Winchester accidentally opened the gate to hell, Harry was busy breeding new thestrals. That year, the number of the new dementor species tripled, and the reapers, as Harry had come to call them, needed their rides. They could fly on their own, of course, but thestrals travelled faster and further with an ease that was enviable.

Loki visited him several times over the years and slowly became one of the few constants in Harry's life. At first he'd just show up, unannounced and demand food or sweets, stay for a few hours, and then leave again. But the longer their acquaintance lasted and grew, the longer Loki stayed. Harry wasn't able to pinpoint the exact moment his little house gained the extension Loki claimed as his whenever he stayed for one of his longer visits, but it was there, where there hadn't been a room before.

They flew together often, both trusting in their own abilities to hide from the Muggles nearby. Not that there were a lot of them, given that Harry practically lived in the middle of a forest. It was through Loki that Harry finally learned a little about the supernatural going on around him. Not a lot, mind, and Harry hardly asked. He felt safer in his ignorance, knowing that no matter what happened, he would always have a job to do.

Slowly but surely, Loki took Harry under his wing. What had started as a few offhand remarks had developed into full out lessons. Loki taught Harry a whole new way of accessing and using his magic. They went over runes and sigils, wards and safeguards. Loki made sure Harry knew his Latin, as well as ancient Greek and Norse – the last one was a bit predictable, Harry thought – and made sure Harry knew as many runes as possible in more combinations than should be possible.

All in all, Loki was the kind of teacher he'd always sort of wished he'd had when he was still in school.

On occasion, when Harry had tea with Madame Johansen and Bobby, Harry would mention his friend 'Luke', mostly to reassure the old lady that he wasn't completely alone.

The hyped up mating trend with the thestrals and the dementors continued for several years, before finally slowing down. It allowed Harry to breathe a little easier, because tending the thestrals was by no means an easy job. But then… Well. Something changed.

Something changed.

It wasn't only the disturbance he felt in the balance by someone who had passed into his domain – death – being forcefully yanked out. That, in itself, wasn't as uncommon as one might think. Those desperate enough found ways to cheat death, and while it upset him, there was little he could do once the deceased were brought back to life. Death was his domain, after all, not life.

Harry had felt it once a year or so, but had never been as disturbed by it as he was now. The one who had been brought back to life… The fact that the being was living again didn't sit easy with
Harry wasn't sure what had changed, but the air felt different. Electrically charged in a way it never had before. Harry read the news at the library in Sioux Falls that he visited once a week, like clockwork, and grew increasingly more concerned.

The increased number of deaths – not just in the country, but worldwide – the epidemics, the escalating violence, the weather going haywire… They were all matters of concern to Harry. He was beginning to understand why his newly dubbed reapers had gone on such an insane breeding schedule. Somehow, they had known this was coming, and had prepared themselves the only way they knew how.

It all came to a showdown late one night when Harry was taking a lazy ride with one of the thestrals over his house and the thestral froze in mid-air.

A sudden shift in the air, and Harry threw his head back and screamed.

He didn't remember falling. He didn't remember thestrals trying to slow his descent, directing his fall, or landing hard on the ground. Everything was black, and it hurt so much.
The sky was red. Actually, it wasn't the sky that was red as much as the inside of his eyelids. Harry struggled to sit up, to open his eyes.

A hand on his chest pushed him down.

"Easy, kid," a familiar voice drawled.

"Bobby?" Harry murmured. "What…"

"Found you passed out on the road outside. Damn lucky I didn't run you over."

"Don't…remember. What—?"

Bobby placed a cool cloth over Harry's head. Harry instantly reached up and tugged it down over his eyes instead.

"What's the last thing you remember?"

Harry frowned. "It…I was outside, then everything went black."

"Black, how?" Bobby demanded.

Harry shrugged. "I dunno, just. Black."

"Didn't feel…like you weren't in control or nothing?"

"Not really, no, more like I passed out or had a seizure or something. Or a migraine," Harry groaned and closed his eyes again. It was more orange now, than red, and slowly shaping letters.

"You get them a lot?"

"Not any more. Used to, when I was a teenager, but they stopped," Harry said, not really feeling up to discussing his supernatural life with Bobby. The man already thought he had a few screws loose; no need to make it worse.

"Splitting migraines, eh?" Bobby muttered.

Giving a careful nod, Harry said, "I'm just glad I outgrew them."

The orange behind his eyelids was slowly melting into a softer, paler shade, so Harry chanced opening his eyes. Other than a faint yellow tinge to his vision, the light didn't hurt his eyes. "I was on the road?"

"Yeah."
Harry frowned. "I don't remember leaving my garden. My head splitting open, yes, but not…" When he turned to Bobby, he found the man giving him a careful onceover. "Bobby?"

"Never put much stock into ol' Jonson's ramblings, y'know?" Bobby began, tone pointed.

"Um, I guess?" Harry answered, quizzical.

Bobby rolled his eyes. "She swears you put some damned ghost 'to rest' in her attic. Now, I ain't no stranger to ghosts, but I do know that you gotta salt and burn the bones to gank 'em properly, not do some hippie dance with a daisy garland of spices."

Harry blinked, his green eyes more than a little confused. "…gank?" Harry tried the word hesitantly.

"Kill, kid."

"Oh. Well. I just warded her house against spiritual influences," Harry lied.

"Yeah? Really? Do I have the word 'gullible' printed on my forehead?"

"Not really."

"Good!" Bobby spat. "Now, I ain't gonna tip 'round this 'till I'm blue in the face, kid. Did a demon possess you?"

Harry blinked. "Demons are real?" The words were out his mouth before he could stop them. "Oh, I mean, why am I surprised?"

"How do you not know 'bout demons if you know about ghosts?" Bobby cried, incredulous.

Harry looked away. "I, um, just know about ghosts and how to protect against them?"

"Bullshit." Bobby's harsh tone made Harry flinch. "You know 'bout it all, or you don't know nothing. So, kid, again, what d'you know about demons?"

What transpired after that almost happened too fast for Harry to make sense of it.

When Bobby reached to adjust his hat, the coloured text that was slowly turning back to its familiar blue flashed in front of his eyes. It made him spot the half hidden bruise on Bobby's temple, a dull purple discolouration. Bobby's hair mostly covered it, but in the years since the text had appeared, Harry had learned to decipher it, somewhat.

This meant alert, warning, take note.

Harry did, but he wondered why the text wanted him to see a bruise and remember about it.

"I don't know a lot about demons, honestly. I know they exist, to stay away, and to never make a deal with one, but that's about it," Harry lied, because the text had warned him, so Harry kept his words deliberately vague. Loki'd be proud, no doubt.

Bobby, though, looked seriously browned off with him. "You know how to banish a demon or not, kid?"

Harry blinked. The text flashed, urgent and desperate, one word over and over: NO.

So Harry dutifully shook his head. "No, I, um, don't, I guess."
"Ain't that neat," Bobby drawled and aimed his gun.

Bobby's eyes were solid black, no whites, no colour, nothing.

Harry reacted before Bobby – or, rather, the demon possessing Bobby – could pull the trigger of his gun. His arm flew out, index and middle finger held out and together, and jabbed Bobby once, sharply, on the forehead right where he had spotted the bruise.

"ETHARZI. AFFA OI ZIZOP."

It was the first time Harry had ever tried – ever felt he even could – speak the words aloud. They came to him with surprising ease, but, he realised, left him just as quickly again once their purpose had been served.

Bobby stiffened.

The demon screamed. Black smoke spewed from Bobby's mouth.

It wasn't corporal any longer; it was a spirit, albeit a demonic one, but spiritual shades Harry was more than equipped to deal with. He pulled his wand, somehow knowing he had to use it in order to dispel a demon, and concentrated.

This type of magic didn't require a spell or any words, mostly because Harry typically went on intuition. It was like working through slug. The demon resisted with all its might, before finally vanishing with a high-pitched shriek of pain and fury in a brilliant, white flash.

"Bugger."
Panting, Harry rushed over to Bobby's collapsed form. The man was still breathing, which made
Harry feel more than a little relieved. "Bobby? Bobby!" Harry called, patting him lightly on one
cheek.

It took some time, but eventually Bobby jerked awake. He sputtered at once. "Kid? Watcha doing, I
— oh, crap."

Harry cleared his throat. "Quite. Um. Do you remember?"

"Remember being possessed by a frigging demon? Sure as hell do, kid," Bobby groused. "Feel like a
blighted idiot, too." Then he blinked. "Hey, how'd you get it out of me anyway?"

Harry floundered. "I…I used the spirit vanquishing spell."

"You used the what?"

"Um. The spell-thing I do to get rid of spirits," Harry repeated. It was a lie, of course, and a bold one
at that. Harry only needed to touch spirits to send them into the next plane. Not that Bobby needed to
know that, of course. Also, the words he'd spoken he had never been able to pronounce before, so,
well, it meant that Harry couldn't even translate them, should Bobby ask, or even tell the man what
language it was.

"That's, that's— Bullshit!"

Next thing Harry knew, Bobby had thrown a glass full of water in Harry's face. Sputtering and
coughing, because, of course, Harry had just happened to take a deep breath when Bobby tossed the
water at him, Harry blinked and tried to get his breathing back under control.

"What—"

"So you ain't a demon."

"No!" Harry cried, using a nearby towel to dry his hair. "I'm your bloody neighbour! And what kind
of demon is allergic to water, anyway?"

"It's holy hater, you idiot. So you weren't possessed earlier, that's what you were saying, right?"

"You could still hear me, even though you were possessed?" Harry asked.

Bobby looked away, appearing more than a little uncomfortable. "Yeah, I was listening, all right.
Screaming myself hoarse, of course, trying to get out or get you to see. Not that I thought you'd do a
speck of good, but I was trying."

Harry gave a shaky laugh. "Well, let's just say when your eyes flashed black, then I definitely knew
something was up. But I was more or less honest with…the demon, I mean. I know a lot about spirits and ghosts and poltergeists, but that's about it.

"I'm from England, and, well. It's different there. Nothing looks the same, or feels the same. When I travelled the world, I didn't encounter the same type of, of paranormal in two regions. America is a mismatch, I guess, because of how the country came to be. Everyone travelled here, from everywhere."

"Suppose that makes sense." Bobby scoffed, then, a little amused. "Suppose that's way there ain't been a speck of spiritual activity 'round here since you moved in. Still. Don't say a lot 'bout what you are, though, kid."

Harry blinked. "I'm human."

"You sure 'bout that?" Bobby asked, eyes narrowed.

Harry hesitated, then said, "Yes." Loki would probably have had a thing or two to say about that. About how, yes, he was human, but how he was also something else.

"Then you don't mind letting me satisfy my curiosity, right?" The way Bobby posed the question left Harry with little doubt that the request wasn't so much a request as it was a demand.

-x-

The night became one long surreal dream for Harry. Bobby had a lot tests, and he wasn't afraid to do them in as outdrawn ways as possible. But by the time dawn came around, Harry had satisfied Bobby's need for testing.

"Well, if you ain't human then I don't know what you are," Bobby finally concluded.

"Great," Harry sniped, feeling grouchy and tired and grimy, but most of all, he was starving. "Now, I'm gonna cook, because if I don't eat soon I am liable to kill something. And you are going to tell me why you felt the need to turn me into a lab rat, understood?" Harry drawled, a touch of impatience in his tone.

"Crystal clear," Bobby snapped back.

So Harry marched into Bobby's kitchen. There wasn't a lot, but the bare essentials were there. Enough for Harry to whip together some pancakes which he then drenched liberally in syrup. No matter how hungry he was, Harry still ate with the delicate, meticulous movements and manners his Aunt had more or less bullied into him.

"You sure you don't want some pancakes with that sugar, kid?" Bobby muttered sarcastically.

Harry sent him a surly glare, complete with pursed lips and narrowed eyes. Bobby wisely shut up.
Friends

Chapter Summary

In which Harry finds out who Gabriel is, meets the Winchesters, eats a lot, hangs out with Castiel, and is still somewhat vaguely confused at the end of the day.

"Darling~! I'm home!" Loki called out in a loud singsong voice.

It was early evening and Harry was preparing dinner. "I'm out back, Loki!" Seconds later, Loki materialised behind Harry where he was preparing the steaks for barbecuing. He had marinated them for hours, and had been busy rubbing a mix of herbs and spices onto them just as Loki had announced his arrival.

"Sweet…"

Harry grinned. "I'm considering glazing them with honey."

"Mmmm, I like," Loki said. "And for dessert?"

"I was thinking strawberries, cream and sugar."

"I definitely approve," Loki drawled.

"I figured you would," Harry returned dryly. "So, what brings you here?" he wondered as he carefully placed the steaks on the grill. They sizzled and began to let off that mouth-watering scent Harry had always associated with barbecuing almost immediately. He was roasting potatoes, too, but as that took a while longer to be ready, he had placed them in their pan a lot earlier.

"Damn, you know how I feel about those sons of bitches you call relatives, but your cooking makes it hard," Loki muttered.

Harry rolled his eyes. Sometimes he wondered if Loki hadn't gone a bit Trickster on the Dursleys, but he had never asked.

"Anyway, I found a couple of books I thought you might like, so I decided it was time to take some downtime again. Now, back to way more important matters. The strawberries. Did you buy 'em or grow 'em?"

'Downtime' for Loki usually meant 'fucking busy with lessons' for Harry. So, while Loki considered himself being on holiday from his Trickster business, Harry found himself buried up to his neck in work.

"I grew them," Harry relented. "Fix a bowl and you can pick them yourself."

"Yes!" Loki exclaimed, all sparkling eyes and bursting enthusiasm.

Harry had a few quiet minutes to himself while Loki went off and busied himself with picking strawberries. The past winter Harry had tried to grow vegetables and berries in his greenhouse. It had somewhat worked. The warmth was there, but he'd had trouble replicating the sunlight in a
satisfactory way. It had made most of the food taste a bit bland.

"I heard you took a tumble the other day."

Harry didn't startle at Loki's abrupt and silent reappearance. "Oh, heard that, did you?"

"I have my ways," Loki said cryptically. "You okay?"

"I'm…better. Whatever happened…it disturbed the balance a lot. Too much. To quote someone I know you love: 'I felt a great disturbance in the Force, as if millions of voices suddenly cried out in terror and were suddenly silenced', and like dear, old Obi-Wan, I also fear something terrible has happened. It overwhelmed me and I blacked out. Bobby found me, only he was possessed by a demon. But we sorted it out."

"Hmm, met Bobby Singer once or twice. Charming guy, ain't he?" Loki drawled sarcastically.

"He's all right." Harry drizzled some honey over the steaks, then flipped them over. "Taught me how to drive, and fixed me my car."

"I don't like cars. Too slow and confining."

"I suppose. But I don't think people would like it if I suddenly popped my way around Sioux Falls. Hull the strawberries?"

Harry detected a snap of fingers, then Loki's triumphant, "Done!"

Grinning, Harry shook his head. He poked at the steaks, but decided to wait a little longer before removing them. Then Loki was there, his arms around Harry's shoulders, chin resting on one of his forearms. "When you passed out…"

"Yeah?"

"Lucifer popped out of his box and left hell behind. I think that's why your reapers and thestrals went at it like sheep. He's gonna bring the Apocalypse, and there ain't a damn thing any of us can do to stop it. People're gonna die, big time."

Harry frowned. He levitated the steaks from the grill onto separate plates. "You mean Lucifer as in the fallen angel? Angels are real? The devil? God? All of it?"

"Hells, yeah, kid. He's gonna raise his Horsemen, end the world, and start it over. Of course, Michael's gonna try and stop it, kill most of the planet to do it, and then start the world over. Either way, people're gonna die by the thousands," said Loki, and he sounded so bitter, so sad, so heartbroken that it almost felt like a physical blow to Harry.

It wasn't as hard for Harry to accept as it might have been for Hermione or the Weasleys, for example. The Weasleys would've had trouble accepting that anything could have created magic, period. To them, magic was the source of creation and life and, well, everything. Hermione, on the other hand, was far too analytical. She was scepticism and logic personified. The idea that something other than science was the reason for life—

Huh. So, yeah, maybe God and the angels an all the others created life on earth, but, had God even created the universe – the planets, earth, the stars, the suns and everything in it – or was God created by the universe?

Philosophical small talk, Loki's voice brushed over his mind, like soft rolls of thunder and fire.
C'mon, time to eat, sugar.

Blinking, Harry levitated the plates to the table. He fetched the potatoes, the aioli sauce he had prepared earlier, and sat down. Loki sat down next to him. The chair had, at some point, turned into a bench.

"Which angel are you, then?" Harry asked quietly as he carefully cut into his steak.

"I'm in witness protection, baby. Can't tell, or it'll spoil."

Harry clasped Loki's hand in his. "Loki, I'd guard your secret with my life. You know that, don't you? You are the only angel here. The only thing supernatural around is the family of kappa living down in the tarn, excepting the obvious, of course."

"Of course," Loki mocked.

"Loki," Harry admonished. "Stop."

Loki rolled his eyes, but he stopped trying to make the situation even worse by finding every little weak spot and tearing at them.

"Now, eat, your blood sugar must be low if you're sniping at me. I won't groom your feathers unless you behave."

-x-

So Harry learned everything there was to know about Heaven and Hell during the next few days. When Loki had stayed for a solid week – a couple of days longer than usual for someone as restless as Loki – Harry began to realise that Loki wasn't going to leave anytime soon. But he didn't say anything, because he liked having the angel around.

Loki made him feel safe, protected and looked after. Almost, Harry reflected, the way Bill Weasley or Remus Lupin had once made him feel.

"Am I, like, your protégé or something?" Harry asked one afternoon. It was a question he had been mulling over for years, now, but never really found himself daring to ask, for some reason or other. Loki had brought out two practice swords earlier that day and had since spent several hours going over the basics of sword fighting with Harry.

It seemed Loki was determined to make a decent swordsman out of Harry.

But it wasn't just that. The lessons Harry'd had with Loki since the angel had decided that Harry was worthy of them had piled up far above his counting skill long ago.

The corners of Loki's eyes crinkled in a smile. "More like… my fledgling. S'been a while since I last had one."

Harry blinked. "Fledgling. As in… a baby bird?"

"Or young angel. Whichever you prefer, luv. Now, we need to put in some serious effort with your footwork."

-x-

Harry learned the art of the sword. He had a feeling it came to him way faster than it should, and that
Loki had something to do with it, but Harry didn't complain.

-x-

It was a Thursday.

Harry and Loki were once again locked in mock-battle when the sound of car doors slamming shut startled them from their practice. Harry didn't get how he could've missed the sound the car made as it drove up the gravelled road, or the loud purr of the engine. But he had missed it, somehow, and Loki had as well.

The car was parked ten metres from where Loki had pressed Harry into a corner – the thick trunk of a tree and Harry's car – which made it even more of a miracle that both Harry and Loki had missed the approaching vehicle until just now.

"You're getting there, kid," Loki promised, his shoulders tense and something grim about the set of his jaw.

Harry managed a smile. "Thanks," he panted. "You know them, then?"

"You could say that." Loki glanced at Harry's sweaty and dishevelled appearance, then snapped his fingers. Harry sighed, luxuriating in the sudden, clean feeling. Loki's magic felt way better than any magic he had ever encountered before. Then again, given that Loki was an angel, his 'magic' wasn't exactly magic, now, was it?

The guests in question turned out to be Bobby plus two.

"Gabriel?" The shorter of the two called out, an angry expression on his face. "What the fuck're you doin' here?"

"Dude, calm down!" The taller one immediately interrupted, prompting a small spat to break out between the two men.

Harry blinked: Gabriel, huh? He felt, somehow, that he wasn't as surprised as he should be. "Can I still call you Loki?"

A spark of mischief entered the angel's eyes. "Call me master. Please?" Loki turned puppy-eyes on Harry.

Harry caved.

Loki – Gabriel, whatever – skipped ahead, now beaming a smile at the three unexpected, to say the least, guests.

"Greetings, fair Winchesters, to my humble abode." Loki made an extravagant bow.

"This is Harry's shack, Gabriel," Bobby snapped.

For the first time it registered with Harry that Bobby was sitting in a wheelchair. "Bobby!" he exclaimed. "What happened? Last I met you, you—"

"I was dosing you in holy water by the gallons," Bobby barked. "Yeah, kid, got it. Let's just say, some angel was a bit pissed."

