### Home

**Summary**

Left homeless after his parents' death, seventeen year-old Castiel is living a life of crime and prostitution. Until a run-in with a certain cop flips his world upside down.

**Notes**

I got the idea for this AU last night and I'm having a lot of fun writing it. Hope you enjoy it.
The night air is thick, hazy with smoke and sweat and something else that Castiel can't quite place. Maybe vomit, or a dead body, or whatever hopelessness smells like. Or maybe it's just the strange aftertaste of those drugs his last client paid him with. At least it was good while it lasted. He's already craving more.

Drugs are a fairly new habit to Castiel. He hates himself for falling so low, but if he's honest, he already hated himself — so what's the difference? Besides, the drugs have their benefits. They mask the pain and make him forget about the bruises on his thighs. For a while, anyway. And then the hungry animal in his gut starts screaming for more. More drugs, more pain, more something. More anything.

Or nothing at all. Some nights he curls up in a pile of broken shingles and doesn't move for hours. Not sleeping, not eating. Not caring. He knows it's a bad idea, but not for the reasons that most people would have. He doesn't care that he's cold and hungry and probably bleeding. The only downfall to sleeping in the trash is that he'll get less clients if he smells like shit.

And that starts a whole chain of misery. No clients, no money — no money, no cheap motel room — no cheap motel room, no shower. And right back to the "no clients" part. Not to mention no food, which kind of sucks ass.

He knows that his logic isn't completely foolproof. There are a select few who don't care how clean he is. But those are the men who take what they want and walk away without paying, and those are the kind that Castiel actively tries to avoid.

Thankfully, the whole sleeping-in-dumpsters thing doesn't happen often. Most nights, Castiel has a shower, a (probably infested) warm bed, and a complimentary breakfast the next morning. Livin' the life. And of course, there's the rare instances that a client wants him for the whole night. Those nights are the worst. Castiel hates falling asleep in a sweaty stranger's arms. So he tries to avoid those situations — he's pretty creative, after all.

Once, he even broke into an old lady's house while she was on vacation. He didn't take anything too noticeable, just used the shower and "borrowed" a little bit of food. He's sort of proud that he never got caught.

But tonight, nothing special is going to happen. Castiel will hang around the usual gay bar, waiting for a client. And he'll make money — simple as that.

He breathes in the polluted air and opens his eyes.

It's not much of a view, but it's home. The hellhole of a bar is located behind several other buildings, so you have to walk down a cliché dark alleyway to reach the doors. Castiel's standing next to those doors, facing the building that sits on the other side of the alley. It's such a narrow space; he can span it with his arms. But again, it's home.

He sighs, staring blankly at the brick wall in front of him. Any second, a sleazy-looking man will saunter towards him, say something like "Aren't you pretty?", and the rest is obvious. It's not enjoyable, and it's certainly not Castiel's idea of a good life. But it's this, or God knows what. Castiel doesn't want to take any chances.

However, he's pleasantly surprised when he sees a well-dressed, unfairly attractive man approaching
him.

Castiel can't remember the last time he actually felt attracted to a would-be client. The man is tall, blonde, and wide-shouldered — not the sort of guy you want to mess with. The sharp business suit and tie only adds to his appeal, and yeah, he's definitely looking at Castiel. If this man's wallet looks as nice as he does, tonight might actually be a good night.

That doesn't mean he's going to enjoy the sex; sometimes the nicest looking people are the shittiest in bed. But money is money, and that's all he cares about.

Castiel's so focused on the prospect of cash that he completely forgets the meaning of caution.

He stands up a little straighter when the man comes closer — those ridiculously green eyes are making him weak in the knees. Castiel's never seen somebody walk with such confidence and power (especially into a gay bar, of all places). And then the man speaks, and his voice is just as deep and syrupy as Castiel imagined.

"Why aren't you at home, kid? It's freezing out here."

Wait a minute. That's not what Castiel was expecting him to say; not at all. What happened to the cheesy pickup lines and premature groping? Why does this man care if he's at home? Something's not right, and it's making Castiel extremely uncomfortable. Normal people aren't nice to street whores. This is some kind of psychopath who's going to kill him any second.

But he has to keep up his courageous facade. "I don't have a home," he spits, feeling a spark of anger flickering in his chest. The look on the man's face is one of pure sympathy, and that's not right, either. Nobody cares about Castiel; they're not allowed to. He won't have it. Emotions like love and compassion do nothing but destroy.

"What about your parents?" the man asks, and his voice is gentle — kind, even. "Dead," Castiel mutters, the anger inside him turning into dulled sorrow. He fights to think of a snarky comment; something to help him regain his dignity. It's out of his mouth before he has time to think. "I've never met a guy with a fetish for being nice to hookers."

The brief flash of shock on the man's face says it all, and the grim look of realization that follows says even more.

Castiel panics. This man isn't here for sex; it's all so obvious now. The suit, the professional attitude, the way he walks. Castiel knows even as the man reaches for the shiny badge in his pocket — he's a cop.

"I think you should come with me," the officer says quietly.

