In My Time of Vinyl

by WinJennster

Summary

A rainy day and an empty tank lead Cas Novak to an unusual record store with an even more unusual proprietor. Dean is more than happy to introduce Cas to the ways of Plant, Page, McCartney, and Lennon, and Cas finds he's more than willing to go along for the ride. Over burgers, movie nights, and of course, marathon music discussions, Cas and Dean get to know each other, even as Cas starts to notice the shadows in Dean's world. They eventually become friends, maybe even teetering on the verge of something more. Cas fails to realize the impact he has on Dean's life - or the impact Dean will have on his.

Notes

OMG another new fic because I can't control myself. No worries, DLiB is almost done, and HISH is still gonna update. In the meantime, have this.

Also, this is totally Deanhugchester's fault (frecklesarechocolate). She put this idea in my inbox a few weeks ago and my brain ran with it. Yell at her.
He hears the silence howling
Catches angels as they fall.

The place was called In My Time of Vinyl, an odd name to be sure, and it was a simple, two window store front with the name painted in an arch on the glass door. The greenish wood surrounding the glass was in dire need of a paint job, but warm yellow light beamed from in between the posters plastered sporadically on the inside of the panes. Red and blue neon from the tubes that lined the inside of the glass lit the water soaked pavement below. It was pouring down rain the day Castiel Novak found it, and he ducked in just to get out of the wet.

A bell jingled merrily, and he was pleased to find the shop warm and cozy, with the faint smell of musk and leather drifting over the stacks arranged throughout the space. The sound of a flute being played in a manner unfamiliar to him bounced off the walls, and a deep voice yelled "be right there!" from somewhere in the back.

Taking a closer look at the store's merchandise, Cas saw crates and bins full of vinyl albums. The inside of the store didn't appear to have any rhyme or reason as to how the albums were stocked; there was stuff everywhere, and the lack of organization hurt Cas's soul. He walked over to a table full of bins and gingerly sorted through them. Titles by Eric Clapton were mixed in with Frank Sinatra, Ravi Shankar, and Metallica. He couldn't imagine how the proprietor found a thing in the place.

Old posters covered damn near every wall, with framed pictures of rock stars on stage at various
venues. A glass counter held a spinning turntable and an old cash register, and the modern day iPad sitting next to it seemed extraordinarily out of place.

Rock 'N' Roll in buzzing neon script dangled from the ceiling, casting the counter in a blue glow. Shelves lined the wall behind the counter, filled with more bins and odds and ends. The inside of the counter held various types of rock memorabilia, including a broken guitar, several guitar picks, concert posters, and torn ticket stubs. A pristine electric guitar with a scrawled signature sat on the very top shelf, beside a framed picture of two dark haired men grinning at the camera.

"Hey! Welcome to In My Time of Vinyl, what're you looking for?"

Cas turned towards the sound of the voice, fighting to keep his jaw closed as he caught sight of the man.

His hair was green. Bright green, except for the very tips, which were dyed an inky black. He had big black circles in his ears - stretchers, Cas thought they were called - a silver hoop through one nostril, an eyebrow ring, and a heavy silver ball through his bottom lip.

Even with all that, Cas could see how lovely he was. His eyes were just a shade or two paler than his hair, and freckles seemed to cover every inch of his skin.

"I'm sorry, but it was cold and wet, and my car broke down. You were the only place open."

The other man's face fell slightly, but he covered it with a big grin. "Mi casa es su casa," he declared, spreading his arms wide.

Cas noted the multicolored designs inked on his arms - he'd mistaken them for long sleeves at first - and the ratty t-shirt with gabba gabba hey! emblazoned across his chest. His jeans were torn, but his smile was beautiful. "You sell records here?"

"Yup," he grinned, waving his arms expansively. "Classic vinyl. Everything from Plant 'n' Page to Robert Johnson to Glenn Miller, and I've even got some modern artists in here. Vinyl's hot, dude. Nothing beats that crackly hi-fi sound. I don't care for the perfect, pristine, studio engineered glossy stuff."

"I don't even have a turntable anymore. Got rid of it half way through college."

"Oh." This time, when the man's face fell, he didn't bother to hide it. "So you really just need somewhere to chill until the rain stops."

"Yes. I'm sorry."

"No worries. Make yourself comfortable, I'm going to go back to cleaning. Holler if you need anything. Name's Dean, by the way."

"Castiel," Cas smiled, holding out his hand. "But everyone calls me Cas."

"Nice to meet you," Dean said, shaking his hand. "Seriously, make yourself at home, poke around, whatever."

"Alright."

Dean tossed him a saucy salute and disappeared into the stacks. Cas stared out the door, frowning at the absolute deluge creating rushing rivers down the sidewalk.
The music caught his attention again - it was manic flute playing. He'd never heard anything like it. "Dean? What are you listening to?"

"Jethro Tull!" Dean called from somewhere. "It's called *Locomotive Breath.*"

"Huh. I think I like it."

Dean's head popped around the corner, the skin around his eyes crinkling with his wide grin. "Awesome!"

"He feels the piston scraping. Steam breaking on his brow. Old Charlie stole the handle and the train it won't stop going. No way to slow down."

"Do you have this on CD? I'd like to hear more."

"Uh, no," Dean said apologetically, coming back up towards the front. "I only sell vinyl in here. It's kinda my thing."

"Oh."

Dean shuffled his feet and fiddled with a silver ring on his finger. "I uh, I have an extra turntable. You could borrow it, maybe."

"You don't even know me."

"Yeah, well, you look like an honest dude." He waved a hand at Cas's outfit. "Suit, trench, look like a tax accountant."

"Accountants can be corrupt."

"What?" Dean grinned as he caught Cas's expression. "Oh, funny guy. Ok. Well, if you don't want to borrow mine, you could probably get one on Amazon on the cheap."

"Hmm. That's a thought. Yes, I think I'll do that. I'd like to purchase this album, then."

"Ok!" Dean's face brightened. "Let me find another copy."

"I don't know how you can find anything, to be honest. You don't seem to have much of a system going here."

"Yeah," Dean laughed. "My brother would agree with you. But I find what I need."

He ducked down another aisle, humming along with the song as he worked. "Here we go," he called a moment later. "Jethro Tull, *Aqualung,* released 1971. This is some good shit."

Dean held the album up, showing Cas the cover with it's depiction of creepy looking old man. "Listen to the whole thing at least twice before forming any opinions."

"Alright." He followed Dean to the counter. "So if I'm buying a turntable, what other albums would you suggest? Maybe I could buy two or three more?"

"Oh, dude. Yeah. Um," he scratched at his hair. "*Houses of the Holy,* definitely. Shit, I could sell you all Led Zeppelin, but let's mix it up. *Houses of the Holy,* he picked up an album with what looked like naked children on the cover. "Gotta have some Hendrix." This one was a yellow album with three men on the cover, *Are You Experienced?* in bright purple lettering. He pulled out another one with what looked like an oddly shaped cake on the cover. "And the Stones - *Let it Bleed. Gimme Shelter* is a fuckin' awesome song," Dean laid all of them on the counter.
"Alright, how much?"

"Really, just like that? Gonna take my word for it?"

"Yes."

"Huh." Dean seemed to think about that a moment more before reaching under the counter and pulling one more album out. This one featured a big, black car, with a beautiful blonde woman laying across the hood, and the word *Mary* in script over the car's roof. "Try this one. Let me know what you think."

"Alright. How much?"

"Um -" Dean stared down at the five albums on the counter, rubbing the back of his neck. "Uh, $40?"

"Is that an answer or a question?"

"Yeah. Huh, $40."

Cas frowned. "Is that what they're worth?"

"Well, I mean - yeah - y'know -"

"What are they worth, Dean?"

"About $80-85," he muttered.