Harry looked momentarily blank. "He means angry, darling, not drunk," Loki helpfully piped up.
"Oh! But...why?"

"What? Gabriel didn't tell ya?" The angrier of the two strangers demanded at once.

"No... Master, what's going on?" Harry turned to Loki, looking suitably bemused. The archangel at once was up and personal with Harry, an arm slung around his shoulders.

The reactions his three guests had were nothing short of hilarious. Bobby gaped like fish. The shorter, dark haired bloke went red, while the taller, longer haired bloke turned white and wide-eyed.

"I'm thinking you should let Castiel in so he'll stop banging on the wards, kiddo," Loki said, leaning in closer than necessary to Harry so he could whisper in his ear.

"Um. Okay," Harry mumbled. At once he could feel what Loki was talking about. Something, most likely the angel Castiel, was trying to get inside, but Harry's wards kept repelling him. Focusing, Harry sent out a thought in the mysterious angel's direction.

_Are you Castiel?_

_YES. WHO SPEAKS?_

Harry winced. "Ow. That's loud."

"Sorry, angel mojo," Loki murmured. He pressed his fingers to Harry's temples, silently giving Harry the means to protect his mind better against the assault that was Castiel's telepathic voice.

_I'm Harry. I've lowered the wards for you._

_THANK YOU, HARRY_, Castiel said, then the voice went silent.

A heartbeat later, Castiel near silently appeared behind the three immobile guests, and quickly walked up until he was standing in front of them.

"Cas?" the taller bloke asked, a bit startled, "Where'd you go?"

"I was...detained." Castiel's serious gaze was fixed firmly on Harry. "You should not have been able to do that," he stated, something almost curious in his tone. It made his wings flicker in a gesture Harry recognised as inquisitiveness.

Harry smiled, gesturing towards Loki. "Let's just say, Master makes sure I am well protected."

"Why the fuck is he calling you master, you douchebag!"

Loki grinned, all devilish Trickster. "Cause I'm the Trickster? Almighty and awesome?"

Harry rolled his eyes. "All right, enough with the ego stroking. He asked me to, all right? I see why now. Anyway, I'm Harry, nice to meet you, I'm sure, but who are you?"

The man aspiring to be a giant started talking almost immediately, a look of consternation on his face. He had one of those honest, plain faces that people tended to trust on sight. "Sorry, I'm Sam Winchester," he began, sort of babbling but not really, "And this is my brother, Dean, we're friends of Bobby's. And this is Castiel, he's—"

"I am an Angel of the Lord." Behind Castiel, both brothers looked alarmed and dismayed, but rather unsurprised. Rather, they didn't look surprised until they noticed that Harry didn't react in the way he assumed most did upon being told they were meeting an angel of the Lord.
Harry smiled. "Yes, I can see that." Without thinking, he reached out to touch the shadowy appendixes on Castiel's back.

Loki snatched his hand away before he could make contact. "Nope, uh-huh, sorry kid. You don't touch an angel's wings without permission. It's like shoving your hand up a dude's ass. Personal and private."

Harry blanched, startled. "Oh. I'm sorry, I didn't know—"

Castiel looked suddenly almost afraid, and had taken a step back to make sure he was well out of reach from Harry's hands. Harry could see his wings, taut and tense, held at a protective angle, as if he expected an attack.

"Never told ya, did I? Wasn't like I was expecting a horde of angels out here," Loki said, his voice suddenly hard and his eyes steely as he looked at the Winchesters, Bobby and Castiel in turn.

"Wait, you know about angels and stuff?" Sam interrupted, sounding both curious and suspicious at the same time.

"And you can see their frigging wings?" Dean added, more snappish than his brother.

Loki suddenly looked pleased and proud. "Yup. I got myself a smart and capable little fledgling this time around, don't I?"

Castiel's eyes widened and something in the cold blue colour seemed to...brighten. "Fledgling?" he breathed, darting quick glances between Harry and Loki. His wings twitched.

A portion of the hardened edge in Loki's eyes softened. "So maybe I was a bit hasty when I said Daddy was gone, little bro. Seems like he left one teeny, weeny surprise behind for us."

"All right, time up! What the hell's going on here?" Dean demanded, looking between the angels and Harry as if he expected the answer to parade itself along at a moment's notice.

Harry just shrugged. "I'm not sure I follow. And I certainly don't appreciate the allusions on my height, you flipping overgrown giants." Yeah, he was coming off all sniping, but he really didn't give a damn. "Anyway, as it is a bit past lunch I'm sure Loki's blood sugar is dropping like a stone. Is anyone up for lunch? I was planning stir-fry. Maybe dessert."

"Oh, my saviour!" Loki exclaimed at once, overly dramatic. He threw an arm around Harry's shoulder, then steered them both inside. "Bro!" he called over his shoulder. "You're with us! I'm sure the Winchesters want to scoop the place out a little."

"Just make sure you stay away from my greenhouse, or else I'm liable to kill someone!" Harry called out, trying to glare over his shoulder, but Castiel was in the way.

"What did you mean, fledgling?" Castiel asked at once.

Loki rolled his eyes. "I meant just that, Castiel. I've taken him under my wing, quite literally."

"Is he—"

"—right here? Why, yes, I am," Harry muttered. "Look, most of the time I don't follow Loki's way of reasoning, and I don't try to. What I do know is that ever since I told him I mastered the Hallows, Loki has taken an interest in me."
Loki narrowed his eyes. In a flash, he turned on Castiel. "You! Don't breathe a word about the Hallows, Harry here, or what that makes him, capice?" Eyes still narrowed, he turned on Harry. "And you! Don't go around blurring to all and sundry, savvy?"

Harry and Castiel both nodded hurriedly, their eyes a little wide.

Loki grinned, looking very smug and pleased with himself. "Dude," he said to Harry, continuing the conversation as if he hadn't interrupted it himself just seconds ago, "you told me that the first time we met."

After grasping what Loki was getting at, Harry gave Loki an enigmatic smile. "You might say I was…instructed to."

Loki's eyes narrowed. "Instructed, how?"

Harry swallowed. "I didn't want you to think I was going mad. I still don't, but sometimes…I see this, this text. A writing, I think, almost like a voice, urging me to do certain things. I know I said it was the Hallows, but it's more than that. It's almost a consciousness of its own. I think the previous Master, who was the creator, by the way, infused part of himself into the objects for me to…suss out."

"Aw, shit, kid," Loki moaned softly. "You're seeing—"

"—memories and prophesies written by the angels," Castiel said. "I used to see them, when I was newly created. I used to call it the fabric of life."

Harry blinked. "Well, that would explain why I can't make sense of it most of the time. I almost never understand a single word unless it's repeated over and over, with intention and patience. When Bobby was possessed…something in me knew what to say, what to do, to push the demon out. But that's the only time it ever happened. I can't even remember what I said."

Loki snorted and rolled his eyes. "Anything else you forgot to mention?"

"I'm not sure, Gabriel," Harry stressed.

"Don't get smart with me, kid."

Expression softening, Harry raised his hand towards Loki's face, then pressed two fingers against his forehead. "I did that," he explained. Harry turned his back on the angels and walked off to the kitchen, mostly so he wouldn't have to see the fallout of his little revelation – revelations? "I don't know a lot about the bible, but I do know the story about the snake and Eve."

"So?" Loki wondered.

"I can speak to snakes."

-x-

Lunch was a success. Once Dean stopped glaring suspiciously at Harry, he ate with gusto. Sam was a bit easier to convince, and Bobby had eaten his food plenty of times before.

Castiel didn't eat. But he stared, his eyes fixed firmly on Harry the entire time. It was disconcerting, to say the least, but it wasn't like no one had ever watched him eat before, so Harry didn't let it bother him overly much. Still, he found himself leaning into Loki's side a lot more than usual, seeking the protection and comfort being near the angel – bugger, archangel – always brought him. It got him
some odd glances from Dean and Bobby, but Harry didn't let it bother him.

"Dessert?" Loki asked after Harry had cut his carrot stick into pieces so small, he wouldn't be able to pick them up with the prongs of his fork.

Harry shrugged. "Sure. I was testing out this new pineapple pie recipe you brought along last time. The one with the crème fraîche you said you'd found in Scandinavia? It's in the fridge."

Loki grumbled a little, but he did get up to fetch the pie.

"Second time he visited, I figured out how to ward my fridge against Trickster finger snaps," Harry explained.

"Let me guess," Bobby drawled, just a touch sarcastic, "same spell you use to dispel ghosts."

Harry winked.

"He carved sigils – sigils! – into the fridge," Loki cried out, face the perfect picture of indignation, as he walked back to the table. The pie in question was reverently set down in the centre of the table. "Here I was, taking time out of my incredibly busy schedule to make sure the kid's safe and sound, and how does he repay me? By stabbing me in the back! Can you believe it?"

"All too well," Sam said, smiling.

Loki huffed. "Aw, Sammy, your low opinion of me is heart-breaking."

Sam rolled his eyes at Harry, who flashed the bloke a grin.

Loki sat back down next to Harry. "Already conspiring against me, are you? Some fledgling you are. I'm telling ya—"

"All right: enough. What the fuck is a fledgling?" Dean demanded.

Harry derailed him by serving him a large slice of the pie. "Here, try this. I'm sure you'll like it."

Dean's narrowed eyes let Harry know that while the trick might have worked, Dean had in no way forgotten the question in the first place.

"A fledgling is a baby bird. This is actually the second time I'm a fledgling," Harry started.

"That's impossible," Castiel stated. "As recipient, the bond works only once."

Harry's grin was a little impish. "It's like this: when I was eleven I was given an owl. She was beautiful and majestic, dominant and perceptive. To her, I was obviously in need of mothering. So to her dying day she treated me like an unruly owlet, in need of guidance. She would occasionally indulge me and let me believe I was in charge."

"You had an owl trying to be your mother?" Loki asked, shoulders shaking in laughter. "Man, that's priceless. She must've thought your hair was a bird's nest, obviously. I mean, look at it!" Loki ruffled Harry's hair. "It defies the laws of gravitation."

Harry glowered and tried to smooth his wayward hair down. It didn't work, of course, it never did, but at least it looked a little less wild.

"Hey, Castiel, who took you in, by the way?"
Castiel's smile was as brief as it was bittersweet. "Harachel. She was a diligent teacher."

Loki's eyebrows shot up. "Wow. That's quite a catch, little bro. You must've impressed her for sure. Can't recall her ever taking on all that many fledglings."

"Harachel is missing and has been since the day I was allowed to walk my own path," Castiel said. "I now suspect, of course, that Uriel was behind her disappearance."

Harry let the conversations around the table flow around and over him. It wasn't that he wasn't interested, more that he couldn't place any of it in a context he understood. So, once he had eaten his pie, he began to clear the table. There wasn't much in the way of leftovers, but what little there was Harry placed in a container in the fridge. Harry didn't own a dishwasher – being just one person, he didn't create piles of dirty dishes – but he was a wizard, sort of. Still, he mostly preferred to do it by hand anyway. Loki knew it as well, of course, otherwise Harry had no doubt the he would've snapped his fingers to clean it all up.

"Sure you don't want me doing it?" Loki asked, now standing behind Harry, arms around his shoulders, head resting on his own arms where they were wrapped around Harry.

"If I wanted that, I could've done it myself." He was almost done with the dishes anyway.

"True," Loki murmured. Harry could feel his wings coming up as well, as if offering shelter and protection to Harry from their guests. Harry suspected it was only Castiel who would see the gesture for what it was, but that didn't mean Harry didn't appreciate it. In a lower voice, Loki whispered, "They want me to kill my brother."

Harry's eyes went a little glassy. "You can't kill him, Gabriel," Harry said, in a voice not quite his own. "It's not on your shoulders. You can recapture him, if you wish, but not kill him. If you do, I will...guide your soul on." The knowledge came to Harry as he spoke, but that didn't make it less true. If Loki were to attempt killing Lucifer, he would die.

Loki's grip tightened. "Who can? Can you see that?"

Harry slumped backwards, eyes wide open and unseeing. "There is... It's... *Fuck!*" he exclaimed, rubbing his now burning eyes, tears streaming down his cheeks. The text had been bright, angry and full of something that physically hurt Harry to look at. "Okay, next lesson: teach me how to bloody read, mate, okay? Buggering piece of wank! *My eyes!*"

Loki laughed softly. "Okay, sweetheart, let's have a look at you." Harry was deftly turned around, then he felt the pressure of a hand across his tightly closed eyes, before blessed coolness chased the fire away. "Now, looking into the souls of archangels is *not* a good idea, kid."

"You asked!" Harry exclaimed. "How was I to know, anyway? The text never hurt before, you know."

-x-

"So you and Gabriel, huh."

Harry glanced up from where he was intently pulling at a loose thread in his jeans, a little startled. Sam had taken a seat next to him on the swing seat outside on Harry's porch, and was regarding him with a mixture between a frown and a smile. "Um. Sorry?"

Sam cocked his head to the side. "You and Gabriel. I got the feeling that there was a bit more than just typical friendship between the two of you."
Harry grinned. "Oh, yes. He's… I can't explain it, except that it's some strange mix between what I think a big brother would be like, and what I always dreamed a dad would be like." By the way Sam's face went red, Harry sort of guessed that hadn't been the kind of relationship that he had been referring to. "Or… what did you mean?" Harry asked, confused.

Sam cleared his throat. "Nothing! I just, you know, thought you were together together." Harry blinked. "But… we are together."

"No, no." Sam shook his head. "I mean, as in lovers."

"Oh!" Harry gasped, his eyes a little wide. "Oh! No, um, I don't do that kind of thing."

"What kind of thing?"

"Cas!" Sam exclaimed, holding a hand over his heart. "Don't sneak, man!"

Castiel's frown told more of his confusion than his next words did. That, and his wings looked all uneasy. "I'm sorry. What were you talking about?"

There was plenty of space between Harry and Sam on the seat, so Harry patted the cushion between them. "Here, Castiel, sit down. I've found humans as a rule don't like being frightened. It does strange things to our hearts. Alters our blood chemistry for a short while."

Castiel looked suspicious and nonplussed, but he did sit down between Sam and Harry, back straight, hands resting stiffly on his thighs. He looked as if he didn't know what to do with a human body, Harry thought. It wasn't a fair comparison, he knew, but it reminded Harry of how long it had taken the reapers to get used to their old/new bodies of light.

Or, Harry realised, maybe his wings didn't allow him to sit in any other position. And, maybe, he was still half-afraid that Harry was just going to reach out and grab at them.

"Now, Sam was just wondering if Loki and I were lovers, which we most definitely aren't."

"Of course you're not. It wouldn't be right."

Sam furrowed his brow. He looked distinctly uncomfortable, Harry thought, as he asked his next question. "Because they're both guys?"

Castiel shook his head. "Because it is wrong to take advantage of someone you are responsible for. Gabriel has assumed the role of a mentor, by your standards, in regard to Harry. To take advantage of that position is unthinkable."

Harry merely smiled. "Something like that, yes. I know Gabriel likes sex, though, so if you want to—"

"That's not what I meant!" Sam exclaimed.

Castiel, though, cocked his head in a gesture that wouldn't have looked out of place on Hedwig. "Was it not? I have observed you—"

"So not talking about this!" Sam snapped, then he stood up and stalked back inside.

On Castiel's lips, a decidedly smug smirk hovered for less than a second before vanishing. It was gone by the time he turned to face Harry.
"You haven't had that body long, have you? You don't look...comfortable in it. Not like Loki does."

"It's strange. Unfamiliar," Castiel murmured. "I have grown accustomed to my vessel, however. I find I become more human each passing day."

"Yeah? You still have wings, though."

Castiel looked rather pleased about that. "Yes. Can you truly see them?"

Harry grinned and nodded. "Yeah. Like, right now, they're more shadows. Loki's were like that until I touched them, then I could see them properly. Well, properly by earthly, human standards. I'm guessing they look a bit different in Heaven."

"They do."

For a while, they just sat there, next to each other, not saying a word. Then Harry arched his back. "So, um, want to see my thestrals?"

"I wondered if they were yours. The dementors as well?"

Harry nodded. "My very own, perfectly loyal, perfectly capable reapers. Sort of. I think they act as reapers, anyway. Loki hasn't argued the point, in any case." Standing, he offered Castiel his hand.

Castiel stared.

It was one of Loki's quirks: that constant need for physical contact and affection. At first, he had attributed it to Loki alone. But now, knowing that he was an angel, seeing with his own eyes just how uncomfortable and ill at ease an angel was in its human body, at least initially – had Castiel called it a vessel? – Harry had to wonder if it wasn't just that, as an angel – even an archangel – Loki was more in need of showing his emotions with his body as well as affirming that he was liked and respected in turn than a human typically was comfortable with. Not everyone was as starved for physical affection as Harry, after all.

When Castiel grasped his hand and clasped it tight, practically twining their fingers together, Harry wondered if he wasn't more right than he had first suspected.

"Your grace feels...unusual."

"My what? I don't have grace, I—"

Castiel tilted his head to stare into Harry's eyes. "Yes, of course. You were a wizard."

"Am, mate. I am a wizard. A little changed, maybe, but that doesn't take away who I am."

"You are the Master of Death, Harry. What you were before bears little importance."

Harry glared. "You're not supposed to say that! Loki has eyes and ears everywhere, you know," he muttered. "He always knows."

Castiel hunched his shoulders. "It's been too long since I last interacted with an archangel who wasn't out to kill me."

Gripping Castiel's hand a bit tighter, Harry tugged the angel with him. "Come on; let's get a bit further away from him before he feels the need to check up on me. Again. Maybe he'll forget you stepped out of line."
"It is a good suggestion," Castiel agreed, and suddenly, Harry wasn't tugging so much as he was being tugged. Castiel had a really long stride.

-x-

In the house, Gabriel felt, like a shiver down his spine, the moment Castiel called Harry by his title. Snorting, he shook his head. "Ah, young kits, so much trouble, so much mischief," he sighed, dramatically, earning himself strange looks.

"You know, most of the time, I just don't get a thing coming out of your cakehole," Dean said.

"No one does, ever," Sam corrected.

Gabriel smiled. "Well, little bro's being a bit naughty, and Harry thinks by getting further away, they'll be safe from me ever finding out about it. Which, just for reference sake, won't happen. Papa always knows."

"What? You mean God?"

Gabriel rolled his eyes. "No, muttonhead, me."

Sam nodded, looking a bit less perplexed than Dean. "Yeah, Harry said something about you being more a weird mix between a brother, and a dad. Which I really don't get. I mean, he's got to be, like, what, twenty-five, at least?"

"Hmmm, a bit older, I think," Gabriel muttered. "Not important. Anyway, you two yahoos stay away from the kid, all right? He wants to help you with your insane quest, fine, but bully him into it and I'll kill you both, got it? Now, what're y'all doing here anyway?"

Hopefully, neither of the Winchesters would ever know that Harry was probably the most powerful ally they could get at without resorting to either angels or demons. He certainly wasn't going to tell them. If anyone had the right to be selfish, Gabriel felt, then it was him. He had sort of made selfishness into his own trademark since going pagan, anyway.

The wildcard here wasn't the Winchesters, though, he knew. Bobby was the one who'd seen first-hand what the kid could do. That really didn't sit well with Gabriel. Nope, not the slightest. There wasn't much he could do about that, though, not at this stage. Way too late for that, now.

Sam nodded at where Bobby was picking down books from Harry's bookshelves. "Bobby thought Harry might have some books that we could use. I didn't really get his reasoning, to be honest. Think it was mostly to check up on him since the possession thing and all." Next to Sam, Dean made a sudden choked noise.

Gabriel raised an eyebrow. "Harry wasn't possessed, you know. I'd be able to tell if he'd been. That kinda thing tends to leave a scar. Wanna tell me why you're really here?"

Dean suddenly couldn't hold in whatever it was he had been fighting to hide for the last couple of minutes or so, and burst out laughing. "Let's just say: never piss off old, wrinkled ladies, all right? They have one hell of a throw."

"Old Mrs Johansson smashed one of Bobby's windows, it rained in, and here we are," Sam filled in, smirking.

They all pretended not to hear Bobby's annoyed mutters from his corner of the room.
"If we'd known you were here, I—"

"We'd have stayed way further away than this!" Dean interrupted. "Trust me."