Castiel's automatic response is to panic. He's never, ever been caught by the cops — why did he have to be so stupid? Even spending the night cold and wet in a pile of garbage seems like a much better option than being hauled off to jail. His hands are shaking and he wonders if he's going to have an anxiety attack. It's too late to run away; there's no way he'll make it past the officer and down the alley without being caught.

He's royally screwed.

"I didn't do anything wrong," he manages to choke out, and immediately regrets it. Not only is it a flat-out lie, it's pretty much the lamest sounding thing he's ever said. But the cop hardly looks angry. His eyes are still eerily gentle, and it's messing with Castiel's head.
"I'm not taking you to jail, just calm down," the cop says firmly, and Castiel is pretty sure there's no way he actually means that. Unless this is some kind of super illegal sex-in-return-for-not-arresting-you thing (a concept which is, unfortunately, not entirely offputting to Castiel).

"If I'm not going to jail, why do I have to go with you?" he asks, surprised at how bold he sounds. The cop looks him up and down, but not in a way that's lustful or greedy. "You're starving, kid," he says, like it's the simplest thing in the world. "I'll buy you something to eat, and you can answer a few of my questions."

Castiel laughs. He looks the officer in the eye and laughs at him, because nobody is nice to Castiel—especially the police. "You're joking," he says. The cop shakes his head, those gentle eyes completely solemn. "Why would I joke about something like this?"

Castiel snorts. "Because approximately 97% of the people I've met enjoy seeing me in pain."

The officer's expression doesn't change. "Guess I'm in the 3%," he replies, and Castiel's starting to think maybe—just maybe—he's serious. It's now that he realizes just how hungry he is, and food sounds really nice. Besides, it's not like anything bad is going to happen to him (or so he tries to convince himself). It's a cop; he'll be fine.

His resolve starts to crumble, and before he knows it he's mumbling an "okay, fine" and sealing his fate with this man.

"I'm Dean," the officer announces, looking too damn pleased with himself (it's immature, but a tiny bit cute). Castiel really wishes he'd stop being so friendly; this is a legal matter and nothing more. They're not friends, barely even acquaintances. But Dean is kind of a nice name, and he has a kind of nice face. Okay, he's got a kind of nice everything. But Castiel Novak definitely does not have a crush on the man who'll probably end up arresting him. No way in hell.

Dean motions to him and starts walking towards the road. It gives Castiel an unsettling feeling, like he's leaving home forever. He doesn't like being out in the open. But ignoring orders from a police officer doesn't seem like a great idea, so he grits his teeth and bears it.

Dean's car is parked right outside the alley. It's gorgeous, Castiel thinks, a sleek black Impala. It's definitely less threatening than the police car he was imagining, but he's still afraid he'll damage it somehow. That would definitely get him arrested; Dean seems like the type who's passionate about his car. But there isn't enough time to dwell on that. Dean ushers him into the passenger seat and starts the car.

The rumbling purr of the engine is strangely soothing. Castiel can't remember the last time he was in a car. Two years ago? Three?

He vaguely remembers his family's white minivan, back when he went to school and had a dog and was normal. And now he's selling himself on the streets; starving half to death. Driving who-knows-where with a cop.

If only his parents could see him now.
"Awkward" is hardly a strong enough word to describe this situation. The car is dead silent, except for the irritating noise Dean makes as he taps his fingers on the steering wheel. Several times Castiel opens his mouth to speak, but decides against it; what would he say, anyway? He can practically taste the tension.

A cop and a hooker get into a car together — it sounds like the beginning of a bad joke.

Dean finally speaks. "What's your name, kid?" Exasperation bubbles up in Castiel's chest, but for some reason he doesn't act on it. It's like he can't bring himself to be mad at Dean. "My name's Castiel," he huffs. "And I'm seventeen, stop calling me a kid." Dean chuckles good-naturedly. "Alright, alright. Castiel, cool name."

That's a new one. Castiel is used to being told his name is "different" or "weird". Yet another one on the list of reasons he can't help liking this cop. "Thanks," he mutters, feeling his face go hot. He's /really/ not good at talking to people. "So why're you being so nice to me? What do you want?"

Oh god, that was the worst possible thing he could've said. Instead of being grateful and just going with it, he had to get defensive and be rude. But Dean must be in an especially patient mood or something, because he doesn't seem offended. "I'm just trying to be a nice person, Cas," he says quietly. "I'm not out to hurt you."

Cas. He hasn't heard that nickname in a long time. It makes him think of his brother, Gabriel. His throat suddenly gets tight. He wants to cry, but there's no way he's going to let himself fall that far. Especially in front of Dean. He swallows hard and holds it in, nodding absentely along to whatever Dean is saying. After a moment he collects himself enough to speak. "Where are we going?"

Dean smiles at that, like he's remembering something good that happened to him. "Best burger place I know. You look like you're starving to death." He says it like buying prostitutes dinner is something all cops do; a hobby. And Castiel realizes that's why he likes Dean so much: nobody else has ever really cared if he lives or dies.