"Alright," Cas pulled out his wallet and counted out five twenties. "That should cover it."

"Dude -"

"I don't want to hear it. It's $20 an album, which seems fair for vintage albums in top condition, plus you let me hang out in here while it rained. Take the money and bag my albums."

"Ok, ok," Dean raised his hands in surrender. He put the bills in the register and wrote out a receipt, then bagged the five albums. "I put a business card in there, in case you know anyone who wants some tunes, plus I wanna hear what you thought. Alright?"

"Of course." Cas picked up the bag. "Thank you for this."

"No, man, thank you. Seriously." He smiled, blushing slightly, before turning to look out the window. "Oh hey. It stopped raining. Not that you have to go, I mean, you can stay as long as you like."

"I appreciate that, but I do have somewhere to be."

"Ok. Come back any time." Dean was still smiling but it didn't quite reach his eyes.

"I will. I'm sure I'll need more music."

"Definitely. You'll be hooked on Zep in no time, trust me."

Nodding, Cas turned to head out the door, but stopped and looked back. "You know, there is an album I'd like to have on vinyl."
"Yeah?" Dean's face brightened.

"Yes - you'll probably laugh."

"No, I won't. Promise."

"Ok - in college, I dunno, but I was really into Counting Crows. I'd love to have *August and Everything After* on vinyl."

Dean frowned thoughtfully. "Not sure I have it, but I could get it for you within a week. If you wanted to come back Friday."

"I'll be here."

"Awesome."

They stood and stared at each other for a moment, and Cas felt a spark, one he hadn't felt for a long time. His cheeks heated slightly, and he stared down at his bag of records. "I'll see you Friday, then," he said softly, before backing up towards the door.

"Friday. Ok." Dean braced both hands on the counter and leaned towards him, a soft smile on his face.

"Ok."

He made eye contact with Dean again, blushed harder, and escaped through the front door.

Two days later, a large shipping box showed up on Cas's doorstep, and he spent the evening putting together his new turntable, hooking it up to his existing stereo system.

Looking through his meager collection of albums, he chose *Houses of the Holy* first, since Dean seemed to be a big Led Zeppelin fan. Google had told him the shop's name was a play on words, based on a song off the band's *Physical Graffiti* album.

The first song was upbeat. The rhythm reminded him of riding in a car down an open stretch of highway, slowing to a comfortable cruise as the singer came in.

Cas lay on his couch with a beer in just his boxers, letting the music sweep over him. He did as Dean requested, listening to the entirety of the album twice.

He could definitely see himself becoming a Led Zeppelin fan. Cas listened to the others over the course of the week, enjoying them all as well. Friday, he left work and drove over to In My Time of Vinyl, intent on picking up his Counting Crows album and possibly a few more that Dean would recommend.

"Be right with you!" called Dean from the back of the store.

"Hello, Dean. It's me, Cas," he called back.

"Oh! Hold on, man, let me grab your album."

"Alright."

Cas poked through some of the records stacked on the counter. There were several more Zep albums lying there, and he was sure what they were listening to was them as well. He'd listened to *Houses of*
"the Holy enough times over the course of the week to easily identify Robert Plant's voice. Cas closed his eyes and swayed slightly with the music.

"You like? It's Zep. All of My Love."

"Mmm, it's nice. I would like a few more of theirs, I think."

"Cool, I can do that." Dean came up beside him and sat the Counting Crows record on the counter. "I did have this. Just didn't know it. Went through everything this week looking for Madman Across the Water and tripped over this."

"Madman Across the Water?"

"Yup. Elton John. It's fantastic."

Cas opened his eyes and smiled at the other man. "Sounds like one for my burgeoning collection then."

"Huh. How is it that you've never heard of this stuff? You look like you're my age."

"I'm thirty-eight."

"Yeah, ok. I'm thirty-six. So we're close in age."

"I was raised on classical music. My parents were very religious and didn't approve of rock and roll. We weren't even allowed to listen to Christian rock like Petra or Steven Curtis Chapman. Hymns were acceptable, but not if they were recorded by people like Elvis or Johnny Cash."

"Huh." Dean's brow furrowed. "That's pretty effin' strict." He smiled. "So now you're here, making up for lost time, right?"

"Indeed." Cas picked up the Counting Crows record and flipped it over, smiling at the familiar song list. "You were right, you know? There's something very soothing about that slightly crackly sound, and listening to the sound switch from speaker to speaker."

Dean's face brightened. "Ah, you've been bitten, my friend."

"Indeed. Now, why don't you add to my affliction? Enable me."

Dean barked out a laugh. "Alright. Well, Madman Across the Water is a definite. How many do you want?"

"Six or seven."

"Really?"

"Yes."

"Sweet." Dean dropped a copy of the Elton John LP on the counter. "Come with me. Let's see what we come up with."

"I was wondering, because I couldn't find much online about them, but that one album you gave me, Mary? By Winchester's Rifle? I'd love to have more from them."

Stopping dead in his tracks, Dean turned to look back at him, an unreadable expression on his handsome face. He ran a hand through his green hair and fidgeted a bit. "Yeah, uh, they only put out
"That's a shame. I really enjoyed the singer's voice, and it was clear that he was madly in love with the real Mary."

"Yeah. They were a husband and wife team. Mary was actually the only song she didn't write. From what I understand, she didn't want it on the album, but it ended up being the only song that got any kind of recognition for them."

"That's a shame. The whole album is wonderful, although there is definitely a disconnect between Mary and the other songs on the album."

"Yeah," Dean mumbled, not meeting Cas's eyes. "So, I think you need some Blue Oyster Cult," he said abruptly, changing gears. "Everyone should know Don't Fear the Reaper."

"Ok," Cas said, rolling with it. "My friend at work suggested the Beach Boys, but I don't know if I've got the album name correct. Pet Sounds?"

"Yeah, that's it. It's a damn good one, probably their best. And I want you to get Led Zeppelin II." Dean plucked an album from a crate. "And you definitely need The Beatles, but do I give you their first, or their best, I dunno. Fuck it. Rubber Soul and Abbey Road. One of them." He darted around the shop, retrieving both LP's.

"I'll take both."

"Dude, Cas, that's a bunch."

"I said six or seven. That's seven right?"

Ticking them off on his fingers, Dean counted. "Crows, Zep, Beatles times two, Elton John, BOC, Beach Boys - yeah, seven. Cas, that's like $140. You sure you want to spend that much?"

"Yes, Dean. I'm sure."

"Ok, man." Dean carried the albums up to the front. "So, I was thinking," Dean said, laying the albums on the counter as he walked behind it. "I feel like a jerk 'cause I should have offered to fix your car last week. I'm good with cars. I was just nine kinds of distracted and -"

"There's no need to apologize. It was the dumbest thing, to be honest. I ran out of gas. Seriously, I'm an idiot."

"Nah, happens to the best of us." He put the albums in a bag and handed it to Cas. "So, uh, that's $135."

"I thought you said $140."

"Nah, bulk discount."

"If you're sure."

Dean grinned. "I am." He took Cas's money and made change in the ancient register, handing back a crisp $5 bill. "So, uh, you come back any time, ok?"

"Definitely. I'll be back next week. You'll have to pull some more albums out for me."

"Really?" Dean looked nothing short of surprised. "I mean, albums are a lot of money."
"I know, but I like the music you're introducing me to, and I enjoy coming in the store and seeing you. It's nice."

"Yeah?" Dean's expression was sweet, maybe a little shy. "You barely know me."

"We could change that. I know a place nearby that has incredible burgers. I'd love to listen to you tell me more about the artists you like."

"Uh, wow -" Dean rubbed the back of his neck. "I um, I don't close for another hour."

"Oh. Well, I have a couple of hours. I could just hang out again, if it's ok with you."