"Oh, I do," Gabriel said. "Listen, I don't care what you two think about me, but I'm not getting involved in this one. I've got... Well, let's just say I got my own orders." Gabriel flicked his eyes upwards. "Daddy dearest needs a favour, you might say."

"Now? We're in the middle of the frigging Apocalypse for fuck's sake! Why don't he get involved in that instead of, of—"

"—instead of what, Dean-o?" Gabriel asked, a tired note in his voice. "Beats me! Since he created you lot, all he ever does is disappear. No one gets a thing he wants anymore."

"So help us! Please," Sam implored.

Gabriel cursed and looked away. "Damn it, kid! No one ever tell you to pack away those big puppy eyes of yours? It's not natural, I swear!" He cast a sudden, sly look Sam's way, then waggled his eyebrows. "You could make a man do anything with one of those looks."

"Gabriel. Please."

"Look, Sam, I—" Gabriel halted midsentence. Cocking his head to the side, as if he was listening for something only he could hear, he recalled one or two conversations he'd had with Harry. Harry was remarkably astute, at times, mostly when Gabriel was least expecting it. But fact was, the kid was the Master of Death. That position came with certain perks. Like, for instance, knowing when Horsemen died.

Rather, one, to be specific. The soul of a Horseman was alike nothing else.

"You could pop Luci back in the box," Gabriel said.

"That's possible?" Dean asked, for once quicker than Sam.

"Yeah, sure. You need four keys. Rings, to be exact, but it's possible to get the cage open again."

"Rings? What kind of rings?"

Gabriel smirked. "Why, the rings of the Horsemen, of course!"

By the time Gabriel's stomach – well, not his stomach, really, more his ever starving grace – began protesting that it had been too long since it was last given sustenance, quite a lot of time had gone by. But Sam and Dean knew the basics of what they needed to know about the Horsemen, which he counted as a good thing. A glance out the window showed that the sun was about to set.

The lack of food brought with it the realisation that Harry was still off with his baby bro.

"So, that's it. We're taking a break till tomorrow, kiddies. Gotta get Harry back so he can fix up some grub."

The mention of Harry made Sam stand straight "Shit. I left him with Cas—"

"—What?"

Gabriel laughed. "Relax. What could possibly have gone wrong?" he drawled, rolling his eyes. "A dysfunctional human and an angel barely out of his diapers – not like it's a recipe for disaster, is it?"
Dean blinked. "Barley out of his diapers?" he asked, incredulous. "What d'you mean? Cas is, like, ancient!"

Gabriel smirked. "Just that, by your standards, Castiel is what you'd call... 'green'. Very young. First time in a vessel, first time physically on earth. Time's different up there." Gabriel made a vague wave upwards. "Now, my little bro may be one of the smartest angels I've seen in a long time, but, still. Young."

-x-

"Okay, Castiel, hold on and don't let go. Okay?" Harry asked, making sure the angel had a tight grip around his waist.

"I can fly on my own," Castiel stated, but he didn't let go, and he didn't protest.

Harry grinned and threw his head back, facing the sun. "I know. But trust me, this is way more relaxing. Loki says it lets him get a different perspective. Plus, you can jump off mid-flight and glide."

"His name is Gabriel, you realise."

"Yeah, I know. But I think I'll keep calling him Loki for a while longer." Sending out his thoughts, Harry urged the thestral under him to fly. The thestral nickered softly, then lunged forwards and upwards into the air. Behind him, he heard Castiel make a surprised sound. For a moment the arms around his waist tightened, but then the grip relaxed. In fact, Castiel seemed to relax entirely, losing all the stiffness that had been present within him 'till then.

The wind buffeted around them, the sun beat down on them and the thestral flew even higher. Far below, Harry could make out his house, standing alone in the middle of a forest, and he grinned.

"This is..."

"I know," Harry murmured. "I love it. It's like... being free. Best feeling in the world."

The smile was almost audible in Castiel's voice. "I couldn't agree more."

Then came the sound of wings snapping out – large wings, wings with a wingspan far greater than the thestral's between Harry's thighs. Castiel's hands were warm on Harry's shoulders, his breath hot by Harry's ear.

"I'm going to fly now," Castiel declared, and then he was gone from the thestral. Harry cast a look over his shoulder to see Castiel flapping his wings to gain speed and altitude. With a snap of his fingers, Harry had his broom in his hands, and then he threw himself off from the thestral as well, straddling the broom in one fluid move as he went flying.

"Harry!" Castiel's shout was full of alarm. In a flash, he was by Harry, ready to catch him before he fell to the ground.

But Harry was already gone.

"I'm a wizard, Castiel!" Harry called back, laughing, as he flew in circles around the more or less stationary angel, taking care to leave a lot of space around the large, dark shadows of beating wings. "I can fly, too. Maybe not as well as angels, but I can."

Castiel looked a little sheepish, but still mostly angry. "Gabriel would never have forgiven me had I
somehow failed to catch you, Harry. Don't do that again."

Harry felt his grin dim. "I...I'm sorry. I didn't think...I forgot that you didn't know. Loki...Gabriel always seems to know all the little things about being a wizard; I guess I just sort of assumed you would, too."

"I've spent far more time among unmagical humans, Harry. I'm not accustomed to being around wizards."

Harry nodded, a little thoughtful. "Do you play?" he asked, the change of subject rather abrupt.

Castiel narrowed his eyes. "Excuse me?"

Snapping his fingers, Harry quickly closed his fist around the Golden Snitch that materialised in his hand at the silent command. He held it out for Castiel to inspect. "We, my kind, we call that a Snitch. It's quick, unpredictable, sly and doesn't like to be caught. The point is to catch it first. It's part of a game we call Quidditch. So." Harry raised an eyebrow in challenge and smirked. "Wanna play, angel boy?"

Castiel raised his chin at the challenge, his eyes burning. "Is that a challenge?"

Harry's grin was fully-fledged and exhilarated. "We count to ten," he declared, then opened his fist. The Snitch shot off like lightning.

Seconds later, Castiel and Harry were both hot on its tail.

Harry won the first round due to one simple reason: he had played Quidditch before. Castiel was a fast learner, and from then on, the 'war' was on. After that first round, Castiel fingered the Snitch, while contemplating himself.

"What's wrong?"

"These clothes are not aerodynamic."

Harry laughed and hovered closer on his broom. Since he was wearing a loose T-shirt and a comfortable pair of jeans, he didn't have the same problem. Then again, he had played Quidditch in heavy robes in the middle of a Scottish winter. Granted, those robes had been created with the intention of playing Quidditch in them. Castiel's trench coat wasn't buttoned; his tie kept flapping all over the place, and, well. He did see what the angel was getting at.

"Well, how about this," Harry suggested. He reached over and undid the tie, then magiced it down on the ground. "Then let's just do the same with these," Harry said, indicating the trench coat and the jacket. As one, the clothes disappeared to appear on his lawn. Castiel was left in his shirt and trousers. "Better?"

Castiel considered himself. "Yes. Much."

-x-

A couple of miles beyond Harry's house, deep in the forest, was a huge lake. It was the body of water that Harry suspected fed the little tarn Harry usually visited when he felt like a soak to get away from the summer heat. But now, with their game of catching the Snitch more or less over, this larger lake suited his and Castiel's plans much better.
Feet bare, trousers rolled to his knees up in Harry's case, Harry and Castiel had flown low across the lake, letting their feet dip into the water. Sometimes, Castiel's wings broke the surface as well and would send rivulets of water up on his clothes. Well, they had flown over the lake, initially, anyway. Sometimes chasing the Snitch, other times playing a faster, more dangerous variation of tag. The game of tag had in turn had ended up with Castiel trying to teach Harry how to fight and manoeuvre in the air, sometimes with fake swords, sometimes with bare hands.

Right now, they were sitting on one of the large stone-like outcroppings in the middle of the lake, allowing the sun to dry them instead of using magic or grace.

Castiel was sitting with his wings spread wide, feathers stretched out and up to allow the sun to get at every little half hidden spot among the downy, tiny feathers closest to his skin, or beneath the glossier, outer feathers. They were still shadowy to Harry, and he had come to the realisation that it wasn't his place to ask so much as it was Castiel who had to offer.

"D'you know why Loki eats so much?" Harry asked, out of the blue. He was lying on his back, studying the sky.

"No."

"I always joke about his blood sugar. But he's an angel, right?"

"An archangel," Castiel agreed.

"And he cut himself off from Heaven."

Castiel inclined his head.

"So why hasn't he fallen? Even archangels can fall; Lucifer did."

"Perhaps his faith in our Father remains strong, still."

Harry twisted his head to look at Castiel. Castiel was leaning his head back, allowing the sun to catch his face. "D'you still believe in him?"

A slight smile turned Castiel's lips upwards. "Yes. My faith in my brothers and sisters, however, is… weak."

Reaching over, Harry placed his hand on top of Castiel's. "But you're falling."

"Because the angels have willed it to be so."

Harry made a noncommittal sound in the back of his throat. "Do you believe in Gabriel?"

"I… My desire to do so is strong."

"But?"

Castiel turned his head down, meeting Harry's gaze directly. "I don't understand why he ran away. I don't understand why he refuses to help."

Harry sighed. "I think it's because he loves. He loves everything your Father created. Sometimes, he loves it too much. Michael, Lucifer, Raphael," Harry trailed off, realising he didn't know the names of any other archangels – didn't even know if there were more. "The archangels were first. They grew up together, and Gabriel loved them all. I don't think he could choose one over the other, even if he was forced to. He loves them all too much, too equally."
"A broken heart makes you…bitter. Cold. Closed off. Broken faith makes it all worse. Being without a family..." Harry shrugged. "He left to remain whole, I think. To not be broken by the fighting between his brothers, to not have his faith torn away and ripped to shreds or used against him. But he never stopped loving. Gabriel the Archangel. He was the messenger, right?" He wasn't sure where the words originated from, but as he spoke them they felt true.

Maybe it was the Hallows again: text that Castiel had said angels had written.

"Yes. He was the hand of justice and judgement. Before Joshua, he spoke the words of God. He listened, learned, advocated. He was loved because he was fair, kind and just. Perhaps Michael and Lucifer took advantage of his nature. It's not an angle I had previously considered."

"They still love him, don't they?" Harry wondered. "I mean, you're the only one who knows he's even still alive. You openly turned against Heaven. Gabriel works in the shadows. I think he has a mission, but I don't know what it is. And, I mean, he's an archangel, yes, but still. God has to know where he is, doesn't he?"

"Hiding from God is impossible. He sees all. Knows all," Castiel stated. He shifted until he was lying stretched out on his front, wings still splayed out above him. He rested his head on one folded arm, the other he reached out with to hold Harry's hand with again. "Until I met him again, I loved him. Now I'm...confused. But I still carry great respect for him," Castiel explained in that gravelly voice of his. It was actually rather nice to listen to, Harry thought. "Emotions are...complicated," Castiel muttered in an almost frustrated manner, were it not for the way his brow was furrowed in confusion.

Harry chuckled softly. "Yeah, I know. Growing up, I always felt like such a twat. As a kid, it was all right, but when my mates hit puberty...well, it passed way over my head. Loki keeps saying the odds of me being, well, who I am, were infinitesimal. Still, I know now I was born to be this. But when all my mates were off dating and, you know, shagging, I was...confused. I didn't understand. I still had problems understanding what friendship was in the first place, and then all my mates were off starting...starting relationships? I was standing on the outside, looking in. Not literally. But I didn't get what sex and everything was all about. Still don't, really. Emotions confused me even more, because I couldn't relate. I didn't understand because I didn't understand because I didn't yethavethe capacity to understand. Then Loki, he," Harry began.

"If he has taken advantage," Castiel interrupted, his eyes dark and oh, so very serious.

"No! No, nothing like that. But he—" Harry paused. "Can you...see my aura? My soul?"

Castiel narrowed his eyes. "If I focus, yes. Why?"

Harry smiled. "Because Loki took a closer look and came to the realisation that I was, well, maturing slowly. Because of the, well. Because of who I am. He said 'his kind and others' do the same. So, who knows, Castiel, maybe, when we're both older, a lot of what don't make sense now, will."

Castiel closed his eyes. Smiling, Harry did the same and lay back, letting the warmth of the sun soothe him. He would probably freckle, his skin turn a bit red and then flake. He didn't take to tanning all that well, but that was all right. Usually, he got some freckles out of it, and he liked his freckles.

Freckles reminded him of the Weasleys, of happier times and carefree days.

It was Castiel who broke the silence what felt like a lifetime later.

"Dean took me to a den of iniquity."
"Hmm? What's that?"

Harry could hear how Castiel shifted. "It was a house of whores," he finally said, sounding very troubled and uncomfortable.

"Oh. That's…"

"Yes."

Harry laughed. "Was she hot?"

"Her temperature was not above average, no."

Laughing again, Harry shifted over to rest on his side. "No, I mean, was she looking good? Sexy?"

"Oh," Castiel considered for a moment or two. "Yes. She was extremely well proportioned," he finally concluded. "But it was not what I desired. It was very uncomfortable. Fortunately, she didn't appreciate my comments on her father and aborted our association. Sexual copulation without emotional attachment…I don't understand how that can be satisfactory."

"Huh," Harry breathed out. "Well, I dunno. I mean, sex is supposed to be pleasurable. So, assuming it feels good…" he trailed off. "Before I realised I wouldn't ever be like my peers in the Wizarding world, all I wanted was someone to love, y'know? Casual wasn't ever my thing. Anyway," Harry sighed, with a glance at the sky as he sat up, "We should probably go home. The sun's getting low in sky."

"Hmm," Castiel said, not moving. "You are correct."

"Wings still wet?"

"Yes. It's uncomfortable to dry them with my grace. The feathers align incorrectly."

Harry smiled. "Yeah, so Loki says. My owl, Hedwig, would rather look like a drenched cat than allow me to spell her dry. I did, once, by mistake. I had to grovel for a week for her to forgive me. After that, I either let her be, charmed something to give off heat, groomed her myself, or…" Harry trailed off, mischievous glint in his eyes. Harry focused his magic, then forced it to manifest itself.

A hairdryer appeared in his hand.

"No," Castiel said.

"Yes," Harry argued and switched it on, using a low setting. It blew out hot air, using very little force. "Here," he said, then aimed it at Castiel's hand. "See? It's like warm wind."

"I will not allow you to touch my wings, Harry," Castiel stated seriously, staring into his eyes with an intensity that sent shivers down Harry's spine.

Harry managed a smile. "I don't need to touch them to dry them, Castiel. They may just be shadows to me right now, but I can still see them just fine."

Castiel glanced at the hairdryer, then looked into Harry's eyes. "No," he said again, this time with an air of finality to his tone.

With a small sigh, Harry shrugged, then banished the hairdryer. "Okay. So, wanna fly back?"

This time, it was Castiel who issued the challenge. "Can you not walk on water?"
It turned out that, yes, Harry could walk on water.

On the fifth try.

The first two tries had ended up with Harry simply falling through the surface of the water. The third time, Harry remained stationary for all of two seconds, before slowly sinking through the water. The fourth try, Harry had grabbed hold of Castiel and refused to let go, which was a phenomenally bad idea, because angels, as it turned out, couldn't swim. On the fifth try, however, Harry figured out how to put enough pressure on the water from underneath to keep him from sinking down entirely. As it was, the water came up to his ankles, but as he didn't sink down any further than that, Harry counted it as success.

"Look!" Harry exclaimed. "I'm not sinking!"

Castiel glowered at him. His clothes were dry, thanks to Harry, as was his hair. His wings, though. Well, that was another matter entirely.

Harry's spirits sank. "Castiel, I'm so sorry. I just, I panicked and I just grabbed hold at whatever I could reach. I'm not that good a swimmer, and… I'm sorry."

Castiel flapped his wings, once. The resulting water being thrown from them almost drenched Harry all over again.

"You are forgiven," Castiel said, a smug lilt to his voice, as he flexed and beat his wings a few more times.

"Thank you," Harry drawled, more than a little sarcasm in his tone.

Castiel didn't say anything, merely reached out and took hold of Harry's hand again.

Yeah, Harry thought to himself, angels were either very touchy-feely and affectionate with each other, or Harry had somehow started something else with Castiel entirely. Maybe, Harry thought, he had made Castiel believe that reaching out and holding hands with strangers was a perfectly reasonable idea?

"I don't, no," Castiel said.

Harry glared. "Don't read my thoughts!" he muttered, then focused on what flimsy Occlumency skills he had.

"Stop," Castiel interrupted. "If we are as 'affectionate' a species as you believe us to be, how would you react if someone in your presence were to close off his mind completely?"

Harry blinked. "Oh," he mumbled. "I just don't have… In the past, whenever someone read my thoughts they would…break in, y'know? Against my will? It…hurt. A lot. No matter how hard I tried to stop it, I couldn't, which just made it worse, and—"

His legs felt cold, suddenly. Harry looked down in panic. "I'm sinking!"

They were halfway across the lake.

Castiel rolled his eyes. "Don't tell Gabriel about this," he said, then he was flying. He grabbed Harry by the arms. Harry, once he realised what was going on, grabbed hold of Castiel's forearms tightly.

"Why?"
"It's...not done," Castiel said in a tone that sounded uncomfortable to Harry. "You don't have wings. There is no need for you to be taught how to fly in this fashion."

"Oh. And even if I had wings, I'm not your fledgling."

"Exactly. Will you stop trying to hide your mind?"

Shrugging, which was kind of hard in this position, seeing as he was dangling by his arms from Castiel, Harry agreed. "Besides, I was pants at it anyway."

"Pants—"

"Terrible. I was terrible."

"I see. If you are what I suspect you are, then your mind would have been more vulnerable to mental attacks than wizards on average. You should ask Gabriel to teach you how to merge minds. Once you master it, it's a much more accurate and complete form of communication."

Harry frowned, considering that. "I'll ask, yeah. But...when I let you inside my wards, I touched your mind, didn't I?"

"Yes. Under Gabriel's instructions?"

"Not at first. I pulled back, remember? Your voice was too loud. It kinda hurt. Then he helped me tune you down or something."

Having reached the beach of the lake, Castiel lowered Harry until his feet touched the shore. Harry came to a running stop, then waited until Castiel had landed as well. The angel kept his wings stretched out, probably in order to dry them completely.

"Seeing our wings means you will most likely be able to perceive us in our true forms. Even so, if you're unused to what that will be like then it will be overwhelming at first."

"It'll hurt a bit, yeah, I know that."

"Telepathy is the first step, you realise. There is much more to learn."

Still without shoes, Harry took care where he placed his feet. While Castiel was similarly shoeless, he was an angel and didn't have to take the same precautions.

"I know. I'm learning sword fighting right now. I kinda hope he's going to teach me how to read and write that language I keep seeing behind my eyelids. He taught me a bunch of other languages, so I'm rather keen on this one."

"It's spoken as well," Castiel said. "I'll help you practice."

Harry smiled up at the angel. "Thanks."

Stepping over a tiny creek, Harry took care to avoid the mud as much as he could. Castiel simply flew over it.

"Hey, Castiel?" Harry called out as he hurried to catch up.

"Yes?"

"You know when I mentioned Loki eating a lot and him not having lost his grace?"
Frowning, Castiel nodded.

Harry snapped his fingers, making a small bar of dark chocolate appear in his hand. It was Loki's, so Harry knew he probably shouldn't have 'lifted' it from the not-so-secret stash the archangel kept in Harry's greenhouse. Deftly opening the wrapper, Harry broke off a square and handed it to Castiel, who accepted it with a puzzled expression.

"I don't require sustenance."

Harry's smile was a little sad. "I know. I don't know if it'll work with you, Castiel. But, please, just try it? Even wizards figured out that chocolate was almost magic on its own when the Muggles first came up with it. It warms you from the inside out."

Castiel stared at the brown square in his hand. Slowly, he moved his fingers up to his mouth, gripping the chocolate tightly. Then, with a quick move, Castiel popped the piece inside his mouth. He didn't chew at first, not until Harry prompted him, but after that, the rest went on autopilot.

"This is…surprisingly good."

Harry grinned, delighted. "Y'know, I have this theory that Loki uses food to boost his grace somehow. I'm not totally sure how he'd do that, exactly, but, still. It's a working theory. Wanna be the test subject?"