It sort of feels good.

Dean pulls into the restaurant's parking lot, and any pleasant feeling escapes Castiel. The place is swarming with people. He can handle one person at a time, obviously, but large groups make him uncontrollably anxious. However, he's starving, so the pros outweigh the cons — just barely. Dean seems to notice his reluctance to get out of the car. "You okay?" he asks, and Castiel nods a little too fast. "I'm fine," he mutters. "Let's go."

He's actually pretty far from fine, but he ignores the churning in his gut and steps out of the car.
Despite the horde of people milling around, the inside of the building is somewhat calming. It's painted a warm maroon color, with chipping wooden tables and chairs that have seen better days. Instead of muffled dance music, Castiel can hear an old country song playing on the radio. But the best part is the smell. Meat and spices and other things that he can't identify; his mouth starts to water. Dean stands at his shoulder, and his anxiety is miraculously fading away.

A bright-eyed waitress leads them to a booth in the corner, by a small window. Castiel can see stars outside. He sits down across from Dean, and in an embarrassing fantasy he imagines doing this every day. It's ridiculous, he knows — after tonight, he'll probably never see Dean again. He'll move to a different area and be more careful about selling himself. But maybe, if he ever gets some extra money, he'll come back to this restaurant alone.

Dean doesn't even give Castiel a chance to look at the menu; as soon as the waitress comes back he's ordering five burgers and a milkshake or something crazy like that. Castiel stares at him, and Dean shrugs. "Eat yourself sick. I'll pay for everything." Castiel doesn't complain. He's still waiting for the moment when he wakes up and realizes this is all a dream.

But dream or not, he's going to enjoy himself while he can.

Dean tries again to make small talk while they wait for the food. "How long've you been doing this?" he asks. He sort of stutters at the end, like he was about to add "kid" but caught himself. Castiel has to think for a while before he can answer that. "About a year ago, I think. When I was almost seventeen." Dean nods slowly, and Castiel can't tell what's he's thinking. Probably either judging him or feeling bad for him. Or both.

So he speaks again, if only to defend his pride. "I only did it 'cause I had to. My parents are dead, my brother ran away, and I didn't have any money. Nobody would hire me for anything else." Dean listens carefully, like the words actually mean something to him. It makes Castiel slightly curious; nobody has ever shown sympathy towards him before.

But then their food comes, and nothing else really matters.

Dean takes two of the burgers and pushes the remaining three over to Castiel. The next few minutes are basically heaven. Castiel is pretty sure Dean is watching him with an amused expression, but he's too busy devouring his second burger to care. This is undeniably better than anything he's ever eaten. Halfway through the third burger, he slows, fighting to keep it all down. His stomach isn't ready for this much food at once.

But he finishes it anyway. Wanting to throw up has never felt this good.

And then Dean pushes the milkshake over to him, and there's no way he can turn it down. But he takes it much more slowly than the burgers, because he knows what comes next. Once he's done eating, Dean is either going to dump him back on the street, or arrest him. Neither sound particularly pleasant. So he drags it out.

After a few minutes, he looks up at Dean. Instead of the amusement he expected, there's something on the cop's face akin to affection. It fades immediately — but it was there. Castiel wonders what he's thinking. Dean is unreadable, though, and he decides some things are best left unsaid.

"I have a proposition, Castiel," Dean says when the milkshake is almost gone. Castiel looks up, curious but nervous. If Dean turns out to be just another sleazy guy who wants sex....

No. He's different, Castiel knows that. He nods, waiting for Dean to go on.
"I'm not going to arrest you," Dean says, and a huge weight lifts from Castiel's chest. "But that don't mean I'm turning you back out on the street, either." The weight starts to come crashing back down. What the hell does that mean? He bites his lip and looks Dean in the eye, waiting for an explanation. Dean stares back at him with those gorgeous green eyes. "I'm going to let you stay with me."

Castiel blanches. He tries to register the words; make some sense of them, but suddenly everything in his head is all jumbled. "You're...me?" he stammers, gripping the edge of the table until his knuckles turn white. He imagines a real bed, breakfast every morning, and a million other things that he's craved for as long as he can remember. It's too good to be true.

Dean laughs at his awestruck reaction. "Yeah, you. Just until I can find you a real job and place of your own." His eyes are sparkling. Castiel feels giddy and sick to his stomach at the same time. In his eyes Dean is suddenly a saint, or God, or at least the best person he's ever met. "Thank you," Castiel whispers, and — shit, he's going to cry.

The prospect of leaving this godawful life behind is too much for him to handle.

"Why are you doing all this for me?" he asks, cursing under his breath at the voice his voice breaks. Dean smiles, almost sadly. "When I was your age, I was in a bad situation, too. I'm just doing for you what I wish somebody would've done for me. It's that simple." Castiel nods along, hardly listening at this point. "Thank you," he repeats, feeling like he could say it a million times. Dean is still smiling, and the fact that he genuinely looks happy only makes Castiel feel better.

This is the first time since his parents died that he feels loved.

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