"Yeah, sure, that would be cool."

"Great! Anything you need help with in the meantime?"

"Not really. You know what? I can close a little early and I'm nine kinds of hungry. Let's go get that burger, Cas."

Dean ordered a big, juicy bacon cheeseburger with extra onions, and when it came, he politely asked the waitress to bring him more onions. He grinned across the table at a bemused Cas. "What can I say? I love onions."

"I can see that." Cas looked down at his own bacon cheeseburger loaded with extra pickles. "And I clearly have a pickle problem."

Barking out a laugh, Dean reached over and snatched one off his plate. "Yes, you do. You ever have fried pickles? Holy shit, those are good."

"No, I haven't. I should try them."

"When the County Fair comes around, we should go. Fried everything. Even fried Snickers bars. It's killer." Dean munched his stolen pickle contentedly. The waitress stopped by with a plate of onions, and he thanked her with his million watt smile before loading almost all of them onto his burger.

Dean gathered the mess in his hands and took a huge bite.

"How on Earth will you even taste anything but onions?"

Grinning around a mouth full, Dean mumbled something.

"What?"

"I said," he swallowed, "onions make the burger!"

"If you say so." Picking up his own burger, Cas happily dug in, moaning around the explosion of taste on his tongue.

"Got some serious happy sounds going on over there."

"These make me very happy," Cas smiled, before going in for some more.

A companionable silence fell over the table as both men destroyed their dinners. Fries and onion rings were pushed into the middle, a silent agreement to share, and they both picked from the plates with grease and meat juice dripping from their fingers.
"Man, you weren't kidding." Dean leaned back against the booth, rubbing his stomach. "That was one of the best burgers I've ever had. How have I never been here? Lived in Sioux Falls a long time, and this place is less than a mile from my store. I really don't get out much!"

"They're new, if it makes you feel better. Less than a year old."

"Huh. That would explain it. How's the pie?"

Cas grinned. "Heavenly."

"I'll be the judge of that," Dean smirked, but that smirk was replaced by a look of ecstasy the second the first bite of apple-caramel pie hit his tongue. "Oh, mannnn," he moaned. "So good."

"Who's making happy noises now?"

"Ssh. I'm have a pie-sperience."

"You're a dork."

Dean closed his eyes, a look of contented bliss spreading across his features. "I just love pie so much."

"I can tell."

The waitress brought their bill not long after that, and Dean pulled his wallet out. He counted out his half of the bill, frowning slightly while he did. Cas noticed his wallet was empty after, but maybe Dean just didn't carry much cash on him.

"That was awesome," Dean told him, as they left the restaurant. "I'm going to be full for two days."

"Indeed. However, we were so caught up in our meals, we never talked about music."

"Shit, you're right." Dean turned and grinned at Cas. "Well, I guess you'll just have to come back to the store."

"I'd love to," Cas looked down at his watch and frowned, "but I have things I absolutely have to do tonight."

"But it's Friday -"

"I know. And I want to stay, but tomorrow is my Saturday to work."

"What do you do?" Dean blushed. "I mean, if you don't mind me asking?" They'd been walking the whole time and stopped in front of the store.

"I'm an assistant bank manager. The other assistant and I switch every other Saturday, and tomorrow is mine."

"I thought banks closed on Saturdays?"

"Most do. Ours is open limited hours. But it's getting late now, and I still have get my things ready for morning. I could come back Friday?"

"Ok," Dean said quietly. He unlocked the door to his store, and Cas didn't miss how his shoulders slumped.
"Dean, are you alright?"

"What? Yeah, I'm fine." He turned back to Cas, a smile glued on his face. "Let me grab your bag and you can get out of here. One sec."

Dean left Cas standing on the street in front of the store, reappearing a moment later with Cas's bag. "Here you go," he said cheerfully, his tone a little forced.

"Dean - are you sure -"

"I'm fine. Seriously, man. I'll see you next Friday and I'll have a bunch more stuff picked out for you to root through, ok?"

"Alright. Goodnight, Dean."

"Night." Dean stepped back into the store and shut and locked the door before pulling a shade down over the glass.

Frowning, Cas walked to his car, casting one last look back at the store before sliding into the front seat.

He didn't see Dean standing in the window, watching him drive away.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to monsterattheendofthisbook for the beautiful banner. I really appreciate your time and effort!!
Cas didn't make it back to the record store on Friday. Things went haywire at work, and he found himself buried under a mountain of paperwork. Saturday, when he got to the store, the closed sign was in the window and he sighed as he drove away. He'd really been looking forward to seeing Dean, and seeing what he thought of the list of albums his coworkers had recommended.

The other assistant manager seemed especially interested in him picking up They Might Be Giants and a someone named Lindsey Stirling.

In My Time of Vinyl was still closed Sunday afternoon, and Cas was horribly disappointed. He knew he wouldn't be able to make it back until the following Friday - the weekdays were just entirely too busy. He hoped Dean was ok.

"So is it the records, or the record store owner?"

"What?" Cas looked up from his computer.

Charlie Bradbury grinned across their shared office. "You weren't into classic rock until two weeks ago, and you have mentioned green eyes a time or two, so can you blame me for wondering?"

Cas felt his cheeks heat. "No - I mean, Dean is very sweet, and very knowledgeable, and I do enjoy talking to him. He seems lovely and it's nice to talk to him, and the shop is fascinating. I like the music he's introducing me to, and it's a bit of a respite to go see him after a difficult week at work."

"Aww," Charlie said, smiling at him. She had her chin resting on her hand. "That's so cute."

"I don't know what you're getting at."

"When are you going to ask him out?"

"Charlie, he's probably straight."

"Easy to assume unless you go for it."

"I barely know him."

"Well, isn't that exactly what dating is for? To get to know someone?"

"Maybe it's easy for you, but -"

"No buts. Ask him out."

"I am capable of making my own decisions as far as any romantic entanglements go."

"Have you ever even had a relationship?"
Cas slammed his laptop shut. "I fail to see how this is pertinent work information. I'm needed on the floor."

Cas stalked out of the office, ignoring Charlie's protests. He plastered on a smile as he walked down the corridor of McLeod and Adler Savings and Loan, greeting customers and employees alike as he passed.

He liked his job. He liked his life.

But Cas would be the first to admit that there was something missing. He'd be the first to admit there was a person shaped hole in his ordered world.

He just wasn't sure Dean was the right person to fill it, although he definitely liked Dean - probably more than he should.

It was another Friday before Cas got back to In My Time of Vinyl, a full two weeks since his previous visit. A folksy melody greeted his ears as he pushed into Dean's little store.

"If I worked my hands in wood, would you still love me? Answer me, babe, yes I would, I'd put you above me."

"If a miller were my trade, at a mill wheel grinding, would you miss your color box, your soft shoes shining."

Cas stopped to listen. He was fairly confident it was Robert Plant singing. The song was lilting, wistful, and he found himself falling in love with the melody and Plant's vocalization. He listened to the rest of the song, and as it ended, he realized no one had greeted him when the bell in the door jingled.

"Dean?" he called. "It's Cas, are you here?"

No answer.

A beat up, red painted door was slightly ajar in the back of the shop - Cas thought maybe it led to a storeroom. He walked to the back, stopping at the counter on his way to shut off the turntable, since it had reached the end of the LP and was making that distracting skipping noise.

The door opened to reveal a set of stairs, and he could hear more music coming from above.

"Dean?" he called, but still no answer.

Cas hesitated. On one hand, he wanted to go up the stairs and find Dean. On the other, he theorized that the upstairs of the building might be an apartment or something, but the walls of the stairwell were dark and dingy, so it was most likely the storeroom.

"Dean?" he called once more, but no answer. "Oh the hell with it," he muttered, pulling the door open all the way and heading up the stairs.