-x-

"So, um, what's Harry got Cas doing that he needs to be out of his frigging clothes to do it?" Dean had started the sentence on a light note, but ended it on an annoyed one, holding a wrinkled jacket in one hand and a tan trench coat in the other.

Gabriel winked, mentally groaning; he knew exactly what Harry had talked Castiel into. "Why, Dean, didn't think I'd need to spell that one out to you," he said suggestively, waggling his eyebrows.

Dean rolled his eyes, looking more than a little exasperated. "This is Castiel we're talking about. Dude's not had an unholy thought his entire life."

Gabriel merely shrugged. "He is young."

Sam walked over from where he had been looking to see if Harry and Castiel had taken off in Harry's car. "Car's still here. And the bike. Why didn't you say Harry had a bike? Also, I found two pairs of shoes and folded socks, as well as this." Sam held up a very familiar tie in his hand.

"So they shucked some clothes! So what?" Gabriel exclaimed. "So they were walking around bare feet in a huge forest. The sun's about to set, Gabe. Anything could be out there! How is that all right?"

"For one," Gabriel said, his eyes deadly serious, "Castiel isn't a harmless bunny. He's an angel, he's got a sword—"

"You talking about this, you douchebag?" Dean wondered, pulling Castiel's shiny, round blade from one of the pockets in the trench coat. "'Cause, let me tell ya, he ain't got it on him right now."

Gabriel closed his eyes for a short moment. Dead, those two were dead. "He is a soldier of God.
Harry isn't totally harmless, either. Now, let's go."

"Hey! Wait!"

Gabriel rolled his eyes. "I'm an archangel. I know where they are. Wanna walk, or do I need to zap you mooks to get there?"

"Walk," the Winchesters decided at the same time.

"Yep," Dean said, nodding sagely.

"Definitely," Sam agreed. "So, um, where are they?"

"In there, smartasses." Gabriel pointed at the forest. "Let's go."

Even if Castiel and Harry hadn't been with each other, Gabriel still would have found them with ease. Castiel glowed with a frail light (he made a mental note to teach Castiel how to replenish his grace away from Heaven), then there was Harry, who he felt a pull towards no matter where the kid was these days. That pull wouldn't go away, no matter what.

Gabriel still felt a pull towards all his fledglings. They may have been out of his nest, so to speak, but they were still his. It had been millennia since he last had one, so long before he left Heaven to go pagan that he'd almost forgotten how much he'd loved it, once upon a time. Even then, the last centuries he'd been in Heaven, he had spent so much time flying all over, being the advocate of peace and love – and didn't that make him the greatest hippie ever, or what? – that he hadn't had a fledgling of his own to look up to him, all wide-eyed and bushy-tailed in so long. Had Castiel even been alive the last time Gabriel had a fledgling? He doubted it.

Gabriel remembered Castiel's clutch being brought to life, one of the last nests. He hadn't had a fledgling then, hadn't for years before that, either.

There had never been harder times since he decided to go play nice with the pagans than when he had felt the pull from one of his old fledglings: in danger, in joy, in death, in love. To ignore it had cost him more than he wanted to admit.

When Gabriel left, Castiel hadn't yet been taken on by Harachel. That much, he knew for certain; he would have remembered that. Harachel didn't enjoy teaching those who lacked creativity. There were so few angels who were creative, who possessed the skill to think outside the box, who were curious and passionate and asked questions.

Gabriel couldn't help but wonder what the angels had put Castiel through after Harachel went missing. But more to the point: had the angels managed to destroy the spark that Harachel must have found and nourished within Castiel?

"So how d'you know Harry, anyway?"

Gabriel distanced himself from his thoughts. He smirked at Sam, then shrugged. "I found him traipsing about where he had no business being. Sooo, I decided to check him out. And here we are, years later, and the little brat's still stuck with me."

"You didn't go all Trickster on him like you did us?"

Gabriel grinned. "Nope. No need. He'd have seen straight through me right from the get-go. Unlike some I could mention."
"Haha," Sam said, rolling his eyes, but there was a smile playing about his lips. "But, how? I mean, no one knew you were Gabriel."

"Neither did he," Gabriel pointed out. "He just didn't get why a supposed Norse god by the name of Loki, claiming to be the Trickster, would have huge wings. I'm telling ya, that was a shocker. No one'd seen my wings since, well. Since I skipped out of Heaven. And I went to a lot of trouble to disguise myself. Then this kid just sees right through it all in a flash. Come on, how could I not like him? Of course I took him in!"

They heard Castiel and Harry long before they saw them. The deep resonances of Castiel's voice coupled with Harry's lighter one, mixed with laughter echoed through the forest.

"Well, doesn't sound like they're in danger, at least," Sam pointed out to Dean, who nodded.

Gabriel merely sighed. "Well, no shit, Sherlock."

Sam's eyes twinkled. "Sher—"

"Don't ask. Just, don't," Gabriel muttered. "Just, wait here," he growled, then he was gone in a flash.

-x-

"Do you do this often?"

Harry was carefully plucking raspberries from a cluster of low growing, clingy bushes he had almost literally stumbled across. Castiel was holding the bowl, which contained a respectable growing pile of the freshly picked berries.

"Sometimes. My job keeps me kinda busy, as does Loki, but whenever I get away, yeah. I pick mushrooms in the autumn, mostly. I grow a lot of vegetables and berries and so on in my greenhouse as well. I like it. It's almost magic on its own, y'know?"

"My Father made it so," Castiel agreed. He reached out and plucked a raspberry right from under Harry's nose, then put it in his mouth.

Harry watched expectantly.

Castiel scrunched his nose up. "No."

"No? Hmmm. The chocolate was fine?"

Castiel nodded. "Yes." He held the bowl closer so Harry could deposit the handful of raspberries he had collected. "I heard Dean talk about dipping strawberries in chocolate, once. Would something similar work with raspberries, do you think?"

The question was asked with such seriousness that Harry couldn't help but laugh. "Oh, Castiel…"

Castiel merely blinked, cocking his head to the side.

"Yes, yeah, it'd definitely work. I, um. I think, though, that when you dip fruit into chocolate, it's supposed to be 'romantic',' Harry drawled the last word and rolled his eyes. "Or so the telly led me to believe."

"Telly?"

"TV," Harry clarified. "But I'm not all that convinced, because Loki treats chocolate as if it were the
national sauce of everything."

"I do not believe chocolate is the national sauce anywhere," Castiel corrected.

Harry laughed again, squinting a little as the sun hit him right in the face as he turned his head to look at the angel. "I think Loki'd kinda want it to be."

"It's very nice," Castiel agreed. After a moment, he moved one of his wings a little so it cast a shadow over Harry.

Harry smiled. "Thanks."

He continued to pick the berries in silence until Castiel broke it with another 'Dean said' tale. Not that Harry minded: the 'Dean said' tales were as varied as they were hilarious.

"Dean also mentioned once that chocolate was a most suitable aid for sexual explorations." The confusion in Castiel's voice was almost audible. "I don't understand what part chocolate plays, but Dean sounded as if it was something great. Perhaps he uses it as a motivator?"

Harry laughed again. His cheeks burned almost uncomfortably, but most of it had to do with being out in the sun all day without sunscreen. "Doubt it. From what I understand, you…lick it from…the other's body. Um. Mid-act."

The hum Castiel let out sounded like he was almost contemplating doing it. Or at least imagining it. But then he said, "That does not sound…hygienic. Humans are particular about hygiene. It's why I need to disinfect my hands when I return from my search for God."

"Sam told you that?" Harry wondered, laughter in his tone.

"Yes. He also taught me how to operate a toothbrush, the shower and how to fill up the Impala with gas."

Harry sat back on the ground, shoulders shaking as he laughed out loud. He could see it in his mind's eye: Castiel 'operating' a toothbrush, wielding it as if it were a dangerous explosive device.

Making a contemplating sound, Castiel added, "Dean taught me that 'Bert and Ernie' are gay."

"Who?" Harry wondered.

Castiel lifted a shoulder. "I don't know," he murmured. "Perhaps other hunters."

"Hunters by day, lovers by night?" Harry chuckled. "Yeah, that'd work."

Castiel almost smiled. Then he blinked and tilted his head as if he was listening to something. Harry crouched down a little lower, instantly on his guard.

"I'm," Castiel began.

"Hey, you two!" The shout caught both Harry and Castiel off guard.

"Loki?" Harry mouthed.

"Gabriel," Castiel agreed.

Seconds later Loki appeared at the edge of the clearing. Hands on his hips, he stared both of them down. "Look, kids. Some ground rules: One, you don't go fucking flying without your weapons, all
right? Two, you don't lose half the get-up. Three, you don't go flying! Four, you don't go anywhere without letting me know, got it? And five, don't go anywhere!” he snapped, eyes almost glowing. "The world ain't exactly all sunshine and daisies right now, in case you hadn't noticed. You two geniuses have a plan if demons attack? Hmm? Some angels stroll by?"

Harry stood up, ready to snap back, but Castiel placed a hand on his shoulder and held him back. "There's no excuse," he murmured.

"The fuck there isn't," Harry muttered, shaking off Castiel's hand. "Look, Loki. I'm never defenceless. You know that. Also? Castiel is an angel. How is that defenceless? I'm probably the most powerful you-know-what at the moment. That is a part of me I can never leave behind. Never.

"Right now? We're inside my property. I'd really like to see the demon that managed to get this far without being maimed, or angel for that matter!"

"'Right now?'" Loki spat in a scathing tone. "That lake of yours ain't inside your wards. That up there? Ain't warded. Kid, you're vulnerable—"

"I'm not!" Harry exploded, his temper getting the best of him. "I'm never alone, I'm never—" Harry's sentence ended in a muffled mess.

Loki was right in front of him, a hand over Harry's mouth, and he was furious. His eyes were blazing gold, wings out and poised as if he were about to attack and his grace was prickly and hot against Harry's skin. "You are my fledgling, kid. Mine. Until I say otherwise, you do as you're told. I know what you are. What you can do, what you're capable of. But you don't kill. You don't like hurting others. You save and you heal. So tell me, kid, what're you gonna do when other angels come after you? They ain't all like Castiel, you know. In fact, I'd say Castiel's the exception that make the rule, you catching my drift?

"You're the exception that says Daddy dearest's still alive and kicking. Now, I'm thinking a lot of the angels upstairs don't like that. So what d'you honestly think they're gonna do to you if they find you, hmmm? Sit down and have tea? Or shove a nice, shiny sword through your skull?" The sound of Loki's voice was overwhelming and resonated through everything, it felt like. It hurt.

Harry's eyes and ears were smarting like a bitch. "Loki," he said stiffly. "Don't tell me what to do."

Loki threaded his hands through Harry's hair. "Kid, you're my responsibility. Don't you get that? There ain't nothing I wouldn't do to keep you safe."

What felt like a hand of ice gripped Harry's heart. His eyes grew wide and hard and cold. "You know what good parents are for?" he hissed. Loki cocked his head to the side. "They die. Parents die, and then you grow up alone. Abandoned. Unwanted. You think your name's 'Freak' until you're old enough to start school. You answer to 'Boy' because you don't think you're important enough to have a name. So don't you bloody dare do anything—"

"Aw, kid," Loki sighed, and enfolded Harry in wings and feathers and light. "You're my Harry, and you matter. See, the difference between humans and angels is that angels pick their kids. We pick the ones that match us the best, and we cherish them. When I'm done with you, you'll be brilliant, a shining star in the skies and beyond. I'll teach you everything I know."

Harry allowed himself to melt into Loki's embrace. "S'just, I'm not really a kid any more," he mumbled. "I grew out of that years ago. I'm twenty-nine. I'm an adult. And…you look like you're my brother more than you look like my dad, and you know I hate it when people order me about, or tell me what to do. I'm independent, and stubborn, and I've a temper, and just wanna be me, not…not
someone I'm not. I just want to be happy."

"Yeah, I get that. I get that," Loki murmured.

"Don't you understand, Loki? If you die...then I have to, I have to...collect your soul. I...couldn't do that. I couldn't," he whispered harshly.

"I didn't know you got the angels, too."

Harry gave a tired sigh. "I collect everyone. Human, angel, god. The kit. That's what the Veil is for – to transport them where they are meant to be. Religion, faith, species – it doesn't matter any more. I've become the universal reaper.

"Look, I understand that you don't want me wander off, but trust me: you don't want to see me when I'm trapped somewhere. No matter how gilded and spacious, a prison is still a prison. There is no escaping that. My claustrophobia isn't just against small spaces. If I think I can't get out, I...'Panic' would probably be a very mild term for it."

Taking a step back, Loki rolled his eyes. In a flash, his wings were folded, the grace withdrawn and the golden shine in his eyes gone. "Maybe I'm just a bit used to my fledglings being all pure, new and innocent, eh?" He winked, suddenly all playful Trickster-god again. "So, you gonna cook dinner, or what? I'm starving!"

Harry ran his hands over his eyes and ears, only just now feeling how much they hurt. How much he hurt. "You might want to lessen the whole Archangel of Doom thing, y'know?" he groaned. "Buggering piece of wank, mate, but that hurt!"

Loki merely smirked. "So fix it, kid."

"Fix it?" he said, incredulous. Then Harry paused. With a wicked grin, he reached into his pocket for the last piece of chocolate. It had helped against dementors, so maybe it worked against archangels, too? With a far too satisfied expression on his face, Harry unwrapped the chocolate and popped it in his mouth. To his surprise, a sense of warmth and comfort immediately rushed through him. It didn't take away all the aches and pains Loki's little archangel demonstration had brought, but it did lift Harry's spirits.

"Oh, fuck!" Harry suddenly exclaimed. "Castiel—!" But the angel was gone. The clearing was empty except for him and Loki. "Castiel?"

Loki blinked. Then he, too, cursed.

Seconds later, Harry found himself back in his sitting room. Bobby was glaring at him and Loki, while Castiel was crouched on the floor, a hand on each of the Winchesters' foreheads.

"Gabriel," Castiel intoned, a serious expression on his face.

"I told them to stay back!" Loki cursed again. "Shit, kid, don't piss me off!"

Harry gaped. "Don't lay this on my shoulders, Loki!" Brushing past the archangel, he went to sit opposite of Castiel, between the brothers. With a finger snap – and wasn't he regretting picking that habit up something awful? – Harry had two bars of Loki's 'extra extravagant exclusive' chocolates in his hand. "Get them to eat this when they wake. It'll help, I promise," he said, even as he was stuffing the bars of chocolate down one of the pockets in Castiel's trousers. Taking a deep breath, all the while hoping that he wouldn't come to regret this, Harry placed his hands over Castiel's and closed his eyes.
Harry focused. His magic was more sentient than it had been when Harry first learned how to do this, so there was less resistance. Using Castiel's bond with the Winchesters as a conduit, Harry willed the blokes to heal. His magic rose to the challenge, eager and happy and filled with a yearning desire to help. It wasn't that there was anything physically wrong with them, more that their every nerve had been over-sensitised and needed to be soothed and dulled until— Ah. There.

Pulling back, Harry blinked his eyes open. "Oh," he breathed out. There were colours and light and everything glowed. Everything. "Castiel... you're beautiful," he murmured. He could see him, now, as an angel free of its vessel, and Castiel was light and colour and his wings were huge, like giant spectra and prisms and—

"All right, kid, enough of that," Harry dimly heard Loki say, then there were fingers against the side of his head and Loki's grace was inside him, dulling his senses in turn until everything was back to normal. Loki grabbed him under the armpits and tugged him back up on his feet. "There, now fix dinner."

"But... my raspberries," Harry mumbled, still feeling more than a little out of it. "Castiel helped me pick them. We had a whole bowl of them... where are they?"

-x-

Once Harry had made sure that the Winchesters would make a full recovery, he had made himself scarce and locked himself in his kitchen. He had the fidgets, still felt a little out of it, and the way Bobby had been staring at him hadn't exactly made him feel better. So Harry took it all out on his kitchen.

While he mostly preferred cooking the Muggle way, he wasn't above sometimes speeding up the process a little with the help of magic. So he baked bread, prepared a stew and prepared ice-cream from scratch the way Mrs Weasley had taught him one summer and threw together two sauces for it that would remain warm until it was time to use them.

The door to the kitchen remained closed and locked for an hour and a half before Loki decided Harry'd had enough time to himself and broke in.

"All right, kiddo, time to face the dragon."

"I'm not hiding," Harry protested as he was bodily dragged out of the kitchen.

Sam and Dean were sitting on his sofa, looking a little wane but otherwise perfectly hale and hearty, Castiel was missing, and Bobby had his head bent over one of Harry's books.

"No, Loki, seriously, I'm—"

Loki rolled his eyes. "I swear, you're worse than a housewife sometimes, kid."

"The food will burn if I don't tend to it, you wanker," Harry spat back in retaliation.

But Loki just rolled his eyes. "You pull that once a day, honestly."

Narrowing his eyes, Harry turned around, arms crossed over his chest. "Well, maybe I'll vanish your supply of sweets. And I'll stop making desserts. Chocolate cakes. Biscuits. Fudge."

"Then what're you gonna eat, kid? Don't think I haven't seen you stuff yourself with far more sugar than even Gabriel here," Bobby muttered, efficiently breaking up Harry's and Loki's argument before it could fully take place. "Where'd you get this book?"
Momentarily appeased, Harry frowned and walked over to where Bobby had wheeled himself. "Which one is it? Oh. Right," he said, once he came close enough that he could make out the title of the book. It was old, leather-bound, and one of the tomes he had lifted from the Black Family library. "I inherited it. After my Godfather."

"Hmm. You ever read it?"

Harry shrugged and took it from Bobby's loose grip. Quickly thumbing through it, Harry eventually nodded. "I read three chapters in the middle. Skipped the rest, then never came round to actually pick it up again. Why?"

"No reason. Mind if I borrow it?"

"Sure. Just write it down on the list." Harry nodded at the notebook – a bright yellow and green in colour – that was lying on top of a few other books on the bookshelf. The list itself contained the books Bobby already had borrowed from him. They eventually made their way back to Harry, but sometimes it took months.

Harry had never asked what Bobby needed the books for in the first place.

"Anyway, dinner is sort of ready, I think, if you'll make your way to the kitchen?" Harry suggested, eyeing the Winchesters slouching on his sofa. "Where did Castiel go, by the way?"

Dean frowned at him, while Sam just looked nonplussed. "The Sahara," Dean said. "You just wouldn't have any idea why, would'ya?"

Harry cleared his throat. His ears felt a little hot. "Um. Angels can't…swim."

"So?" Sam wondered, now a little curious. "What's that got to do with anything?"

The sounds that came from the kitchen didn't reassure Harry the slightest. Loki tended to ruin more food than he ever managed to turn edible – in a kitchen, that was – even when all he had to do was move the pots and the pans from the cooker to the table.

Harry shifted a little. "He got…wet. And angels are…prissy about their wings. I suggested a hairdryer, but he seemed to find that idea distasteful, to say the least."

"Dude, how d'you get him wet in the first place?" Dean asked, a little smirk on his face that suggested he was amused rather than upset.

Harry shrugged, feeling a little uncomfortable. "He dared me."


"Um. Food?" Harry asked, making small gestures towards the kitchen.

"Oh, I'm not letting this one go. What'd he dare you with?" Dean wanted to know.

"Doesn't matter, I— Castiel. Hi." Harry smiled. "Better now?"

Castiel rolled his shoulders. "Much."

"So, you can, like, seriously see his wings?" Sam asked before Dean could repeat his question. "What do they look like?"
Harry blinked. "Um. They look like wings. So, d'you wanna continue my experiment?" he asked Castiel.

Castiel cocked his head to the side. "I'm uncertain."

"Ice-cream with chocolate sauce for dessert. There's warm raspberries, too, but I didn't think you'd like that."

"Hey, hold up! I got some serious questions here," Dean interrupted, lumbering up from the sofa. Harry found he had to crane his neck a little to look him in the eye. It became even worse when Sam came over and joined them as well. "First of all, Cas: did you really give him a dare?"

Castiel blinked, calm and vaguely amused. "I challenged him, yes."

"Dude! That's great!" Dean sounded like he was so full of enthusiasm that he was about to bust open with it. Was it because Castiel had done something human, Harry wondered, or because this was the first time Castiel had seemingly relaxed and done something not related to whatever the Winchesters and the rest were up to? "All right, what was it?"