"Lay, lady, lay, lay across my big brass bed. Lay, lady, lay, lay across my big brass bed. Whatever colors you have in your mind, I'll show them to you and you'll see them shine."

"Lay, lady, lay, lay across my big brass bed. Stay, lady, stay, stay with your man awhile. Until the break of day, let me see you make him smile. His clothes are dirty but his hands are clean, and you're the best thing that he's ever seen."
Something pungent and spicy hit his nose, and Cas frowned. "Dean?" he called again, softer this time. He pushed another door at the top of the stairs, and the smell of pot smoke nearly knocked him over.

The upstairs was definitely Dean's apartment and it was, in a word, incredible.

The room Cas was standing in was painted a deep jade green with striking red trim. Guitars hung on the walls, and the rest of the open space was covered in pictures, posters, framed ticket stubs, and even a framed gold record. Stepping closer, Cas saw the familiar cover of Winchester's Rifle's Mary, and the plaque below it indicating that it had reached sales of 500,000 units.

Cas thought it was odd that Dean had it. He hadn't seemed to be that big of fan of the band, at least not like he was about Led Zeppelin.

"Cas?" a raspy voice made him startle a bit.

"Dean. I'm sorry - I called for you downstairs but you didn't answer."

Dean stepped into the light. His eyes were red and his hair seemed limp and unhappy. He was sporting at least a three day growth of reddish-brown beard and nothing but a pair of torn jeans. "What're you doin' here?" he asked quietly, taking a long drag of the joint in his hand.

"It's Friday - that's when I usually visit."

"Not last week."

"No, and I'm sorry. I worked late Friday, and when I tried to come Saturday and Sunday, you were closed."

Something flickered in Dean's eyes. "Yeah, I was - I was sick. Been a rough week." He seemed to brighten a bit, reaching down to stub the joint in an ashtray. "Sorry about the pot, man. I don't - I don't usually -"

"Don't worry about it." Cas looked around. "So this is your home, too?"

"Yeah," Dean said shyly, rubbing the back of his neck. "It's a bit slopped up right now."

"You were sick," Cas reminded him.

"Right." Dean looked away.

"Are you sure you're alright now?"

"Yeah, I'm fine, I'm good - how did you get in, anyway?"

"Well, the sign said open and the door is unlocked."

"Oh shit!" Dean grabbed a shirt off the chair and bolted for the stairs. "I can't believe how dumb I am sometimes!" he yelled on his way down.

Cas took one last glance around Dean's place and followed him downstairs.

"I didn't think you'd be in tonight so I figured I'd just go upstairs and -" Dean's voice trailed off.

"Why didn't you think I'd be in?" Cas asked as he joined him in the store.
"I dunno. Just, you didn't come last week, and I had stuff set aside -" Dean shrugged. "It's not important."

"What were you listening to when I came in? It was a song about a carpenter. Sounded a bit like Robert Plant."

Dean's face brightened immediately. "Did you like it?" Cas nodded. "Awesome! And good call on Robert Plant. It's from a 2003 album called *Sixty Six to Timbuktu*. It just had a bunch of random stuff on it from his entire career up until that point. I love that song, by the way. Tim Hardin wrote it, but a lot of artists have had some success with it."

"Interesting. So what do you have for me this week, music guru? Oh and my friend said to ask about someone called Lindsey Stirling and They Might Be Giants."

"They Might Be Giants!" Dean chuckled. "Those guys are awesome. *Flood* is probably their best known. It's got *Istanbul* and *Particle Man*. Lindsey Stirling - I think she's the ballet dancer who plays violin while she dances. Pretty talented. I might have *Shatter Me* on LP. Hold on, let me look." Dean started digging through the stacks, humming. "Hey Cas, can you put that CSN&Y album on the turntable? I wanna see what you think."

"Sure." Cas crossed the floor to the counter, finding the maroon album cover easily. "*Deja Vu*?"

"Yeah," Dean said, voice muffled. "*Side One.*"

"Alright." Cas carefully slid the album from the case, after putting away the Plant album.

"*One morning I woke up and I knew that you were gone. A new day, a new way, I knew I should see it along. Go your way, I'll go mine and carry on.*"

"*The sky is clearing and the night has gone out. The sun, he come, the world is all full of light. Rejoice, rejoice, we have no choice but to carry on.*"

Cas closed his eyes and listened to the song, floating along on the guitar riffs. The song changed tempos several times, and it had sort of a melancholy hopefulness to it.

"What do you think?"

"I like it." He turned to smile at Dean. "One of your recommendations?"

"Yup. I found TMBG," he smiled, holding up *Flood*. "But no dice on Miss Stirling. I'll order it for you."

"Alright."

"This too, Kansas' *Leftoverture*. Has *Carry On Wayward Son*. Not to mention a bunch of other kick ass tunes." Dean set both albums on the counter.

"I need more Led Zeppelin."

"Damn right," Dean grinned. "But which one?" He sorted through a stack of albums on the counter. "Zep I. Next time it'll be *Physical Graffiti.*"

"Ok. One more then, don't I usually get five or six?"

"Yeah," Dean said thoughtfully. He tapped his fingers against his chin for a moment. "I got it," he snapped his fingers. "Be right back." Dean vanished into the stacks again. He was back a moment
Cas laughed. "You probably have the munchies."

"Yeah," Dean blushed. "Sorry about that. I don't do it much -"

"I don't care. I think it should be legalized anyway."

"Heh. I actually want to move to the west coast for that very reason, but who has the money for that?"

"I hear you." Cas pulled his wallet from his back pocket. "How much this week?"

"Oh, um, $110? It's a little more because Woodstock and -"

"Ok," Cas smiled, laying the bills on the counter.

Dean took them, put them in the register, and pulled out a bag. "So uh, next Friday then?" he asked, eyes downcast.

"Well, actually, I was hoping you'd let me take you to the burger place again to make up for last week."

"Oh. You don't have to do that," Dean said, blushing. "It's no big deal."

"Dean, you've got the munchies, I missed lunch, let me buy you a nasty onion laden burger, alright?"

"Oh god that sounds so good," Dean smacked his lips. "With cheddar and bacon and mushrooms and a shit ton of onion rings."

"Exactly," Cas laughed. "Grab some shoes, let's go before you flood the store with your drool."

"I dunno -"

"Go get your shoes or I swear I won't come back."

"Ok, ok, can't have that," Dean chuckled. "Shoes! I'm on it."

"I like all kinds of music," Dean said, popping a fried pickle into his mouth. "I just lean towards classic rock a little bit more."

"Understandable. Who were you listening to upstairs?"


"Interesting voice."

"Yeah, not everyone likes him, but he's a genius when it comes to writing songs. Ooh! Speaking of songwriters, next week I'll have some Doors for you, and probably the Eagles. Maybe some Marvin Gaye, but that's in an entirely different direction than most of what I've given you so far. Just, everyone needs to listen to Marvin Gaye's What's Going On album. It's such a statement. I dunno."
"Ok, that's three. Maybe I'll pick up six next week. Come up with some good stuff. What do your other customers like?"

Dean looked down at his plate. "Oh, the usual. Classic rock and stuff." He shoved an onion ring in his mouth. He didn't expand any further on that thought.

"Oh. Maybe you could let me know what others are buying. Might help me expand my tastes."

"Sure," Dean muttered, focused on his the remains of his burger.

Cas watched him for a moment. Dean's moods seems to change abruptly, and he didn't know why - unless it was coming down from the high.

Finished with the burger, Dean turned to look out at the darkening sky. "Gettin' late. Guess you'll have to go soon?" His voice was flat, emotionless.

"Um, well I do have to work tomorrow -"

"Ok. I'm gonna get back then. Thank you for dinner. I really appreciate it." Dean stood and left before Cas knew what happened.

Befuddled, he paid the bill and left not long after Dean did, not at all surprised to see In My Time of Vinyl closed and dark when he walked back to his car. The upstairs appeared to be dark as well, and he wondered if Dean was out.

He needn't have rushed off. Cas did have to work in the morning, but if Dean had let him finish, he was going to at least order dessert for them.

Dean was odd; closed off at times, open like a book at others. A mystery, at any rate, one Cas wondered if he had the wherewithal to solve.

"And he just ran off? Did he say thank you at least?"

"Yes, he thanked me - but the store was dark when I went back to get my car. Almost like he was avoiding me." Cas stabbed another forkful of lettuce. "I'm making this out to be more than it is, aren't I?"

Charlie and Jo Harvelle were both staring at him with their chins on their hands. His two friends were wearing the sappiest expressions.

"What?"

"It's so romantic," Jo sighed.

"How is it romantic? He ran off after dinner!"

"Because he was clearly disappointed that you couldn't stay and hang out so he ran back and locked everything up so you wouldn't know he was upset."

"Or," Jo offered, "he wanted you to think he was unaffected and closed everything up so you wouldn't know he got his little feelings hurt."

"Ooh, yeah, I didn't think about that!"

"You two are ridiculous."
"We just love you, Cas, and you like this guy, he could be good for you!"

Cas shook his head and started packing up his lunch. "I think you're seeing things that aren't there. I don't even know if we're friends at this point."

"Would you like to be?" Jo asked softly.

"I don't know - he's sweet, and funny, but so closed off sometimes. I don't know."

"Chop, chop, it's time to head back!" Naomi, the bank manager, tapped smartly on the break room door. "Back to work!"

Grumbling, Jo packed up her half-finished lunch as Charlie did the same.

Cas went back to his office, but he was distracted, thoughts of Dean interrupting his reports and emails. He wondered what would happen if he went back to the store that night, or Wednesday night, instead of waiting until Friday. Would Dean be happy to see him?

He made it through the rest of the day, leaving well after closing to finish his work. Stopping at a grocery store on the way home, he snagged a cart and randomly grabbed stuff that sounded good.

"Excuse me," he muttered to a man blocking the end of an aisle as he pushed his cart past.

"Oh, sorry," the other guy said. "Cas?"

Cas stopped and turned back. "Hello, Dean," he smiled.

Dean smiled back. "How's it going?"

"Good. You?"

Setting down what appeared to be a list and a calculator, Dean nodded. "Yeah, I'm great. Getting some groceries, huh?"

"Well, it is a grocery store."

"Right," Dean barked a laugh. "I'm an idiot."

"It's ok. I'm so tired I can barely stand up long enough to get this crap."

"What're you getting?" Dean asked, peering curiously into Cas's cart.

"Some steaks, ground beef for burgers later this week. I was thinking about roasting a chicken on Saturday."

"A lot for one guy - or are you married? I never asked."

"I'm single."

"Yeah, same."

Electricity sparked in the space between them, and Dean rubbed his neck. "So I should go. Got what I came for."

"That's a lot of ramen."

"Breakfast, lunch, and dinner of champions," Dean said ruefully.
"I sure hope you're kidding."

"Oh, I am. Yeah. They were on sale, y'know, stock up and stuff."

Cas looked into his own cart, brimming with meat, vegetables, milk, cereal, and other goodies. He then looked at Dean's, filled with a couple of twelve packs of ramen, cans of cheap tuna, and a big bag of rice.

A picture was forming in Castiel's head, one he didn't like. "Why don't you come over?" he blurted out. "I'll make burgers tonight and you can have dinner with me."

"Uh -" Dean's face flushed red. "Don't have to do that," he protested. "I'm good."

"I want to - there's no strings attached, I promise. And I know for a fact I have some pecan pie from Lafitte's. Ordered it after you left."

"Oh. Pie, huh?"

"Yeah, pie. Come over, ok?"

"Is it far?"

"No, not really. You could just follow me."

"Car's in the shop right now."

"Ok, well then, I'll drive, and I can take you home later. Are you done shopping?"

Dean turned back to his cart and looked at the calculator. "Yeah, I'm done." He frowned and shoved the thing in his pocket. "Ready when you are, I guess."

Cas parked his Lincoln in the street in front of his little house. "Home sweet home," he smiled over at Dean as he opened the trunk. "You didn't get anything perishable; feel free to leave it in the car."

"Ok," Dean said, staring up at Cas's house. "This is so nice," he said, taking a bag from Cas.

"It's little, but it's just me, so it's plenty of room."

"I like it," Dean told him. "It seems cozy."

"It is. Come on, you can fire up the grill while I change."

Dean looked over at him. "I like the suit, though." He blushed. "I mean, you always look so nice - never mind."

Chuckling, Cas hoisted his own bag. He led the way up the path, opening the door and holding it for Dean. "Kitchen's down the hall. Make yourself at home. Grill is on the deck," Cas told him, setting his own bag on the counter, "and all the stuff is in the bin next to it. Go ahead and get it going, I'll be back down in a moment."

He left Dean standing in the middle of his kitchen while he went up to change. When he came back down in jeans and a tee, Dean was standing on the deck with grill going. He was staring out into the yard, arms wrapped around his middle.

"Want to help me cook?"
Dean startled a bit. "Sure."

In the kitchen, Cas put away everything except for what they'd need to make dinner. "Beer?"

"Uh, no. Water or soda's good."

"I have iced tea."

"That'll work."

"Not much of a beer guy?"

"No, not really. What can I do to help?" Dean asked, taking the glass of tea.

"I'll mix up the ground beef if you can chop up an onion for me."

"Sure."

They worked together to prepare the burgers, chatting about mundane things while they did. It didn't take long to get everything ready, and Cas set the table on the deck while they waited for the burgers to finish.

"I just noticed you changed your hair."

"Oh, no, it's just faded from washing. The green doesn't last that long and I haven't had time to redo it."

"You do that yourself?"

"Yeah."

"I like it. It suits you."

"Thanks," Dean said, cheeks pinking in the dim light of dusk. He slapped at his arm. "Mosquito," he said, catching sight of Cas's raised eyebrow.

"Ah. I'll light the torches." Cas lit the tiki torches lining the deck, turning back to face Dean again.

Dean's face looked gorgeous in the flickering light of the flames. He also looked a million miles away.

Checking the burgers, Cas was pleased to see they were done. "Hungry?"

"Always," Dean smiled.

After dinner, Dean insisted on doing the dishes. "Go put some music on, I got this."

"Alright."

Cas's house was open on the first floor - the kitchen opened into the dining room, which opened into the living room. It was easy to hear the stereo in the living room from the kitchen. Cas slipped the Counting Crows album out of it's jacket, smiling as Round Here started playing.

He worked on tidying up the rest of the dinner mess, and it was a moment before he realized Dean was singing along. His voice was deep and husky, warm - Cas liked it.
She says, "It's only in my head." She says, "Shh I know it's only in my head."

But the girl on the car in the parking lot says, "Man you should try to take a shot, can't you see my walls are crumbling?" Then she looks up at the building and says she's thinking of jumping. She says she's tired of life she must be tired of something -

Dean's voice faded on the last line, hands frozen on the glass he was washing. Cas could see his reflection in the window over his sink.

He looked so lost.

"Dean?"

Jumping, the glass slipped from his hands and shattered half in the sink, half on the countertop. "Oh fuck! Fuck, I'm sorry, Cas, I'm sorry!" Dean dropped the dish cloth, reaching for the pieces of glass. "Oh man, that went everywhere, I'm so sorry. I'll clean it up. I didn't mean to -"

Dean was babbling, picking up pieces of glass, and Cas saw the blood well on the tip of his index finger. "Dean, stop. Stop, you've cut yourself."