Castiel opened his mouth to reply, then shut it just as fast. He glanced at the open doorway to the kitchen, but Loki wasn't anywhere within sight. "Gabriel wouldn't like it if I told."

"Aw, c'mon, Cas," Dean wheedled. Sam didn't say anything, but he looked just as curious as his brother. "Don't leave us hangin', not now."

Harry snorted. "It was sort of Castiel who was left hanging, I would say. I slipped, grabbed onto him, and pulled us both under. We were...walking on logs in the lake." Sort of. It wasn't as far removed from the truth as it could've been. "He said I couldn't do it, but I could."

"It took you five tries, Harry. Jesus only had the one."

"Hang on, Jesus?"

Castiel shifted his gaze from Harry to Dean. "Yes," he said simply.

"Jesus didn't walk on logs, man! He walked on the freaking water," Dean burst out.

"Seriously, I can't leave you two kids alone for two seconds!" Loki declared before snapping his fingers.

Harry and Castiel found themselves standing in the kitchen with the door closed.

-x-

By the time the door opened again, Harry had set the table and prepared a special bowl for Castiel. Standing in front of the angel, Harry fished up a spoonful of ice-cream liberally drenched in chocolate sauce. Castiel was standing close to him, too close, encroaching on his personal space, but Harry didn't really mind.

"Open up, then," Harry said, flashing a smile.

Castiel regarded the spoonful of dessert sceptically, then finally opened his mouth. Harry put the spoon inside the angel's mouth, waited until Castiel closed his lips around the spoon, then slowly pulled his hand back.

Castiel closed his eyes as he considered the morsel of food. "This is...unexpectedly good," he finally
Harry grinned. "I know!" He scooped up another spoonful. "Here, have some more," he suggested, and Castiel dutifully obeyed. "Try and direct the energy towards refuelling your grace if you can. You can feel your grace, right? How it looks like and where it is—"

"Yes. More."

Harry's grin grew a little smug, but mostly thrilled. Lifting more ice-cream and chocolate towards Castiel's open and waiting mouth, he wasn't as tuned or focused on what was going on around him as he usually was.

"Dude! What the fuck!" Dean exclaimed.

Harry blinked. Castiel's lips closed around the spoon.

"Seriously!" Loki snapped. "Two frigging seconds!"

Castiel moved to grip Harry around the wrist, then tugged the hand along with the spoon away. "Dean, I think I like chocolate and ice-cream," he declared in that serious way of his. "It's a most pleasurable experience."

"Yeah, yeah, spiffy," Loki muttered. "Harry, please, don't feed him."

Harry and Castiel both looked confused: one vaguely, one considerably. "But—" Harry started, after a quick glance at Castiel to check if he was going to speak up first.

"No," Loki said with an air of finality. "Don't. Just, don't. Now, let's eat before the food goes all cold and slimy."
Enemies

Chapter Summary

In which Harry and Bobby run afoul of some demons.

About a week after Harry had met Sam and Dean Winchester, along with Castiel for the first time, Harry made his way down the narrow, winding road that eventually led to Bobby's place. He'd meant to visit sooner, but Gabriel had kept him quite busy.

Gabriel. The name still felt a bit awkward and alien to him, but Harry reckoned it was time he started getting used to it. Besides, something in him felt more…complete and less alone, whenever he used the angelic name. Loki hadn't felt off, per se, but Gabriel felt complete in a way Loki somehow hadn't.

Parking his motorcycle next to a pile of broken cars, Harry removed his helmet and unpacked the large basket he had, with the help of a little magic, secured in the large bag he'd fastened on the back. Walking up to the door, basket held under an arm, he knocked once, then stood back and waited.

Gabriel had been busy teaching him all sorts of things the past week: sword fighting, lore, letters and symbols and sigils, and broken pieces of more languages than Harry had ever known existed. It was incredibly exhausting, but he was still having the time of his life, somehow. It was fun.

The door wrenched open, and Bobby glared up at him. "Kid, what're you doing here?"

Harry smiled. "Hi, Bobby. Haven't been by in a while." He jiggled his basket. "And I brought some food. Figured it'd maybe keep you fed for a week or so. That is, if you can abstain from those horrible TV dinners and the awful beans you eat. Made you a raspberry pie as well."

Bobby blinked.

Harry's grin was a little sheepish. "Okay, so maybe I was bored out of my skull last night and couldn't sleep. Still, it makes me feel better knowing you've got proper food. I have issues, I know," he ended up saying in a mumble.

Barking a laugh, Bobby shook his head. "Eh, what the hell, kid. Come on in."

"Thanks!"

"That Gabriel out, then?"

Harry shook his head as he placed the basket on the table in Bobby's kitchen. "Nah, not really. To be honest, I was a bit worried at first, because normally he never sticks around for more than a couple of days at the time, but this time it's been a lot longer than that." Months? Had it been months? Harry wasn't sure, but if it hadn't been, then it probably wasn't off by far, either.

The amount of food he transferred from it to the fridge and the freezer didn't match the size of the basket, but Harry'd sort of forgotten about that until Bobby pointedly cleared his throat.

"Erm. It's like the TARDIS?" Harry suggested weakly.
"I'm just gonna pretend I understood that, kid. Now, I want you to be honest with me here: are you a Trickster?"

Harry blinked, then shook his head, bemused. "No. No, why?"

"'Cause I seen you snap your fingers, just like that Gabriel character. I know you ain't just human. I just don't know what you are, or if it's bad."

Harry felt cold and afraid and worried inside as he faced Bobby, his eyes a bit wider than usual. "I… I'm not evil, I know that. Our choices make us who we are, and I try to do good. I just… My people, where I'm from, we're…sort of born with magic, Bobby. I was a wizard, but Castiel thinks I'm not any more. So I…I just don't know any more."

"You're born with magic?" Bobby asked, frowning and looking a bit like he wasn't sure Harry was telling the truth or not.

Harry nodded. "Yeah. It seems to be hereditary for the most part." He glanced down at the food still in the basket, then at the fridge and freezer behind him. With a tired sigh, Harry closed his eyes briefly, then snapped his fingers.

The food sorted itself into a semblance of order in its designated places.

"I'm not sure what the Wizarding world did, exactly, or what happened, but at some point they forbade my kind from ever stepping foot on this continent. That's when I first met Loki, the first winter I lived here. He wasn't too pleased with me, running around where I had no business being, but something made him change his mind and take me in." Harry took a deep breath. "So, am I evil?"

Bobby considered him carefully. "Let's make some more tests, first, aye?"

"You cut me open with seven different knives, Bobby!"

Bobby grinned. "Didn't work, did it? Need to know how to off a wizard."

Harry rubbed a hand over his face, then snapped his fingers again.

The table was made, coffee poured into familiar mugs, and two slices of raspberry pie was laid out onto plates. With a slight hesitation, Harry sat down. He stalled by pouring liberal amounts of milk and sugar into his coffee.

"We're human, Bobby. We bleed like you. The only difference is that something in us makes us capable of using magic. This," and Harry almost hated himself for doing it, but at the same time it felt good talking about it, telling someone who wasn't an angel and who sort of already knew all about being a wizard already.

He pulled out his wand from thin air and laid it on the table between them.

"That's my wand. Ordinarily, I'd need that to do magic. For some reason, I don't. In order to incapacitate a wizard, all you need to do is separate them from their wand. Wizards are sort of arrogant in the way they feel they're superior to what they call Muggles – people born without magic. I doubt even a handful of them knows how to fight without a wand."

Harry took a sip of his coffee, made a grimace when he found it too bitter still, and added some more milk and sugar to his mug. "I have a horrible suspicion that my people did something awful, once, and that's why we aren't allowed to come here any more, to the US, but I don't know. I mean,
werewolves and vampires and ghosts and all those creatures and beings that you call monsters, they're nothing like the versions I encountered in the Wizarding world. My godfather's best friend was a werewolf, and he actually turned into a wolf, but as long as he took his medicine, then he was perfectly docile. Even without it, as long as he locked himself up tight, he wasn't a danger to the people around him.

"Ghosts were friendly and talkative, not dangerous, and vampires, yeah, so they were a bit distrusted and feared, but as long as they had legitimate donors, no one complained about them. There were centaurs living in the forest by my school, merpeople in the lake with a giant squid, and my headmaster had a phoenix as a familiar. And…" Harry flashed a crooked grin. "And, yeah, we do fly on broomsticks."

Bobby smirked. "So you and Cas really did go flying, then."

Harry flushed a little. "Um, yeah. Gabriel wasn't very happy about that," he said, rubbing the back of his neck. "I think most of the stereotypes about wizards and witches are founded in some sort of truth, to be honest. The women are called witches, by the way."

"That's it, then?" Bobby asked, sounding rather sceptical to Harry's ears.

"Oh, no, but could you really tell me everything there is to know about Americans?" Harry asked, pointedly.

"Fair enough, I suppose." Bobby reached over and picked up Harry's wand. He twisted and turned it, taking in every little scratch and imperfection. "Feels just like a stick, to me."

"That's because you're not a wizard. All wands have a core that helps the user channel and access their magic. The wood's important as well. I used to have a holly wand with a phoenix feather as a core, but it stopped working for me." He had sort of outgrown it long before he'd stopped using a wand at all. Still… With a cheeky grin, Harry focused his magic, concentrated on his wand, then murmured, "Lumos."

The wand lit up.

Bobby yelped and dropped it with a clatter to the table.

Harry laughed and said, "Nox."

"Very funny, boy," Bobby grumbled.

"I have books, you know. I'll make sure to turn the visible next time you visit."

Bobby narrowed his eyes. "You been hiding books from me?"

"Oh, yes." Harry nodded. "Wizarding books. The ones with the moving pictures, wand based spells and sex magic."

"Hmmph," Bobby scoffed.

For a while, they were both quiet as they focused on their pie. Then, frowning a little, Harry cocked his head to the side. It had been a little windy when Harry drove here, but still sunny and bright. It was a bit after noon, yes, but it shouldn't be fully dark outside for another couple of hours yet, and still, the view outside was…pitch black.

"It's awfully dark outside," he murmured. "A storm, d'you think?"
Except, it didn't feel much like a storm. It just felt dark and cold and _off_ and, frankly, it was scaring him.

"Crap!" Bobby exclaimed. "Those're demons, kid."

"Demons?" Harry yelped. "Shit!"

For the first time in a long while, the blue text was silent and absent.

"How do you kill demons, Bobby?" Harry asked, feeling more than a little nervous and a lot nauseous.

"You don't _know_? You got one out of me, you idiot!"

"It never came up! I mean, yes, I know how to exorcise one, Gabriel taught me, but that only applies to demons who're possessing someone, and—bugger!" The window behind Harry smashed to pieces.

"I just had that replaced, you filthy hellspawn!" Bobby shouted.

"What about the salt?" Harry wondered. He knew Bobby put salt lines _everywhere_. The man was more paranoid than Moody had been, only not as insane about it. There was no way Bobby would've forgotten to ward properly.

"Must've been disturbed by the workers," Bobby snapped. "Watch out!"

Black smoke poured in from the broken window. It brought back memories – horrible, awful memories – of when Harry was thirteen. The dementors had swarmed him then, pushed him down, clawed at him, sucked at his _soul_. And while the demons didn't bring out Harry's worst memories, they made him feel out of it and terrified and _cold_.

Harry snapped.

Raising his arms, palms out, Harry shouted, "_Expecto Patronum_!" just like he had then. Light burst out of his palms and shaped into a familiar animal. The stag looked the same, except it had wings now, wings exactly like Gabriel's, and it was _huge_ and glowing and _pure_.

The demons shrieked.

"Kid!" Bobby shouted. Harry jolted, then he blinked and suddenly he was behind Bobby's wheelchair and was dragging him out of the room. The stag kept guard. It sank its sharp antlers into any demon that came too close, turning it to dust, and the demons backed away for a short moment. But it was draining the patronus. Each demon it killed, a little more of its pure light dissipated, and there were a lot of demons; _too many_ demons.

"Gabriel!" Harry called, even as he pushed Bobby into the living room, then began conjuring salt that he shaped into lines on the windowsills and the doorways. He even covered the fireplace, just to be safe.

"Your stag's gone!"

Harry's breath hitched; he'd felt it like a jab to his heart when it'd been destroyed. Then he willed his strongest, happiest memory into existence again and shouted, "_Expecto Patronum_," once more. The stag was just a large, but not as radiant, and it shot off into the fray of black smoke.
Summoning patroni was draining. Each time a demon attacked it, it resonated back to Harry like a physical blow. It hurt, it hurt a lot and he was starting to feel dizzy.

"Gabriel! Gabriel!" Harry blinked the sweat out of his eyes just in time to see his second patronus wink out of existence. "Expecto Patronum," he cried, then almost collapsed at the wrenching feeling when the patronus burst from his hands. It burned his hands, his veins, his magic. "Castiel?" he whispered. "Bobby, did you ward against angels?"

"No, no, couldn't find nothing that worked." Bobby looked grim and he was clutching a sawed off shotgun in his hands. Harry didn't want to know where he'd stashed that.

"Shit," Harry murmured. "Do you have a knife?"

"Yeah, 'course."

"Silver?" Bobby just looked insulted as he handed the shiny dagger over. "Thanks."

Harry took a deep breath, then he sliced his palm open, hissing with pain. The sigil he drew on the floor was a simple, common summoning glyph, largely ineffective unless the person drawing it was particularly powerful, or particularly desperate. Harry happened to be both.

Slamming his palm down in the middle of the design, Harry gasped out, "Gabriel," as the unexpected pain of his raw and bleeding palm took him by surprise when it connected with too much force on the hard floor. He hissed, snatched his hand back and cradled it to his chest.

"Please, please, Gabriel," he murmured.

Maybe he'd cut too deep? The knife had been a bit sharper than he'd expected, but—

There was a flutter of feathers, then Gabriel was there. "Harry, what's the— Oh, hello!" Gabriel pouted at the demons, still flying at the empty doorway but unable to cross the threshold.

Harry whimpered as his last patronus died.

"Now, that's just not fun," Gabriel growled. He drew his sword as he knelt by Harry. "You okay, kid?"

"I called, like, three times. Why didn't you answer?" Harry whispered, feeling weak and exhausted and hurt, and everything was too chaotic in his mind for him to sort out properly.

Gabriel looked grim. "They must've blocked me out. And I sure as hell don't like that one bit. First thing I'm gonna do when I get your sorry ass home is bind you to me good and proper. Now," Gabriel stood up again. "Close your eyes, Bobby. I got myself some demons to smite."

 Gabriel didn't exactly go all archangel on the demons, but he glowed brighter than any of the patroni Harry had managed to summon. He didn't use his wings, or turned them into light and power like Harry had been told angels could do if they felt threatened enough. No, Gabriel turned pagan, turned dark and bloody and vengeful. He killed demons with ruthless efficiency, with his hands and sword alike.

For the first time, Harry realised that Gabriel was more powerful than he could ever hope to comprehend.

He was beautiful.
"Here we go, kid," Gabriel murmured in his ear. Harry blinked. The demons were gone, the kitchen looked whole, and Bobby was inspecting his wards and salt lines.

Harry realised he was still on the floor, still kneeling in front of the sigil he'd drawn on the floor, still clutching his bleeding hand to his chest.

"I don't like demons, Gabriel," he said shakily. "They make me ill, and I couldn't focus, and you were gone, and—"

"Hey, shh, it's okay, kiddo, I'm here now. You're just a fledgling, still. I'd forgotten how you react to demons. That's my fault for not telling you like I should've done right from the start."
Lovers

Chapter Summary

In which Dean and Sam question Castiel's cellphone usage.

"This is pointless," Castiel declared.

"No, hey, wait, man!" Dean grabbed Castiel by the wrist and tugged him back down on the bed again.

"Look, Sam's gonna be back any time now with food, so I just wanna make sure you're getting this, all right?"

Castiel's eyes were narrowed, forehead furrowed as if he were squinting at something far away. "Dean, this entire endeavour is futile." He reached out and grabbed one of the mags on the bed. "These 'Busty Asian Beauties' are not appealing."

"Come on!" Dean protested. "How can you not like them?"

"They're not proper representations—"

Castiel's response was cut off by the door opening and Sam stepping inside with the bags of cheap takeout.

"Dude, you gotta stop shoving porn at him," Sam complained, rolling his eyes. "Or at least let him see that there's more than 'Busty Asian Beauties' out there."

"Oh, like what, Sam? Geeky interns? Badass police chicks? Hot librarians?"

Castiel made a humming sound. "The librarian is indeed of pleasing proportions," he said, only to have both Sam and Dean stare at him as if a goat had jumped out of his mouth. Slipping a hand down into one of his pockets, Castiel retrieved a slip of paper. "He gave me a numerical code that I can't decipher along with a smiley face. I believe he named it James." His tone was only slightly bemused.

"Dude. The librarian's a dude."

Sam grin was wide, with just a hint of smugness directed at Dean. "Cas, you got hit on by the librarian. Man, what'd you do? No one's gay in a small town, and he gave you his number?"

Castiel frowned. "I merely complimented his physique and asked if he was in need of assistance in order to ascertain the proper techniques involved in callisthenics. He then gave me this note and… caressed my bottom. I don't understand." Castiel full out scowled in confusion. "Why would he caress my bottom?"

"Dude, you're not gay, Cas!" Dean blurted, his eyes a little wild. "I know you're not. You liked Chastity, right?"

Castiel turned his narrowed gaze on Dean. "That is not of import. I'm content, Dean," he primly
pointed out. "Besides, the voice informed me I was out of minutes when I tried calling Harry yesterday, so I can't call the librarian now. May I borrow your phone, Dean?"

"No!" Dean exclaimed. "I'm not helping you bag yourself a male librarian, Cas. No way!"

"I don't want him in a bag, Dean. Harry has pointed out before that—"

"You talk way too much to that skinny little Brit, man," Dean complained.

Meanwhile, still grinning, Sam sat down next to Castiel on the bed. "You can borrow my phone if you like, Cas."

"Sammy, no!" Dean protested. "You can't turn an angel of the Lord gay, dude! That's, that's like, blasphemy, or something!"

"My Father created my brothers and I to love all of his creations. There's no distinction between an amoeba and an elephant, much less between what you refer to as gay people and overcompensating heterosexuals suffering from minority complexes."

Dean gaped.

Sam laughed. "Okay, yeah, you totally gotta hang out with that Harry guy more, Cas."

-x-

A week later, and neither Sam nor Dean knew for sure if Castiel actually had called, what Dean had dubbed, the 'Gaybrarian'. Sam had talked Dean into buying more minutes for Castiel, though, so chances were, Dean knew, that Castiel had gone and…given in to some homosexual urges or something.

It creeped him out a little, yeah, but only because it was Castiel. Gabriel he had no problems believing was into everything that moved, but fact was that Castiel was the same dude who'd been terrified just sitting down inside a brothel.

They were finally done with the case (mojoed up kittens from hell), though, and they were packing up and heading out. Back to Bobby's, maybe, or just on to the next town. Sam was trying to find a new case for them on the laptop while Dean packed up the room.

"I need more minutes, Dean," Castiel declared, speaking right into Dean's ear.

"Gah!" Dean jumped back, rubbing a hand over his ear. "Cas! Some warning!"

Sam was snickering, but he was also rubbing a hand over his chest, which let Dean know just fine that he'd been spooked as well by the angel's abrupt appearance in the room.

Castiel furrowed his brow and held out his phone to Dean. "I need more minutes," he repeated seriously.

Rubbing a hand over his face, Dean frowned a little. He was seriously starting to feel like some dad who'd a teenage kid – daughter – what with the way Castiel kept using up all his fucking minutes in what felt like seconds on a frigging guy. "More? Seriously?"

"Yes."

"I got you, like, seven hours a week ago, Cas. No way you used them all up already."
"I have," Castiel said.

"I'm putting a ban on your phone for a week," Dean blurted.

Sam startled in his chair. "Dude, you sound like Dad."

"Shut up, bitch."

"Jerk. You do."

In Dean's hand, the phone began ringing, blaring out a tinny edition of… "Hey, is that the theme song for Dr Sexy?" Sam wondered, a hint of laughter in his tone.

Dean gave his little brother a glare worthy of some serious doom and destruction, then turned it on Castiel after Sam showed no signs of succumbing to spontaneous combustion. "What the hell, man?"