"Let me clean it up -"

"No, come on," Cas took Dean's arm and pulled him away from the sink. "Sit." He left Dean and fetched the first aid kit from the downstairs bathroom.

"Cas, I'm so sorry."

"Don't be, it was just a glass. It's not a big deal."

"But you invited me for dinner and I messed up -"

Cas pulled out the chair beside Dean and sat down, reaching for his hand. "It's not a big deal, I promise. I have cheap dishes. Don't worry, ok?" He took Dean's hand in his, turning it palm up. "The cut doesn't appear to be very deep." Opening the case with one hand, he pulled out a bandage and the antibacterial ointment. "I'll clean it, and bandage it. Good as new."

Dean watched silently as Cas tended to his cut. "You don't have to do this," he said softly.

"I don't mind." He wrapped the bandage around the treated wound. "There you go." Cas closed the case and stood. "How 'bout you sit and enjoy some pie while I clean this up?" Not waiting for an answer, Cas cut Dean a nice big slice and set it in front of him. He then went to work on cleaning up the glass and finishing the dishes.

Dean was quiet the entire time.

When it was all done, Cas got his own piece of pie and sat down across from Dean. "You haven't touched your pie," Cas frowned.

"Are we friends?" Dean blurted out.

"I guess - I guess we're becoming friends, at any rate."

"Huh."

Finally picking up his fork, Dean dug into his pie. Cas followed suit. They ate in silence for a bit.
"I mean, I'd like to be friends," Dean murmured, cheeks pinking again. "I don't really - don’t have many friends."

"Well, I'd like to be your friend, too. Then maybe we could hang out outside of the store a little more?"

Dean's face brightened considerably. "I'd like that," he smiled, face so happy it broke Cas's heart.

How could someone as sweet and kind as Dean seemed to be have no friends? It just didn't add up.

But then again, not a whole lot about Dean made much sense at all.
"You should bring him to the Summer Solstice Slash and Stab!"

"What?" Cas looked up from his computer to find Charlie grinning at him and holding a paper with Royal Decree emblazoned across the top.

"Moondoor! The Summer Solstice thing I told you about. I'm defending my crown against the Shadow Orcs and since Garth already whined about not being able to make it, I could use another knight and you friggin' promised you'd come, Novak!"

"But - bring who?"

"Dean!"

"Oh," Cas thought about that for a moment. "I don't know. Our little group of friends can be rather overwhelming at times."

"You told me you didn't think he had any friends other than you. If he comes and LARPs he'll make friends! Bring him, Cas, please, I need another knight."

"Ok, ok, I'll ask, but I'm not going to push him."

"Sweet! Owe you one, buddy!" Charlie bounced out of their shared office, leaving the flyer behind.

"He's not going to go for this," Cas muttered to himself. Dean was shy, quiet - this wouldn't be his thing at all.

"Hey!" Dean greeted Cas as he entered the store Friday evening. "I got that Lindsey Stirling album and some other awesome stuff for you. How was your week?"

"Fantastic. You changed your hair."

Dean's hair was a deep blue now, and the inky black at the tips was gone. "Yeah. Whaddaya think?"

"The blue is lovely."

"Thanks. It reminded me of -" Dean blushed and rubbed the back of his neck. "I'm glad you like it." Dean sat a stack of records on the counter. "As promised, I've got Physical Graffiti for you and some
other crap. *Sweet Baby James* by James Taylor. It's pretty mellow, but it's a must. *Fire and Rain*, man that song. It just, it does something to me." Dean flipped through the albums. "I have a Doors album for you, too, but I think it might be upstairs. I dunno. What else did your friends suggest?"

Cas fumbled for the list in his pocket that Jo, Charlie, Garth, Aaron, and Balthazar had slowly been adding to. "Jo says *Ride the Lightning* and *Appetite for Destruction.*"

"Ooh, Metallica and Guns 'n' Roses. He has good taste."

"Her."

"Ah," Dean grinned and reached behind him. "I actually have *Ride the Lightning* right here. It's a lot different than what I've been giving you, so maybe we should try this one out before you buy it." Dean slid the album out of the sleeve and put it on the turntable.

The album started off with a slamming guitar riff and heavy drums.

"Well. Um," Cas said, "that is noisy."

Chuckling, Dean turned it down. "Hey, it's fine to have dislikes, y'know? Just because your friend says its good doesn't mean you'll think so."

"Speaking of my friends - and you don't have to say yes, especially since it's last minute notice and all, but there's a campout and LARP this weekend and my friend Charlie, who's the Queen of Moons, asked me to invite you -" He showed Dean the other side of the record list, which was written on the flyer Charlie had given him.

Dean's face lit up as he read the paper. "Holy shit! I haven't been LARPing in like six years. This is so cool!" Albums forgotten, Dean locked the store's door and flipped the sign to *closed*. "C'mon, come help me find all my gear."

"I didn't realize you'd be this excited about it. I didn't think you'd say yes, to be honest."

"Dude! LARPing is awesome!" Dean turned and grinned down the stairs at Cas. "I was a Mage with my last group. But I have all kinds of stuff." He pushed through the door at the top of the stairs. "What does your friend want me to be?"

"Can you swing a knight?"

"Definitely."

Dean's apartment was cleaner than the last time Cas had visited, and the pot smell had dissipated somewhat. Stacks of albums sat neatly by his turntable, and the place just seemed airier, lighter somehow.

The gold record caught his eye. "Dean? How come you have a gold record for Winchester's Rifle?"

Dean's head popped up over the trunk he was digging in. His cheeks were pink. "Oh. I'm just a fan and I found it somewhere."

"Ok." Cas guessed it was reasonable that a music store owner would collect memorabilia as well as albums.

Dean resumed his digging while Cas went to inspect the six guitars hanging on the wall. Three of them bore signatures. He studied an unusual red guitar with two sets of strings, eyes widening as he
"read the scrawled signature. "Dean, is this really Jimmy Page's signature?"

"Yup."

"Wow." Cas ran his fingers over the curves of the instrument. One side had six strings, the other had twelve. He might be new to the whole music thing, but he'd researched Led Zeppelin. He knew this guitar had to be worth a fortune - then his eyes caught on the black guitar hanging next to it. A signature scrawled in silver across the bottom read *To Mary, thank you for everything, Johnny Cash.*

Dean hummed behind him, the sound of items clanking and rustling in the trunk he was digging through. He was oblivious to Cas's awe as he stared at the row of guitars - one more was signed. Next to the Cash guitar was an electric designed to look like the Union Jack - *Good times in the UK. To the best yanks I know,* and underneath a sloppily scrawled name - *Pete Townshend* - that Cas didn't recognize.

The two acoustics next to the Union Jack guitar bore no signatures, but looked well loved. There were scratches and dents indicating that they'd been heavily used, and both had labels inside that read C.F. Martin and Co.

The one all the way on the end had a little brass plate on the side. It was smaller than the rest. The inscription on the plate read *To Our Sweet Boy - May He Find Love on the Open Road of Music. Love, Mom and Dad.*

Cas was so absorbed in his study of the guitars that he didn't hear Dean come up behind him.

"Cas?"

"Oh," he startled, turning to find Dean standing there, arms full of stuff. "I'm sorry, what did you say?"

"I asked if you thought this would be ok. I have pants and a tunic and some chain mail. I thought I had a dummy sword, but I don't." His eyes were cast down, staring at the floor.

"That should be fine. Charlie always has plenty of weapons." Cas turned back to the guitars. "How the hell do you have all of these? They're amazing!"

"Someone gave 'em to me." Dean rustled around behind him, and Cas heard the flick of a lighter. He turned to find Dean lighting a joint.

"Are you ok?"

"Fine. So uh, you wanna head back downstairs? I'll ring you up so you can get going."

"I have off tomorrow for the LARP. I thought maybe you could come over to my house and I'll make us steaks and baked potatoes and you could spend the night. The LARP is kind of far, we'll need to leave early. Unless you want to just meet me there?"

"Car's still in the shop," Dean muttered, not meeting Cas's eyes. He took a long drag on the spliff, holding the smoke in his lungs for a few seconds before releasing. "You sure you don't mind me staying?"

"Silly. It was my idea. We can watch a movie or something."

"Yeah. Yeah, ok," Dean smiled, brightening. "Ever seen Star Wars?"
"Yes. Charlie considered it a major part of my nerd education. Still haven't seen Indiana Jones, though. She's not happy about that."

"Indiana Jones it is!" Dean dug around on an overloaded shelf and pulled out a couple of DVD's. "Hopefully she'll forgive me for only showing you Raiders and Last Crusade, but I can't stand the other two. Let me throw some shit together and I'll be ready to go." He stubbed the joint out in an ashtray and busied himself packing.

"Dean - I was wondering something, because I keep forgetting to ask - what's your last name?"

He froze in the middle of packing, hands stilling abruptly. "Uh, it's uh, it's - it's Michael."

"Dean Michael?"

"Yeah."

"Ok."

"What's yours?"

"Novak."

"Cool."

"So do you play?"

"What?"

"Do you play? All these guitars - are they just for show?"

"Uh, no. I can play."

"Any good?" Cas smiled.

"I'm passable," Dean smiled back. He checked through his bag again. "I think I got everything. I don't have a sleeping bag. You said it's a campout?"

"Not to worry, I have an extra."

"Great! Help me lock up downstairs and I'm ready to roll."

"Let me buy my albums on the way out. How many did you have for me this week?"

"The usual five," Dean said, stopping to snag a record on his way past the turntable. "Here's that Doors one. It's their first and arguably their best." He handed it to Cas. "C'mon, rest are downstairs. I'm guessing you don't want Ride the Lightning?"

"No," Cas scowled. "Jo can keep Metallica."

Dean laughed, a pleasant, carefree sound that Cas decided he definitely liked and wanted to hear more of.

"Man, I love this album," Dean leaned back in his chair, humming along with Dancing Days. "I think most Zep fans would agree Houses of the Holy is at least in the top of Zep's albums, although I
know some prefer *Physical Graffiti* or Zep IV. I dunno. This one is my favorite."

"I love it, too. I think *The Rain Song* is beautiful."

"Yeah, definitely. Funny story about that song - George Harrison gave them shit for not doing ballads and that's how that song was born. It's also the song that sent Jimmy Page to Gibson to get that dual guitar hanging on my wall. He needed a twelve string for *Rain Song* but didn't want to have to keep switching back and forth. Far as I know, I have one of just a handful of those Gibsons."

"That's amazing," Cas said, flipping the steaks. "How well do you want your steak?"

"Medium is fine."

"Man after my own heart." Cas closed the grill to let the steaks finish. He walked around the deck and lit the tiki torches, popping inside after to grab the tray of condiments and baked potato toppings.

"It's so nice out here," Dean told him when he stepped back onto the deck. "But you need a hammock between those two trees over there," he said, pointing towards the back of the yard.

"I have one, but I haven't had a chance to put it up. Maybe you could help me with that Sunday when we get back from the LARP?"

"Totally."

"Are you sure it's ok to close the store for two days? Won't you lose business?"

"Nah. It'll be fine."

"If you're sure." Cas opened the grill and busied himself plating up their food.

"This looks awesome," Dean smiled, as Cas set his plate down in front of him.

They both dug in and ate in silence for a while, Cas smiling, pleased at the happy groans and grunts coming from Dean's direction. Dean ate with gusto, thoroughly demolishing everything on his plate.

"Damn, Cas, you could be a chef or something." He leaned back in his chair, a satisfied expression on his face.

"I'm not sure I'm quite that good," he grinned, popping the last bite of steak in his mouth.

"I dunno, man, that steak was pretty fucking perfect."

"You're kind."

"No, seriously. I don't get food like that much.~" Dean flushed and stared down at his empty plate. "Anyway, it was fantastic."

"I'm glad you liked it. I picked up a cherry pie from Lafitte's for dessert, by the way."

"Ooh, pie. God I love pie."

"What's your opinion on cake?"

"Not a huge fan, but I'll eat it."

"Cheesecake?"
Dean laughed. "Cheesecake is pie. It has a crust and filling. Totally pie. Cheesepie."

Castiel laughed and started gathering the dishes. "Cheesepie. That is amusing. But I guess you're right, it's definitely more pie than cake."

Nodding, Dean stood and working together, they cleaned up the dinner mess. Cas washed and Dean dried, while *Abbey Road* played in the background. Conversation was light and cheery, and Cas did notice how well they worked together, how comfortable it was. When they were done, Dean went into the living room to set up the movie and Cas made popcorn.

"*Last Crusade* is my fave," Dean explained, as Cas sat beside him on the couch, "but you gotta watch *Raiders* first. It's the first one anyway."

"I do enjoy Harrison Ford. He's a good actor." Cas decided to test the water a little. "He's hot, too."

"Yeah, especially back in the day. Han Solo was like one of my first big crushes," Dean said casually, leaning back into the couch and reaching for a handful of popcorn.

*Huh, Cas thought. That answers that question.*

Halfway through *Last Crusade* - just after Henry Jones Sr. brought down the Messerschmitt with the flock of birds - Cas looked over at Dean and noticed his friend had fallen asleep, slumped over on the arm of the couch. Smiling, he shut off the movie and cleaned up the sodas and popcorn. He fetched a pillow and a blanket from the hall closet and carefully rearranged Dean on the couch.

Dean sighed, a little half smile forming on his handsome face.

"Sleep well, Dean," Cas said softly, running a hand through gelled blue spikes.

He shut off the lights and went up to his own room.

Dean was in his house, he thought to himself as he readied for bed. Dean was his friend. These thoughts made him very happy, and Cas slept quite well that night.

"I dub thee Sir Dean of…" Charlie blinked and leaned down a bit. "Sir Dean of what?" she asked Dean.

"Uh -"

"Kashmir," Cas grinned.

"Kashmir," Cas grinned.

Dean looked up at him and smiled. "Perfect."

Charlie straightened and laid the fake blade on his shoulder again. "I dub thee Sir Dean of Kashmir, proud Knight of Moondoor." She tapped the sword on each of his shoulders. "Thou fought bravely for the kingdom today, and surely helped advance us to victory. I welcome you into our circle, oh brave Knight, and verily doth bestow upon you all the privileges and liberties worthy of a Knight of the Realm. Rise, dear Knight, and join your fellows as we rejoice with libations and song!"

There was a lot of loud cheering, hooting, and hollering as Dean stood, face bright and happy.
"Thank you, my Queen," he smiled, bowing low as he kissed her hand.

"And to think," Charlie mused, "I almost made you my handmaiden."

Dean scowled and Charlie giggled.

"Alright, enough medieval wackiness for one day!" Jo bellowed. "Time to feast!"

A louder cheer swept through the crowd. Everyone worked together to start the bonfire, and food and drinks were brought out.

Cas hadn't been the least bit surprised that Dean hit it off with his friends, but he was pleased that Dean was able to hold his own. Once they'd broken character for the night, Dean and Charlie quickly became embroiled in a loud discussion about all things sci-fi. Charlie and Dean seemed to be well on their way to becoming fast friends, and that was to say nothing of how Dean and Jo hit it off. They teased and harassed each other, and both were pleased to discover they liked a lot of the same things - the Avengers, Dr. Sexy, heavy metal, classic cars, good burgers, and Harrison Ford.