Castiel looked nonplussed. "Gabriel set it for me." Then he help up his phone, pulled it open with enough concentration and focus one would normally apply to something like brain surgery and pushed the correct button.

"Hello, Harry."

Dean rolled his eyes. "Seriously?" he mouthed at Sam, who shrugged in return. But he looked a little confused, too, so Dean guessed he wasn't the only one who found it more than a little odd – and way more than creepy – at how much time Castiel seriously spent on a guy he'd met a grand total of one times.

"I'm out of minutes," Castiel was saying. "I will come see you shortly."

Okay, Dean realised, so maybe Castiel was mojo-ing his way over to see the guy whenever he felt like it.

"Cas, seriously," Dean started after Castiel hung up.

"What, Dean?" Castiel turned to face him, somehow, ending up right in his fucking face.

"Why d'you spend all your minutes on a guy you can just fly over to see whenever you want?"

Castiel didn't so much as blink. "Because it would be improper," he said, as if that explained it all. Then he was gone.
In which Harry questions the concept of family.

The concept of family wasn't something that came naturally to Harry. It never had, given his childhood and subsequent years at Hogwarts, but there were times when he'd thought that, finally, he was at least getting close to being part of a family.

So far, it had ended up blowing up in his face every time. There was always someone ready to betray him, to stab him in the back, to die for him or sacrifice themselves so that Harry might live on.

Deep down, Harry knew family was important.

He just couldn't put the belief into action.

"Gabriel…"

"Hmmm?"

The angel sounded groggy and sleepy and content and sated all wrapped up in one. If he were a cat, he'd be purring.

Harry made a humming noise as he smoothed out some of the bent feathers near the base of the primaries. He had a lot of practice, grooming feathers – the wings of an angel, these days, rather than the body of an owl – even more so now, after having done this for Gabriel for so long now. "D'you know…what family is?"

The feathers in Harry's hands quivered and rustled in response to a spike in Gabriel's grace at the question, but Harry ignored it as he smoothed the feathers out, one by one, then focused on fixing every one of the primaries to perfection.

"I've never really had one, you know? I was too young to know my parents, and then, later…well, you know my relatives. And in the Wizarding world…” Harry cleared his throat. "Every time I thought I was finally part of a family, something happened that took it away. So I… Are we family, Gabriel? It's just, I keep saying you're my brother and my father, and I love you, I do, so I was just wondering. Are we family, now?"

"You're my fledgling, kid. Yeah, we're family," Gabriel said softly.

Harry's smile was as brilliant as it was shy. "Oh."

"So, wanna meet your pseudo-step-siblings?" Gabriel wondered as he stretched out a little, flexing his left wing so that Harry could groom the harder to get at spots.

"You have—"

"I was Loki, Harry. Yeah, I've got kids. We'll start with Sleipnir, I think."

Family

Chapter Summary

In which Harry questions the concept of family.
Sleipnir was exactly how Harry imagined a cocky stallion to be, sort of, except that he also had eight legs that hurt Harry's eyes when he looked at the horse walk or run too much, because no matter how natural Sleipnir made it look, a horse having eight legs was just plain wrong. Sleipnir pranced, posed and flexed and showed off something outrageously. He boasted, shouted and tried to 'chat up' more than one of the female thestrals, which was just more than a little disturbing to Harry.

Gabriel watched it all with a calm sort of detached amusement, as if Sleipnir was behaving exactly like he'd expected.

And, well. Harry wasn't sure if he should laugh or not, the first time he heard Sleipnir call Gabriel 'Mama' with all the pride of the most handsome stallion to ever walk the earth.

Sleipnir calmly pranced up to stand next to Harry, then nuzzled his hair. "Mama, I like the new baby," he nickered, snuffling at Harry's neck, which made him laugh uncontrollably.

"Oh, for the love of… He's not a baby, Slippy."

"Smells like a baby," Sleipnir argued. "Smells like Jörmungandr and Fenrir and Váli and Nari and Narfi and Hel."

Gabriel rolled his eyes. "Yeah, count all my kids, why don't you?"

Harry was confused. "How do I smell like a giant snake, or, or—" Fenrir? The only Fenrir Harry had any knowledge of was a monster – the horrible werewolf who'd turned Remus and so many other kids, just because he was a sick bastard.

"That monster is not my son, kid," Gabriel said firmly. "My Fenrir is a vargr, the grandest of his kind. That abomination you ran into, well. He's a shame to the name."

A weight lifted from Harry's shoulders. "Oh. Good. I don't think I could've…" Harry cleared his throat, then jumped when Sleipnir stuck his velvety soft nose back under his ear. "Tickles," he protested, squirming away.

"Smells like baby," Sleipnir declared. "Baby, can I have one of the thestrals?"

"You're not breeding some new kind of species again. Remember last time?" Gabriel intervened, his voice firm. Harry sort of wanted to know what had happened last time. As it was, he had a sudden vision of an eight-legged, winged, huge carnivorous horse with wings – and not a skeletal bit in sight.

Sleipnir shifted impatiently on all eight of his hooves. "But Flickerwing is waiting, Mama," the great horse whined.

"No."

"Mama!"

"You touch that mare, I'll have you gelded before you can say 'neigh'." Sleipnir whined with horror, somehow managing to do an impression of a man crossing his legs to protect his bollocks. If now an eight-legged horse could move like that.
"It…is a bizarre function. You were totally right. I don't understand what anyone would use it for, or, y'know, need it for or anything."

"I don't understand its purpose, either."

"Maybe…maybe it's like a secret identity? Y'know, like when Dean and Sam pretend to be from the FBI and stuff. Maybe?"

"Humans lie so they may become presidents. Dean has said this on one occasion."

"Yeah, exactly. Oh!"

"Harry?"

"Look! I took a picture of you."

"That's not an accurate representation of my vessel. I don't have horns."

"It's cute. Oh! There's one so you can have a dog's head instead."

"I'm not a dog—or a cat."

"You're adorable, Castiel: Look!"

"I don't understand. Angels don't have halos or, or… Why is there a cloud in my face?"

"You can have a rainbow too, or a pie."

-b-

"Dude."

Sam ran a tired hand through his hair and tried to ignore how unsteady it was. "What is it, Dean?"

"Take a look at this." Dean ruffled Sam's hair as he sat down next to him on the bed. He had his phone in his hand and was scrolling through the— Sam blinked.

"You've fourteen unread texts from Cas? How'd he even know how to send a text?"

Dean snorted. "I don't think he does. Here, look." He opened one of the texts at the bottom of the list. It was an attached picture, no text, of a party hat. Not a proper hat, but one of those stupid functions you could add to whatever picture you were taking with your phone. In this case, the hat was the only still part of the picture, as if Cas had been waving the phone around while taking the photo, most likely without knowing he’d opened up the camera function. "This is like, the fifth one. So," Dean said smoothly as he scrolled to the next one, "I was thinking, instead of hitting 'save' he's
been hitting 'send', and since 'Dean' comes before 'Sam'," he trailed off.

"Guess Bobby should count himself lucky we didn't put his number in," Sam filled in. "Hey, isn't that Harry?"

Dean shrugged, then laughed when the next photo came up, and a disgruntled Castiel came into view, complete with devil horns and a red, forked tail. "Guess so, or Cas' got freaky skills with invisible limbs. You know what else this explains?"

Sam shook his head. "How he goes through his fucking money like butter in the sun, man. Hey, he's got a halo on in this one." The next picture had Castiel with a cloud on top of his head and glitter around the edges

The very last photo was of Gabriel laughing his ass off. The text after that was from an unknown number and read: 'so, the kiddos don't have a fucking clue what a text is. Or a cam phone. Go figure.' And the text after that: 'hey, and send me the pic of C with the halo and the devil'.

In which Dean and Sam are a little bit fed up with Castiel's act.

Castiel was acting off. Well, odder than usual even for him. Coming and going at strange hours, spending more money on his phone so he could talk to frigging Harry than Dean really had in the first place. Being chatted up and getting more numbers than Dean and Sam normally managed together. It wasn't like he even did anything, just put them in a little pile in the backseat of the Impala before flying off.

Then he started picking up stuff. Useless stuff. Blankets and pillows – not the kind of thing Sam and him usually bothered with beyond making sure they could survive a night in the car every now and then. But the stuff Castiel picked up… What'd he need with a feather boa, anyway? The dude was, like, perpetually dressed in the same clothes all the time.

It was just plain weird, and a little freaky.

They'd just banished a demon in the penthouse suite of a hotel, but instead of busting them out like Castiel'd said he'd do to get them all away from the security team Dean had no doubt was rushing to check out the disturbance, the angel was calmly and methodically picking the room clean of blankets, pillows, cushions and comforters.

"Cas, what the hell are you doing? We need to get out of here."

Castiel moved his head to glare at Dean, but didn't stop meticulously folding what had to be the twelfth fucking blanket he'd lifted from somewhere in the rooms. "You would not understand," Castiel eventually declared, snapping yet another freaking pillow over from somewhere.

He had a good sized pile of them on the floor, all spread out on a large sheet.

As if on cue, someone started pounding on the door.

"Cas," Sam snapped, throwing a worried eye at the door.

Castiel took on his most affronted expression to date. For a moment, it looked like he was seriously contemplating letting all the guards in, then incapacitating them. In the end, though, he just quickly pulled the sheet together in a makeshift bag, everything he'd taken folded neatly inside it.

"Let's go," he declared.

Sam and Dean arrived in the motel room across town they'd rented three days ago, with no sign of Castiel in sight.

"Son of a bitch!" Dean growled.

"Yeah, I mean, seriously? What's he up to?" Sam wondered even as he started gathering their bags.

"Hell if I know," Dean muttered. "Come on, let's go."
"Bobby's?"

"Yeah, let's see what he's dug up on the frigging Apocalypse."
Parents

Chapter Summary

In which Harry has lessons, redecorates his bedroom and talks to Gabriel.

Castiel came by sporadically. He usually helped Harry with Gabriel's lessons, but they also sneaked off to fly, to walk on water, to take walks in the forest. After a while, Harry found himself telling Castiel more and more about the Hallows, and what he did by extension as the Master of Death. On occasion, Harry would be in one of his lessons with Gabriel when Castiel arrived, and those times, Castiel would quietly sit down next to Harry and direct all his attention to whatever it was Gabriel was teaching.

When Harry and Castiel were alone, though, Harry always had the impression that they were never alone. When they were all in the same room, Gabriel usually stood back and simply watched, an enigmatic smile curving his lips and an expectant tilt of his head. Sometimes he disappeared off to who knew where, but Harry still had the impression that he wasn't as gone as it appeared. Castiel seemed to be under the same impression, as the one-time Harry had wondered if he felt like Gabriel was watching over them as well, Castiel had merely stated 'of course'.

Then, one day, Castiel started bringing gifts. Not for Gabriel, not for Harry, but for something else. Harry wasn't sure what, precisely, the something else was, but he knew enough that it was important.

The first object Castiel brought was a pale green fleece blanket. Harry looked it over, carefully smoothing his fingers over it, before coming to the decision that, yes, this was precisely what he required. Without another word, Harry gave Castiel a curt nod before apparating directly to his bedroom.

The fleece blanket was placed with precision and consideration over the back of his armchair.

Next came pillows and cushions and blankets and downy duvets, all of them deliriously soft, made of materials like satins, velvets and silks. Once, Castiel got his hands on a Kashmir blanket, large enough to cover Harry's bed. The pillows and cushions were soft and fluffy, and the blankets warm. There were rugs, too, all indulgent and supple, feeling glorious against naked feet.

Castiel brought feathers and pieces of glass and crystals in all sorts of combinations – from dreamcatchers to long beaded strings to feather boas – that Harry dutifully hung from the wooden beams crossing his ceiling.

Harry wasn't sure why he did this, why he accepted some of the gifts Castiel brought, while rejecting others. Castiel never seemed surprised when Harry would reject something either, almost as if he'd only brought those items to test Harry, to make sure Harry felt the same way about the smooth silk encased pillow that wasn't quite up to standards. On occasion, Castiel would bring something he was inexplicably proud of – like the Kashmir blanket – and smile at Harry.

Gabriel was watching all this with an indulgent eye. He was always present when Castiel came bearing gifts. Always. He seemed to know which times were just ordinary visits, and which times were something more. He'd stand back, yes, but he'd oversee the proceedings with the watchful eyes of a hawk. If Castiel lingered too long, or if Harry met Castiel's gaze for too long, Gabriel would
pointedly clear his throat.

Something Harry felt strangely grateful for, though, was the fact that Gabriel had stopped coming into Harry's bedroom to wake him up in the mornings the way he had before. He wasn't quite sure why he didn't want Gabriel to see, or why it didn't feel right to show Castiel what he'd done with all the gifts quite yet, but he did.

Until one day, Harry felt the room was ready.

-x-

"Gabriel?"

"Mmmm?"

Harry cleared his throat. "Um. You know this thing I've been doing with Castiel?"

"Yeah?" Gabriel carefully tucked away whatever it was he'd been poking at in his pocket, before turning to give Harry all his attention.

Harry frowned a little, even as he drew a finger down the ridge of Gabriel's right wing, smoothing down the errant feathers that he came across. "Could you explain it to me?"

Gabriel's facial expression softened. "No, kid, no can do."

"But—"

"Dad made us that way, y'know. Able enough that we'd know what we're doing, but not enough to know why. So I can't tell you, because you're meant to figure it out on your own."

"Castiel seems to know."

Gabriel smiled. "He's more angel than you, sweetie. You've felt like you're doing it right, haven't you?"

Harry nodded. "It's just… I don't know why."

"You'll know."

Harry pursed his lips, appearing deep in thought.

"So, um. Papa?" he ventured after a while.

Gabriel started. "You…don't call me that, kid. Okay? It's way too creepy."

Harry grinned and gave Gabriel a sly wink. "I figured, if Sleipnir can call you 'Mama'—"

"Harry, darling. No." Gabriel rolled his eyes, then drew Harry with his wing in a kind of one-armed/winged hug. "You're my fledgling, yeah, you don't call me 'Papa' or something like it. You call me Gabriel."

"Okay," Harry muttered.

"What did you want to say, anyway?"

Harry cleared his throat, fidgeted a little with the hem of his jumper. "I had this feeling that I'm
supposed to…show you my room now. So that I can show it to Castiel. I think I need your feathers, too."
Chapter Summary

In which Sam has questions, Harry and Castiel bond, Dean tries to eat and Sleipnir just wanted to have some fun.

Gabriel was at Bobby's when Sam and Dean finally got there. He was helping Bobby fix his wards, and using up an insane amount of candy in the process.

"So, um, I was wondering," Sam started, having followed Gabriel to the kitchen.

"What's up, Sasquatch?"

Sam pulled a face at the nickname, but didn't comment on it. "Cas has been acting kinda odd lately."

"You don't say," Gabriel drawled, snapping a lollipop into existence. He offered it to Sam, who shook his head, before popping into his mouth with a delighted hum. "Well, kid's been cast out of heaven, almost forced to fall and all that. Makes sense, don't you think, that he'd latch onto my fledgling, right?"

Sam frowned. "What are you talking about? Harry's human. And, anyway, what's that got to do with Cas spending an insane amount of time on the phone talking to him, or, or hoarding blankets and shit like the next ice age's about to go down, big time."

Gabriel smirked. "Ever heard the saying: birds of a feather, flock together?"

"Yeah, and that applies to this situation, how?"

"'Cause that's what Castiel and Harry are, Sammy. They're both at sort of the same stage in terms of maturity. If Castiel'd still been in heaven, he'd be busy flying all over doing exactly the same to some other angel his age."

"But Harry's human, Gabe!"

Gabriel made a grimace. "That, I'm not so sure about any more. When I first picked him up, yeah, as human as you, but these days… No, I don't think he's as human as he'd like to be any more. And you!" Gabriel poked Sam in the chest with a pointy finger. "Don't. Tell him. Got it? He'll know on his own when he's good and ready."

Sam frowned, rubbing his chest, looking a little worried, a little confused, a little curious. "So, okay, I won't ask about that, I guess. But, still. What's the deal with Cas trying to start his own branch of IKEA?"

Gabriel's smile was soft and almost tender. "They're flocking, kiddo. Nesting. Me and my brothers did it, all four of us. Some garrisons do it, but I guess Castiel never fit in his. Other times, two angels do it. Angels are flock animals in that sense. We need others around us much more than humans do."

"So, what? They're…fucking?" Sam asked crudely.
Gabriel rolled his eyes. "How should I know?" he exclaimed. "If they want to, fine, none of my business! But building a nest and creating a flock isn't sexual in itself. It's about companionship and stuff like that." He pulled his lollipop out of his mouth with a loud pop, then pushed it into Sam's when he opened his mouth to say something. "Look, it's strange, yeah, I get that, but it was obviously something the kids felt they had to do. Don't give them shit over it."

With a grimace, Sam pulled the strawberry flavoured lollipop out of his mouth. "I won't. I don't care. There was this other thing, though. Cas's been spending hours on the phone with Harry, right? So me and Dean wondered why he didn't just zap his way over to Harry instead of, you know, using up all our money, and Cas just said something about it not being proper or something. So I guess I just wanted to know what the deal with that was?"

"Hmmmm, well, think of it this way: Harry's under my protection. I'm his angel – archangel, in fact. Castiel, on the other hand, is another angel who wants in on the action, so to speak. But since Harry's a fledgling, strictly speaking, I'm the only grown angel he should be spending any real time with. There's a loophole in this situation, 'cause Castiel's still young."

"So you don't want other angels giving your kids bad impressions, that it?"

"Succinctly. Yes."

Gabriel leaned forward and licked the lollipop still in Sam's hand. "But Castiel's been naughty, using the phone network to talk to Harry. He's sneaky and inventive, for an angel. I think I like it. Where is he, anyway?"

Sam shrugged. "Last I saw him was about a week ago, when he vanished with another haul of blankets or whatever. We haven't seen him since."

-x-

"Well? I think I did it right, but, well, I don't really know, y'know?" Harry mumbled. "I mean, Gabriel approved." He nodded at the circle of feathers hanging by the ceiling as close to the centre of the room as possible. They were strung together with beads and pearls and pieces of glass. Gabriel had pulled them from his left wing, calmly and carefully, before creating a sort of wreath from them. Harry wasn't sure he knew what all of it – all of this; the room – was actually about.

Castiel stood pressed up close to him, one hand grasping Harry's tightly. Still, despite how close they were, Castiel was careful to keep his wings angled away from Harry. Harry didn't mind, not really, because he knew now that they weren't anywhere near close enough in terms of a relationship for Harry to have that privilege.

"Your nest is magnificent," Castiel said, his eyes busy taking in every little detail.

"Our nest, Castiel," Harry softly corrected. "I made the bed round for you. Gabriel says it's easier on the wings, though I don't really understand why since they're not really all that corporeal in that since, but, um, yeah."

The bed was lowered down into the floor, until it was sunk down just barely a foot beneath floor level, and the bed itself as well as much of the surrounding floor was padded with rugs and cushions and duvets. Magic was handy that way. Every corner of the room was filled with cushions and pillows. The windows and the sills had been adjusted so that one could sit on them, and had been padded appropriately. The light spilling in, as well as the soft glow from the oil lamps hanging from the ceiling created beautiful colours and patterns wherever they caught the beads or pieces of broken glass also hanging down from the beams.
Castiel stood very still, then he carefully removed his shoes as well as his socks. Harry had been the one to teach him all about tactile sensations.

"The rugs are wonderful," he declared.

Harry smiled. "I know. Come, let's try the bed."

He pulled Castiel with him, pulled off Castiel's trench coat as well as his jacket and tie, then…then Castiel took over. He relieved Harry of his thick jumper, then kneeled, so that Castiel was on the bed, while Harry still stood on the floor. Lifting one foot at the time, Castiel removed Harry's soft slippers and socks.

*Join me,* Castiel's voice echoed in Harry's head.

*Show me.*

So Castiel shifted backwards, wings splayed out, somehow never knocking into anything, simply shifting and reshaping every time they pressed into anything. He tugged Harry with him, until they were both kneeling on the bed.

*Lie down.*

Harry blinked, then smiled and lay down on his back. Castiel made a sound in the back of his throat, then shifted Harry until he was curled up on his side, facing Castiel. Then Castiel shifted, lying down as well, curled up so that his wings were pillow on the soft duvets and cushions Harry had lined the floor outside the bed with. Resting his forehead almost on Castiel's chest, Harry closed his eyes and drifted.

Castiel was there, and he pressed his forehead to Harry's, their hands grasping each other tightly.

*Do you know how—*

*Yes.*

They communed.

-x-

When Harry entered the kitchen early the next morning, just after dawn, having come in from outside, he was covered head to toe in blood.

"Whoah, Harry!" Sam exclaimed. He stood up hurriedly from the table, sending the chair he'd been sitting on clattering to the floor. "What happened? Are you all right, man?"

Harry blinked. "What are you doing here, Sam?"

For some reason, Sam's ears tinged red. "No, nothing, Never mind. What happened to you? Are you hurt?"

Harry shook his head. His knees were a bit sore, but that was all. Well, and his arms and shoulders were strained and his back was aching something awful. "What're you doing here?"

"Gabriel…invited me over." Sam cleared his throat. "Um. Yesterday. So, what's wrong? I mean, that's a lot of blood, and—"

"Thestral give birth?" Gabriel casually wondered, sauntering into the kitchen behind Harry. His feet
were bare and he was only wearing pyjamas bottoms and a tank top. "Thought you didn't have one due for a couple of weeks, yet."

Harry rolled his eyes. "Well, since this thestral had, like, six legs, I suspect divine interference of some kind," he muttered. "Your son is a sneaky bastard, Gabriel."

Gabriel blinked. "Six legs?"

"Mmmm. And wings. Feathered wings. The thestral looks like some strange Pegasus, or whatever."

"You have a son?" Sam came out with, looking all kinds of confused.

"Hello? Loki?" Gabriel rolled his eyes. "Anyway, I'm gonna go geld that prancing prat," he declared, then was gone.

"Geld, who? And what's a thestral?" Sam narrowed his eyes at Harry. "Who are you?"

Harry took a measured breath. "Okay," he murmured, then snapped his fingers. He hated cleaning up that way, but chances were he'd be standing around drenched in thestral blood and fluids for hours otherwise. "Sleipnir. The eight-legged horse Loki gave birth to. That's who Gabriel's off to geld, or something. A thestral is a magical horse-like being. They're skeletal, carnivores, winged and only visible to those who've witnessed death. I've been keeping them hidden, but now that you're in on the 'secret' I guess you'll start seeing them as well. As for me?" Harry shrugged. "I'm just Harry."

"Yeah, right."

"Bobby knows. Ask him. Please? I'm hungry."

"So talk and cook. Multitask." Sam didn't sound as if he was asking, either. The bloke was a hunter, all right, Harry thought with a mental sigh.

"Just, no more tests, please. Bobby already carved me open I don't know how many times."

So while keeping busy preparing and baking scones and muffins, Sam sat back down at the table, cradling a large mug of coffee, Harry told Sam a little about himself. There were a lot of interruptions, a lot of questions and clarifications, but Harry eventually got through his story. It was basically the same tale he'd told Bobby, but with a few more details. Wouldn't do to let the Master of Death business slip, after all.

Castiel trailed into the kitchen sometime during the explanation.

"Cas. You're, like, glowing," Sam murmured, his eyes wide with a sort of wide-eyed wonder he looked about twenty years too old for.

Castiel smiled a little. "I had a good night. Thank you, Harry."

Harry managed a grin. "You're welcome. You eating today?"

Castiel gave it a moment's worth of consideration, before nodding.

"So, the wands?" Sam wondered, prodding at Harry to start talking again, even though he was still sending Harry and Castiel both odd looks. With a small nod, Harry started up his tale again.

Just as Harry was pulling the scones and muffins out of the oven, the rumbling sounds of a car came from outside.
Sam grinned. "I swear, my brother's got some weird sixth sense when it comes to food."

Without missing a beat, Harry set the table for two more. "Castiel, could you let them in?"

"Of course."

Harry watched the angel wander off with a frown on his face.

"Harry?"

Harry shook his head. "Nothing. Well. Sort of. His wings are…a mess, to say the least. I should talk him into letting Gabriel groom them for him. It's starting to look painful, and I don't even have wings."

"Oh. I didn't know they needed stuff like that."

"They do. I've been grooming Gabriel for years now. It's the most obvious clue that they're flock animals: they can't fix their own wings."

"And most humans can't see them."

"Exactly." And even if they could, chances were the angels wouldn't trust the humans in question enough to let them close in the first place. Harry paused, then walked over and sat down next to Sam. "I… Could you tell Dean? About me?"

Sam's eyes were open, warm. They looked caring and honest, sort of like Hermione's had, once upon a time, before everything went to hell.

"You sure?" Sam wondered, voice low. "He can be a bit…"

Harry nodded. "You know. Bobby knows. Gabriel and Castiel do, obviously. I have this feeling that Dean needs to, as well. It's important."

"Are you, like, psychic?" Sam wondered, his eyes a bit narrowed.

Harry lifted a shoulder. "Not exactly. I get hunches, sometimes. Following them is beneficial."

Sam didn't get an opportunity to question him further, because Dean, Bobby and Castiel chose that moment to stomp inside the kitchen.

"Sweet!" Dean exclaimed. "Scones!"

Harry gave him a shy smile. "I thought you might approve."

"Dean does indeed favour food," Castiel gravely intoned, taking a seat next to Harry. "I would like that beverage again."

Harry's smile shifted into a grin. He snapped his fingers before he could think twice, magically preparing and fixing the drink in question for Castiel – hot chocolate with a bit of whipped cream as well as marshmallows. "Here— oh, bugger."

Dean was aiming his gun at him.

"I'm not a Trickster!" Harry blurted at the same times as Bobby rolled his eyes and Sam slapped a hand to his forehead.
"He's a wizard, Dean, lower your firearm," Castiel added.

"Not helping, Cas," Sam muttered. "Look, Dean, I was gonna tell you later anyway. Might as well do it now. Sit down. Eat."

"I'm not eating—"

"I watched him prepare the scones and the English muffins from scratch; he didn't even make them from a box. There's nothing 'Trickster' about them."

"Kid's a saviour in the kitchen," Bobby added, having already prepared a scone or two on his plate and was now busy fixing his coffee.

"And I didn't really snap Castiel's drink into existence, either," Harry said quietly. "I just mixed it really fast, s'all. I can't conjure food. Magic doesn't work that way."

"Magic?" Dean demanded loudly, scepticism and derision and disgust dripping from his tone and expression.

It really was the worst timing in the world. Outside, there was a loud commotion, like the sound of breaking windows and creaking wood and exploding stone. Then a horse started whining and neighing loud enough to wake the dead.

It was shortly followed by the sound of frantic shouting.

"Baby! Baby! Help me, Baby! Mama's gonna geld me! Help!"

Harry slumped down in his chair, closed his eyes, and groaned.

"Baby! Baby!" Sleipnir squealed. "Help!"

Sam's eyes were wide. "Is that…?"

"Sleipnir?" Harry muttered tiredly. "Oh, yeah."

"BABY!"

Harry took a deep breath. "Sam, Bobby, Castiel. Tell Dean. I—"

"HELP, BABY!"

"Bugger this," he mumbled, then vanished with a muted crack.

The scene he arrived to outside wasn't necessarily better. Gabriel was wielding a wicked sharp curved blade. He had trapped Sleipnir in a large circle of fire, and the horse was running around like crazy, screaming for help, the whole time trying to protect his bollocks. Not that anything was chasing the horse, because Gabriel himself was merely standing there, outside of the flaming circle, dark glower on his face, his arms crossed over his chest.

"Well, Winchester and company know all about your sordid past now," Harry murmured as he walked over to Gabriel. "And mine, sort of."

"Baby!" Sleipnir called out, catching sight of Harry almost immediately. His nostrils were flaring. "Protect me, Baby, Mama's gonna geld me!"

"I warned you," Gabriel calmly declared.
"But Flickerwing was waiting," the horse whined.

Harry was probably the only person in the world who was able to detect the faint glimmer of amusement in Gabriel's eyes, considering how well hidden it was behind all the displeasure and anger.

"Maybe you should only take one of his bollocks?" Harry asked seriously.

"No!" Sleipnir protested. "Baby, help me, not Mama!"

"Actually, I was thinking of taking his dick instead," Gabriel drawled coldly. "That way—"

"Sorry, Mama! I'm sorry, won't do it again, Mama! Please, I'm sorry!"

Sleipnir was shaking on his legs.

Gabriel rolled his eyes. "Oh, relax, you blubbering pony," he snapped. "I won't touch your bits, you featherbrain." With a snap of his fingers, the fire disappeared. "You should know better, Slippy."

The horse hung his ears, looking completely miserable. "Sorry, Mama."

"Hmmm, well." Gabriel rubbed a hand over his eyes. "Why don't you introduce us?"

"Really, Mama?" Sleipnir's ears perked up.

"Really," Gabriel said drily. Between one breath and the next, a horse stood where Gabriel had been. It was a large horse, almost as tall as Sleipnir, beautiful and pearl grey with shiny fur and a white star on its forehead. The horse nosed Harry's temple, then it galloped after Sleipnir in the direction of the forest.

"Dude. What the fuck."

Harry's shoulders slumped. "Seriously?" He turned around a met Dean's shocked stare. It was either that or break down into hysterical laughter. "I've got no idea. What do you want?"

"Um." Dean ran a hand through his hair. "You know what? It don't matter anymore. Sure as hell can't remember what it was in the first place," he mumbled to himself.

"Still hungry?" Harry wondered, coming up to stand next to Dean.

Dean snorted a bit in laughter. "Yeah, yeah. I think I am."

"Good. Because when I'm nervous, I cook obscene amounts of food. Ask Bobby."

Inside the kitchen, Bobby and Sam looked just as shell-shocked as Dean had, so Harry gathered they'd seen the little display outside as well. Only Castiel look unruffled. Then again, he was busy working his way through a muffin smothered in nutella.

"So...Sleipnir calls you 'Baby'?"

Harry glared at Sam. "I'm Gabriel's fledgling. To Sleipnir, that makes me 'Loki's' latest baby. Now shut up and eat. All of you."

Castiel looked at him with his wide, affronted eyes.

"Not you, Castiel. You're doing fine," Harry murmured. By reflex, his hand was reaching out to fix
the errant feathers on the ridge of the wing closest to him. By a reflex ingrained even deeper in Castiel, the wing immediately moved out of reach. Harry blinked, frozen with his hand hovering in the vicinity of Castiel's shoulder.

Castiel's glare was hard and cold. "Don't touch my wings, Harry."

"Sorry. It's just… I get sympathy aches just looking at them."

Castiel appeared a little appeased at that. "I'm fine."

"Except, you're not," Harry muttered. He reached for a scone, then drenched it in honey and cheese, before eating it.

"I won't let you—"

"Ask. Gabriel," Harry intervened before they could start up that particular discussion again. "Please."
Birth

Chapter Summary

In which Death drops by for a cup of tea.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"You don't remember, of course, but we've met several times by now."

Harry paused with his hand over the kettle. He hadn't felt a disturbance in the air the way he usually did when someone used magic – or something else – to suddenly appear in his house. There was just a sense of *nothingness*, instead. It was uncanny, and sent shivers down Harry's spine.

Death sat comfortably in one of the chairs around the kitchen table, both eyebrows raised. "I mean when you were a baby, of course. And when I took the guise of your late headmaster."

"Tea?" Harry asked, because he wasn't sure what else to say. What else he could say.

"Oh, yes, don't mind if I do."

So Harry quietly poured the steaming water into mugs, then opened the cupboard that held all his teas.

"Vanilla, if you don't mind. A dash of honey."

"Crumpets?"

"Lovely, thank you."

Harry sat down at the table after setting it and serving them both. He didn't say anything, and neither did Death – holy freaking *cock, Death* was sitting at his kitchen table *drinking tea*!

"This is the birth of a new era," Death said at some point after having eaten his crumpet. Harry was still working his way through his.

"Oh?"

"Mmmm. You are unique. I've never before seen one like you. I must say, I quite like it."

Harry sat a little straighter, small frown furrowing his brow. "So, you know who I am? What I am?"

Death raised an eyebrow. "Quite."

"Oh."

"Master of Death," he drawled through a longsuffering sight. "Though, to be frank, I had hoped you would be older."

"I'll grow and learn," Harry replied. "I'll be older when I'm ready."
"Yes, I dare say you will be." Death took a sip of his tea, then put his mug back down on the table. "Tell me, has that esteemed archangel of yours taught you how to shift realms?"

Harry shook his head. "What do you mean?"

"You guide the souls of the dead, boy. But you can't see me, or my reapers, can you?"

"I've never seen you before, so, no. What do your reapers look like?"

"What you need them to look like."

Harry nodded. "Makes sense."

"I thought so. Now." Death grabbed his cane and stood up. "Pay attention," he said, and clapped his hands.

For a second that seemed to last a lifetime, Harry couldn't breathe. Then he could, except the world was wrong. "It's like I'm looking through the Veil," he managed to say through a throat that was too thick and narrow at the same time.

Death nodded. "Not an altogether incorrect allegory. This is as if you had stepped through it, though I wouldn't advise you to try that. It gets ever so messy."

Harry nodded. When he walked over to the window to look outside, he saw a woman in a suit who smiled and waved at him before disappearing. "Was that one of your reapers?"

"Yes. You need to know how to shift into this realm, Master of Death. You've done well enough without this ability until this point, but from here and onwards, I should like you to do it like this instead. It's less messy, you understand. Certainly a lot less eye-catching, and under the radar of those who might be watching."

Death placed his hand in the centre of Harry's chest and pushed.

It was worse coming back. Way worse. It was like he'd been dead and now he wasn't. Breathing, living, seeing, hearing, his heart starting to pump all at once. It was like being born all over again, except this time you already knew how easy and painless it was to live because you'd already done it before. Harry fell to the floor in shock, then decided to just stay there. He could do this, so long as he was just lying here, down on the floor. Death crouched down next to him.

"It's because part of you is still human. You'll get used to it. You can replicate the process, I trust?"

"Oh, yeah," Harry panted. "I've never felt anything like that before. Easy as pie. Promise."

"You're a smart lad. I like that about you."

It only took a short struggle, but then Harry was sitting up instead of lying flat on the floor. He wet his lips. "So, I was hoping… Do you know why they call me Master of Death? I mean, death is absolute, y'know? How can one person be the master of it? It's not you they mean, right?"

"I know, yes. And, no."

Harry's shoulders slumped a little. "That's the tone that's usually followed up by silence or the hated: but I won't tell."

"Smart boy." Death smiled. "I will see you again. Thank you for the tea. Oh. If I commission you, will you bake me some more of those absolutely scrumptious crumpets?"
Harry laughed. "Sure. Come by anytime. They're free."

Chapter End Notes

**Prompt(er) #2:** Harry and Death being foodies together, by [fateofshadow](#).
Chapter Summary

In which Harry drops in on the Winchesters.

Ever since Harry had found out about angels and demons and the fact that the Apocalypse was lurking just around the corner, Gabriel hadn't felt all that comfortable with letting him out of sight, much less out of the house, alone. But fact was that Harry was the Master of Death, and certain responsibilities came with the title.

Harry had been practicing sword fighting again. He was almost managing to stand his ground these days, despite Gabriel steadily upping the ante every time Harry was starting to feel as if got the hang of it. But there was a cloud on the horizon that kept distracting him until, finally, he couldn't ignore it any more.

Harry dropped his sword and turned around.

"Harry?" Gabriel asked, putting a hand on Harry's shoulder.

The blue text flashed beneath his eyelids. He sort of knew the letters, but not enough words.

"Something's…happening. I need to go."

"Harry, no—"

"Something is dying," Harry interrupted. "My presence is required. The reapers can't handle it, not this time."

"I'm coming with you, then," Gabriel decided, as if it was as easy as that, and maybe it was.

"Where?"

Harry closed his eyes and focused on what his ring was telling him. There was a pull, a sense of direction, but not a clear location. So Harry focused, drew on his magic that was feeling less and less like the magic he'd had as a kid these days, then released it.

They reappeared outside of an ordinary looking diner, were it not for the fact that most of the windows were smashed in. Without pause, Harry strode forward, Gabriel hot on his heels. Harry never noticed that Gabriel had materialised his blade. All he could see were the black shadows creeping along the floor, all he could feel was the struggle of a soul so twisted and different from anything human as it fought to remain in its dying body.

Harry didn't see Dean or Castiel or Sam. He forgot Gabriel was there.

Harry saw Famine, and he saw Death standing behind him.

"I can take him," Harry offered in a low voice. "I mean, if you…" he trailed off, not really sure what to say. Or, do, for that matter, because that, right there, was Death. He was first and absolute, and whatever role Harry was playing and whatever he was becoming… It had nothing on Death.

"You're late."
Harry couldn't hold back his grin. "Don't you know, a wizard is never late?"

Death raised an eyebrow. "Except, you're not a wizard, are you, Master of Death?"

"I used to be."

"Mmmm, yes. Maybe." Death cocked his head, then offered a thin smile. "Next time we meet, bring crumpets," Death said. He pulled out a pocket watch. "Now."

"Okay," Harry said, and reached out with his hand to pull Famine's soul from his crumbling body. The soul wasn't the bright light he'd come to associate with human souls, but rather it was like a perfect sphere shot through with colour, not giving off any light at all.

"War's looked something like this, too," Harry murmured even as he pulled a black bag from thin air that he placed the soul in.

"You are changing, Master of Death."

Harry looked up sharply. "I know I'm not technically human any more, but—"

Death smiled a little. "You must not ask. It will come to you. Now. When you have collected Pestilence's soul, come find me and I will lend you my ring."

Harry nodded. "Okay, I will, thanks."

"You are a good boy, Master of Death," Death declared, then he vanished.

Light and colour and sound came rushing back. Harry gasped, his knees buckling, as the sensations overwhelmed him.

"—just nutty— Holy crap!" Dean exclaimed as Harry appeared out of thin air in front of where Sam was standing.

Sam caught Harry by reflex before he could fall, and Harry spent a few seconds leaning back against the hunter, learning how to breathe and function in the realm of the living again. "Hi, guys," Harry whispered.

"Where'd you come from?" Dean exclaimed.

Harry managed a weak grin. "Oh, you know, just hanging out."

Gabriel appeared from one of the booths in the diner, his arm around Castiel's waist. Castiel looked decidedly worse for wear, with dark circles under his eyes, his wings in an absolute disarray and blood spattered over the collar of his shirt.

"Death?" Gabriel asked.

Harry cleared his throat. "Might have been here, yeah," he mumbled. Sam's arm was still around his chest, but Harry's legs didn't feel entirely stable yet. He hated shifting realms. Coming back to the 'living' side of it always left him drained.

"Hang on, the Horseman Death was here? And we didn't notice?" Dean asked, sounding both angry and horrified.

"He's Death, Dean," Harry explained. "Death is always around, and you can never see it. Death isn't really a Horseman in that sense, because, in a way, Death is always near even when Lucifer doesn't
release the Horsemen. It's why he had to do a specific summoning to raise Death. I think, personally, that Death might be a little pissed off with Lucifer for thinking he can control him. He can't, by the way, no one can. Death is absolute.” Harry pursed his lips. "Well, most of the time."

"So, now what?" Sam asked from behind Harry. Not that Sam was hidden, or anything, because Sam was easily about a foot or so taller than Harry.

Dean looked pained. "We lock you up, Sammy."

Sam flinched. "Dean—"

"How much did you drink?" Dean asked, stone-faced. "You ganked the demons, pulled them from a frigging Horseman. You gotta be detoxed, man, and you know it."

"What did you drink?" Harry wondered, twisting around until he could look into Sam's eyes. "Oh." Sam's mouth was surrounded by dried blood. Hell, the lower half of his face was stained with dried blood.

"Demon blood."

"And it's addicting like nothing you ever seen before," Gabriel filled in.

Harry wet his lips. "I was…kind of hooked on Dreamless Sleep, for a while. Withdrawal was a bitch."
They landed in Harry’s sitting room in a flurry of feathers, limbs and shouting.

“*My car!*”

“*Your car’ll be fine, hotshot.*”

“I can take you back.”

Harry tuned out the loud argument that had started almost before they materialised in his sitting room and turned his focus on Sam, who was still right next to him, still with an arm around him to keep him up. Now, Harry could feel the tremors shaking Sam, see the way his pupils were dilated, and, if he focused, he could almost *smell* the scent of demon *inside* Sam. The scent of the blood was thick and cloying, almost making him sick. Harry wasn’t sure why he hadn’t done that before, back at the diner, but it probably wasn’t all that important. But now that he could, he was starting to feel crowded and jittery, and some of that fear that had stricken him when he was attacked at Bobby’s started trickling back. Harry really didn’t like demons.

Instead, he placed his hands on Sam’s neck because the blue text flashing behind his eyes was pushing him in another direction. “Come with me.”

Sam started, at once alert and suspicious. “What? Harry? What’s going— *Hey! What’re you doing, man?*”

Harry managed a small grin, feeling rather proud of himself at the way he had seamlessly transported the two of them without that jolting, disturbing feeling apparition usually brought. He was getting better; all that practice with Gabriel had certainly paid off.

“This is my and Castiel’s nest,” he said instead, and not without a hefty piece of pride. Sam’s eyes were a bit wide and wild, his forehead furrowed.

“This is what he was doing with all the blankets and stuff?”

Harry nodded, another spike of pride going through him. “Yeah.”

“It’s… I mean, no offence, man, it looks nice. Just, you know, a bit…padded, maybe?” Sam babbled, running a hand through his matted hair.

Harry chuckled. “Yeah, I still have got basically no clue why we did it, but I kinda like it. Now, come on.” He took Sam’s hand, tugging lightly to get Sam to follow him.

“Um. Seriously, Harry? What’s going on?”

“I need you to lie down.”
“In your bed? You want me to lie down in your bed? No offence, dude, but you’re not really my type. Besides, I…”

Frowning, Harry looked over his shoulder. “What d’you mean? It’s easier if you lie down. I’ve no idea how you’re going to react, or, well, anything really. I’ve just got a hunch that says I’ll most likely be able to clear the demon taint right out of your system. But I don’t know—”

Sam jerked his hand out of Harry’s grasp. “What?”

“I said—”

“I heard. But, it’s just, why couldn’t Cas? Heck, why not Gabe, for that matter? He’s an archangel and way more powerful than you. No offence, dude, but…you know.”

Harry frowned, then shrugged. “I’ve no idea. Maybe they can, maybe angels are as diverse as humans and the two of them don’t have the necessary training or something. I honestly don’t know. But I’m not an angel, you know. I’m… Maybe I’m not technically human any more, but I’m pretty sure I can do this.” Harry flashed a shy grin. “It has to do with why Gabriel took an interest in me in the first place, so even though I kinda want to tell you, I’m not really supposed to? Gabriel gets ever so cross, y’know.”

Sam pursed his lips, eyes a little narrowed. “That the same stuff that had you dropping in on us just now and chatting up Death?”

The tips of Harry’s ears went a little red. “Um. Maybe?”

“Uh-huh,” Sam mumbled, not sounding all that convinced or as if he was even close to putting the subject to rest. “So, that’s what you whammied me out of your living room for? To put me through rehab?”

“Basically.”

Sam nodded, then asked, “Will it hurt?”

“I think it’ll burn, really bad. All I can really promise is that you won’t die.”

“All you can promise’?” Sam mocked, snorting. “That’s kinda big, and, y’know, usually the only thing doctors and stuff can’t guarantee.”

“Well,” Harry said, voice carefully even and detached even as he looked Sam straight in the eye, “That happens to be just about the only thing I can guarantee.”

“How can you promise that?”

Harry looked away for a second. “Let’s call it mine and Gabriel’s best kept secret. Do you remember the time Castiel and I took off flying the first time we met?”

“Yeah.” Sam frowned. “He went all archangel on you, nearly blasted mine and Dean’s brains out.”

“I healed you and Dean then, you know. Gabriel was angry because we went outside the wards. Out there, if the demons or the other angels realised what I’m… What I represent, what it means for the Apocalypse— They’d want me dead so fast not even I’d see it coming. Probably.”

“Which side are you on? Heaven or Hell?”

Harry opened his mouth, the automatic ‘Heaven’ dying on his tongue. Cocking his head to the side,
Harry narrowed his eyes. The text was coiling lazily around his spine, warm and slow and bright. It was what the change was all about, wasn’t it? The whole scale tipping its balance in a new direction entirely. “Earth,” he murmured. “I’m with Earth.”

Sam blinked, then he grinned. “You know what? I think I’m with Earth, too.”

“Y’know, the bible is all about the Holy Trinity, isn’t it? So if there’s a Heaven and a Hell, then there’s got to be a third, right? I’m guessing, in this case, that third ‘power’ is Earth.” It resonated within him with a sense of rightness Harry hadn’t been entirely prepared for.

“So, now that we’ve established that we’re on the same side, are you going to let me help you?”

Sam shifted his shoulders. It made Harry uncomfortably aware of how easily Sam could, probably and most likely would, overpower him in a fight. Unless Harry resorted to magic, that is. “That doesn’t really tell me anything about what kind of powers you have, though.”

“Earthly powers?”

“Which means?”

“I can tie your life to the Earth and ensure you can’t die until I’m done with you?” Harry chanced, a hopeful smile on his face.

“Which means you’re not gonna tell me.”

“Not yet, no. I’m…not done yet. There’s still something in me that’s changing. It’s strange, looking back, and realising that you’re not the same person you were ten years ago any more, even though I had everything back then that I do now, only something along the way changed.” Harry rubbed his hands together. “So, down on the bed, on your back, if you don’t mind.”

“I do mind,” Sam protested sullenly, but he did as ordered, albeit with obvious reluctance.

“Is it okay if I need to sit on you?” Harry asked after Sam was stretched out as comfortably as he could be on his back. Harry was perched on the edge of the bed. “I need to have my hands on your heart and mouth, I think. No. I definitely need that,” he murmured. “Shirts off, I guess.”

“Why do I get the horrible feeling you’re just making this up as you go along?”

Harry flashed a grin even as he was busy conjuring a bowl out of thin air that he filled with sand, dirt, sea water and water from the tarn outside his house. “I’m sure I’ve no idea what you’re talking about. Oh, before I forget. D’you want me to fetch Dean?”

Sam paused in the process of unbuttoning his shirt. “I. No. Not yet. Just, after? Get him up here as soon as you’re done.”

“Promise.”

“Good.” Sam tugged his shirt off, handed it to Harry who folded it up and placed it beside the bed, then did the same with the t-shirt Sam’d been wearing underneath. “Why d’you need me to take my shirt off?”

Harry shrugged a little as he moved to sit on the bed next to Sam’s head. “I. No. Not yet. Just, after? Get him up here as soon as you’re done.”

“Promise.”

“Good.” Sam tugged his shirt off, handed it to Harry who folded it up and placed it beside the bed, then did the same with the t-shirt Sam’d been wearing underneath. “Why d’you need me to take my shirt off?”

Harry shrugged a little as he moved to sit on the bed next to Sam’s head. A paintbrush materialised in his hand. “I dunno.”

“You don’t—”
“Look, maybe I could’ve done it with your clothes on, I’ve honestly got no idea. But.” Here Harry paused, dipped the brush in the mud he’d mixed in the bowl, then started drawing symbols on Sam’s chest. “At least, this way, I don’t mess up your clothes more than they already are.”

“I see your point. What’re you doing?”

“Working on a hunch,” Harry murmured, distracted by the pattern he was slowly creating, all the while being subtly influenced by the part of him that wasn’t quite human any more, the part of him that he suspected was the very essence of what made the Master of Death become the Master of Death. The part that was older than time, the part that had been created for one purpose, and one purpose only.

Harry tried not thinking about it too hard.

“The heart is what makes humans so unique, you know? Some say they do what their hearts tell them to do, others work on instincts and gut feelings, others still use cold logic and scientific facts. Close your eyes.” Sam did, and Harry moved his brush up to gingerly write runes exactly where they needed to be. “So, if we’re going to make you all human again, we need to work with what makes humans human. In your case, the love you have for your brother, the urge to do right and protect the ones that need protecting. A part of you craves revenge, justice and vengeance. A part of you is filled with hatred, righteous fury and envy. You have dreams, desires and wishes just like everyone else. All of this, it makes you a perfect human being, Sam. We’re perfect because we’re flawed.”

In a smooth, calm voice, Harry continued, “The angels and the demons, they’ve never really understood that. They seem to think that because we’re so flawed and fractured, then we can never reach perfection. I don’t really agree with that sentiment. But because they think that way, they seem to gain some power over us – or at least the illusion of power. Demons make deals, and angels look down their noses. I think, personally, that when humans rise up and take pride in what they are, then demons won’t have anything to offer in terms of deals or powers. If more people were like you and Dean, then the angels wouldn’t be able to gain foothold on Earth any more, either. It’s why I suspect God wasn’t quite done with the universe he created, because Heaven and Hell are too different, too at odds with each other to ever truly reach a balance. Enter a third power, however, and balance might be obtained.”

Sam was breathing slowly in and out, his eyes closed and his face relaxed. “Does Gabe know you think that?”

“He suspects, at the very least.” Harry dipped his brush in the bowl one last time, then focused on drawing a large symbol in the centre of Sam’s forehead. “Sometimes, I suspect that it was God who sent him to go Pagan in the first place, to prepare him for, for…”

“For you? Isn’t that a bit egoistic?”

“Maybe. But I needed a mix between Heaven and Earth – Pagan – to ground me, to train me. Who’d I be apprenticed to if Gabriel hadn’t become Loki only to become Gabriel again? God may be missing these days, but back then when Gabriel skipped out of Heaven, God was still around.”

“You saying he couldn’t hide himself from God, but that he could make all the other angels think he was gone? Yeah, I guess I can see that.”

“I’ve thought about it a lot.” With a last swirling spiral, Harry closed the circle he’d been drawing around Sam’s navel.

“It kinda burns,” Sam murmured moments later.
“Yeah, sorry about that. It’s gonna get worse, though. A lot worse.” Harry put the bowl aside, then glanced at the paintbrush and transformed it into a supple leather disc. “Open up,” he said, then placed it between Sam’s teeth. “Bite down on that.”

For a moment, Harry simply sat back and regarded his work. Every last symbol and rune on Sam’s body was complete, there were no loose threads or mistakes. Beneath that, beneath Sam’s skin Harry could see the sluggish, struggling movements of the demon blood in him, no longer itching to take over, rather, instead fighting against the magic Harry was now working on the blood of the cells it was possessing. Scooting closer until he was kneeling next to Sam’s head, Harry placed his palms over Sam’s heart and eyes, softly intoning, “close your eyes,” when Sam continued to stare at him with a wide open gaze.

It was kind of like when he exorcised the demon possessing Bobby, except it was nothing at all like that. The light coming out of his hands was more like the sun reflected on the surface of a lake, rather than blinding whiteness. It chased through every orifice of Sam’s body, cleansing and purifying until there was nothing left but human blood, pure and uncontaminated. Dimly, he was aware of Sam screaming behind his gag, of Sam struggling and twisting against the invisible bonds Harry was holding him down with almost like an afterthought.

“You are of this Earth, Samuel Winchester,” Harry murmured as he sent a last, pulsing wave of magic – pure and unadulterated – through Sam. When he was done, Sam was soaked in sweat, shaking and trembling and pulling in panicked breaths through his nose.

As if he were soothing one of his skittish thestrals, Harry ran a hand through Sam’s hair until his eyes went from wide and unseeing to heavy lidded and calm. By then, his jaw had relaxed enough that Harry could remove the leather disc Sam had been biting down on hard enough to leave a lasting dental impression on.

“Hey,” Harry murmured, running a soothing hand down Sam’s throat as he sent a wave of healing magic through the man. It made Sam exhale in bliss. “How d’you feel?”

“Like I could fly. Man, I. Feel. Awesome.”

Harry grinned. “Good, good. Humour me for a second, but what colour are Gabriel’s underwear?”

“Not wearing any,” Sam slurred. “You forgot to do the laundry.”

Harry’s grin widened. “I did forget, yeah.”

“Dean’s got blue. Cas’… Cas’ wearing something black and white, and you’re green and—”

“Yeah, that’s good enough, Sam.”

Just as Harry conjured a new bowl with clean, lukewarm water along with a towel to wipe the dirt off Sam, Sam murmured, “Purple towel.”

“How do you feel here?” Harry tapped a finger in the centre of Sam’s forehead. “Inside, right here?”

“Open,” Sam murmured. “Sore. Stretched thin and tight and open.”

“That’s what I thought,” Harry said as he calmly started to wipe Sam’s chest and stomach clean, careful not to drip any of the dirty water on the bed. Magic was neat like that.

“Can feel you, you do that thing. Tingles. S’kinda warm and fluttery.”
“I think, Sam, that Azazel chose you and the others for his little experiments because you were already likely to develop psychic abilities—”

“Dean!” Sam gasped, interrupting Harry, clutching at his arm. “You promised!”

Harry had the feeling that Sam wasn’t really aware of half of what was going on, much less what either one of them was saying. “I did.”

Harry sent out a tendril of his mind, searching for Castiel. It was easier, finding him, especially since they had started communing almost every other day.

_Harry? Where are you? Dean is very vexed about yours and Sam’s abrupt disappearance. We could hear him scream._

“I, I can feel you! Is, is that Cas?”

Harry smoothed a hand through Sam’s hair. “Yeah. Shhh.” _We’re in our nest. Bring Dean, please. And Gabriel._

“Cas’ gonna bring Dean?”

“Yeah. He’ll be here any minute, now.”

“Good. Good. Dean’s awesome. He can make everything all right.”

The door clattered open, and Dean rushed inside, closely followed by Castiel and Gabriel. “Sammy!”

“Dean’s got blue boxer briefs and yellow socks with kittens on them,” Sam blurted.

Harry laughed a little. “Yeah, that’s good, Sam. Now close your eyes so I can clean your face.”

Sam did close his eyes, but he kept turning his head around. “Dean?”

“Dean’s right here, Sam,” Harry said as he carefully washed Sam’s face clean. The bed dipped a little as Dean stepped down on it, then sagged as he sat down next to Sam’s head on the other side of the bed.

“Right here, Sammy,” Dean said, and he sounded only a little choked up.

“Dean! You’ll make it better.” Sam reached out with a hand and blindly patted Dean’s thigh. “Harry, he fixed me and I’m awesome, and Gabe’s not wearing any underwear, and Cas’ are made of organic cotton, and—”

“Shhh,” Harry whispered. Sam closed his mouth with a smack.

Dean was gripping Sam’s hand tight with one of his as he reached out to brush Sam’s hair out of his face. “It’s gonna be all right, Sammy.”

“What did you do, Harry?” Gabriel murmured from behind Harry.

“I cleaned out the demon blood. All of it.”

“He’s wide open.”

“I noticed.”
Dean fixed a glare on them. “What’s going on?” he demanded. He startled a little when Castiel came to perch behind him, glancing down at Sam over his shoulder. “What the fuck did you do to Sam?”

Harry placed a palm over Sam’s forehead. “I removed the demon blood. All of it. The bit Azazel gave him as a baby worked as a, a vaccine, almost. Made him immune to most of the nasty side effects it’d give anyone else who’d try to drink it. I’m pretty sure it’d be just as poisonous to Sam now as it is to everyone else.” Harry paused, frowning. “That’s the good news.”

“The good news?” Dean grit out. “How the fuck—”

“—Bobby’s gonna call, and Gabe’s got black socks with red stripes, and there’s a hole in Cas’s left sock and there’s a Chamber in the basement and a soul—” Sam blurted, as if the effort of having kept silent had become too much for him. Or as if the temptation of speaking was irresistible.

“Very good, Sam,” Harry interrupted. “Can you feel my hand?”

“Yeah. S’good.”

Harry focused a bit of magic to come to his hand, making Sam gasp. “What’s behind my hand?”

“Too open!”

“Shh, it’s all right. Why don’t you try to put some blinds up, or close the curtains? You can tie the knot as tight as you need.”

“What the fuck is going on?” Dean growled.

“Best guess?” Gabriel offered. “I’m betting Sam would’ve been precognitive with or without the demon blood. Happens in humans sometimes, no one really knows why. But you know all about that, don’t you, Dean? Missouri. Pam.”

“Silence. Now,” Harry filled in, then closed his eyes. “I want you to focus on Dean, Sam. Can you do that? On what Dean feels like. He’s not open—”

“Still, quiet, dark, calm, awesome, cool,” Sam rattled out.

“Yeah, now, try and be exactly like him.”

“Easy,” Sam drawled, then he was clutching just as tightly onto Dean’s hand as Dean had been clinging to his all along. “Dean?”

“Right here, Sammy.”

“Do you see what Dean looks like right here, where I have my hand on you?” Harry asked. Sam nodded. “Try and make this spot, right here, look exactly like Dean’s, okay?”

“Can’t! Not, not—”

“You don’t need to seal it shut, Sam, just close it. Then, when you need to, you can still open it again. I promise.”

“Okay,” Sam agreed, then he was frowning really hard as he closed, what a teacher of Harry’s had once referred to as, his third eye.

“Then, when you’re done, you can sleep. How’s that?”
“Awesome,” Sam breathed, forehead furrowed as he concentrated on what he was doing.

-I-

“I reiterate: what the fuck, people?”

Sam was basically conked out, but there was a frown on his face that Harry didn’t like. Scooting closer to where Dean had pulled Sam’s head into his lap, Harry placed his hand back on Sam’s forehead, then urged him deeper into sleep. Little by little, the frown disappeared and smoothed out.

“I purged him, Dean,” Harry explained as he picked up the damp towel and set about cleaning up the last traces of the dirt that he’d missed.

“From the demon blood,” Dean stated. Harry nodded. “How?”

Harry shrugged. “I don’t know, really. I focused on everything that makes him human. Used that as a motivator. Sam helped, mostly on a subconscious level, but if he hadn’t wanted to change, then it wouldn’t have worked.” Of course, Sam hadn’t known that. Sometimes, not knowing made certain actions much easier to fulfil. “He was a baby, right? When Azazel—”

“Yeah. Cut to the chase, Harry. My patience’s wearing a little thin here.”

“My best guess is that the demon blood latched on to the tiny, undeveloped part of him that could, one day, have the ability to develop into something psychic. He could’ve gone through his entire life without ever knowing. A lot of people do. But, well. Sam wasn’t really given the chance to develop at his own pace. When I burned the demon taint out of his system, I. I don’t know. Maybe I ‘woke’ that part of him up, or maybe it was always awake, simply busy battling with the demon. I don’t know.”

“He’s psychic?” Dean demanded, voice low.

“Are you wearing yellow socks with kittens on them?”

Dean scoffed, but he didn’t outright deny it, either.

“Dean… I honestly don’t know how much of this he’s going to remember when he wakes up. I don’t even know if he’ll be able to ‘open’ that inner eye again.”

“Whatever you did, though, I hope you know what you’re getting yourself into, kids,” Gabriel interrupted suddenly, voice low and hard.

“Gabriel?”

“Kiddo, you just neutralised Hell’s most powerful weapon in their fight against Heaven. Without the demon blood, there ain’t no way in hell that Lucifer’s gonna be able to ride his ass without burning Sam up like a firecracker on the fourth of July, much less a fight to the death with Michael.” Gabriel’s grin was grim and bloodthirsty at the same time. “Just hope you know what you just got yourself into, ‘cause this is gonna get real nasty from now on. People’re gonna wonder who changed Sam, gonna want to know who’s got the power to turn a potential Vessel of Hell into just another ordinary mook. They’re gonna start looking, digging into every little thing that stand out until they find out exactly where the road took a sharp turn to the left. They ain’t gonna be happy, s’all I’m saying.”

“Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned/ Nor Hell a fury like a woman scorned.”
There was a moment of silence, then Dean patted Castiel on the shoulder. “You almost got it there, Cas.”

“So, what was the bit with the soul and Chamber about?” Dean asked after his phone started ringing, Bobby’s name flashing across the display. “Since wonder boy here got the rest of it right.” With a raised eyebrow, Dean flipped his phone open. “Yeah, hey, Bobby.”

Harry cleared his throat. “Yes, quite,” he mumbled. “I’ll just pop down to the Chamber—”

“Oh, hush, you!” Gabriel snapped out, exasperated grin playing about his lips.

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