Cas's lizard brain was also very happy that there didn't seem to be any sort of romantic attraction between Jo and Dean. It was more like long lost siblings finally finding each other.

Not that Dean didn't attract his fair share of romantic interest, however.

The party got loud and raucous as the night went on. Cas found himself becoming quite intoxicated, and he'd stripped off most of his Friar's costume. Dean was in a similar state, minus the alcohol, sitting across the fire from him in nothing but a white tank top and the brown suede pants that were part of his costume. He seemed to be the only sober person sitting around the fire.

Aaron Bass, one of Cas's friends and Charlie's resident White Mage, sat on a log next to Dean, hands making expansive gestures as he talked Dean's ear off. There was a slight rosy blush painting Dean's cheeks, and Cas realized Aaron was flirting with Dean - and Dean seemed to be eating it up.

Something ugly clawed at Cas's insides. It felt a lot like jealousy. He stared down at his mug full of mead. Maybe it was just the alcohol.

Charlie's girlfriend and resident Queen of the Fae, Gilda, pulled out a mandolin and started strumming. Cas's watched Dean's eyes light up in interest.

"Scarborough Fair?" he asked.

"Yes," she smiled back. Gilda started singing, and to Cas's surprise, Dean joined in, harmonizing beautifully with her. Everyone else stopped what they were doing and stared as Gilda and Dean's voices floated over the campfire. Gilda was a high, sweet soprano, and Dean was a warm, husky tenor.

"Tell her to find me an acre of land: parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme; between the salt water and the sea strand, then she'll be a true love of mine.

War bellows blazing in scarlet battalions. General order their soldiers to kill. And to fight for a cause they've long ago forgotten.

Tell her to reap it with a sickle of leather: parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme; and gather it all in a bunch of heather, then she'll be a true love of mine."

There was an enthusiastic round of applause as they finished the song, and loud demands for more.
"Can you play, Dean?" Gilda asked, offering up her mandolin.

"He can play guitar," Cas offered helpfully, causing Dean to flush.

"Yeah, I can. I just didn't bring one."

"No worries!" Charlie reached behind her. "Gilda brought hers, too!" She passed the instrument over to him.

"Holy shit, a Whitebook! These are really rare. Mark Whitebook stopped making them a long time ago - he got sick from inhaling sawdust and varnish over the years," Dean smiled, lovingly running his hands running across the body and the neck. He smiled up at Gilda across the fire. "Nice choice. What do you want to sing?"

"What do you know?"

"Everything."

"Landslide?"

"Can do."

Dean started the song off, nimble fingers picking out the chords easily. Gilda joined him, the ethereal sound of the mandolin complementing the guitar nicely. Dean started singing, Gilda picking up the harmony.

"I took my love and took it down. I climbed a mountain and I turned around. And I saw my reflection in the snow-covered hills. Till the landslide brought me down."

Dean looked across the fire at Cas and smiled, eyes twinkling in the firelight. Cas's heart pounded in his chest as he listened to Dean sing.

"Oh, mirror in the sky, what is love? Can the child within my heart rise above? Can I sail through the changing ocean tides? Can I handle the seasons of my life?"

Jo joined in with a ukulele, adding her own spin to the song. Around the fire, people began to couple off; Charlie scooted in closer to Gilda, and elves and warriors alike smiled and joined hands with their special someones.

"Well, I've been afraid of changin', 'cause I've built my life around you. But time makes you bolder. Even children get older. And I'm getting older, too."

Dean looked so at peace, relaxed as his fingers danced up and down the fretboard of the old guitar, his voice harmonizing effortlessly with Gilda's.

Cas was falling in love with him.

Of course, the moment that this realization hit him was the very moment Aaron scooted closer to Dean on the log and stared up at him with stars in his eyes.

Fuck you, Aaron Bass, Cas thought, draining the rest of the mead in his mug and dumping more in from the bottle in front of him as he sent an unnoticed dagger filled stare across the fire. Aaron was his friend, but Dean was his - his - what was Dean, exactly?

Dean and Gilda finished the song to another round of applause and clamoring for more.
"I'm done," Gilda said softly. "My voice hurts from all the yelling today. I'd happily play but I'm not singing anymore. Dean, you should sing another. Your voice is so lovely. Pick something you like."

Dean blushed, "I dunno -"

"You should," Aaron told him. "I could listen to your voice all night."

Cas rolled his eyes and Dean smiled shyly. "Really?"

"Really," Aaron told him, stretching up to whisper something in Dean's ear that had him turning bright red.

Barely holding back a growl, Cas tossed down another mug of mead. He was now very drunk indeed.

"Ok, ok, I'll sing another." Dean started picking out the chords and Cas smiled. He recognized the song immediately, since it had been on the second Led Zeppelin album Dean had sold him.

"If the sun refused to shine, I would still be loving you. When mountains crumble to the sea, there will still be you and me. Kind woman, I give you my all, Kind woman, nothing more."

Dean rocked slightly on the log, eyes closed as he lost himself to the song. It was a different Dean than the one who'd sung *Landslide* and *Scarborough Fair*. This song seemed more personal.

"Little drops of rain whisper of the pain, tears of loves lost in the days gone by. My love is strong, with you there is no wrong, together we shall go until we die. My, my, my. An inspiration is what you are to me, inspiration, look... see."

Castiel was transfixed. He was so beautiful, firelight dancing along the planes of his handsome face, hands sure and steady on the guitar.

"And so today, my world it smiles, your hand in mine, we walk the miles, thanks to you it will be done, for you to me are the only one."

Dean opened his eyes, found Cas's across the fire.

"Happiness, no more be sad, happiness...I'm glad."

He was singing to Cas. He was singing for Cas.

"If the sun refused to shine, I would still be loving you. When mountains crumble to the sea, there will still be you and me."

Something was changing between them. Cas could feel it in the air, could see it in the way Dean held his eyes, even as Aaron tried to regain Dean's attention as he finished the song. Dean didn't seem to notice. He set the guitar aside and stood. Gathering two sticks, marshmallows, chocolate, and grahams from the food table, Dean crossed to where Cas was sitting, as Charlie watched the entire scene play out with a knowing smile.

"Wanna make a s'more?" he asked as he sat.

"Sure," Cas said softly. He watched as Dean loaded a marshmallow onto one of the sticks and handed it to him.

The rest of the party seemed to melt away from them, as they sat on their log roasting marshmallows and making s'mores. Cas was aware of the others, but paid them no mind. His initial drunkenness
began to fade with every s'more. Stars sparkled overhead and fireflies danced in the tree line while magic spun its web around them. Utterly sated on s'mores, Cas tossed his stick into the fire and watched as Dean did the same.

"Nice out here," Dean said softly.

"Mmm," Cas agreed, pleasantly tired and rather beyond words at that point.

Nearby, Gilda and Charlie were intertwined, hands woven together as they whispered secrets back and forth. Charlie's face was glowing in the firelight - she'd had a good day after all, retaining her title and crown as Queen of Moondoor, and now was spending the evening in the arms of the woman she loved. Meeting eyes, Charlie gave him a beautiful smile - a happy-for-you smile. They disappeared into the Queen's tent not long after that.

"You tired?" Dean asked, and Cas was surprised to find himself with his head on Dean's shoulder.

"I think I am," he admitted.

"How much mead did you drink?" Dean asked, a smile in his voice.

"Entirely too much."

"Thought so. You're downright cuddly right now."

"Do you mind?"

"Not even a little."

A warm bubble of contentment filled Cas's chest and he knew he was grinning like a fool but he didn't care. They sat a moment more, and somehow, Dean's hand ended up holding his, their fingers woven together. Cas leaned further into Dean's shoulder, growing more and more sleepy.

"Thank you for today," Dean told him softly. "I've been lonely for so long, and then you showed up and now I have people and -" he cut himself off. "Thank you."

"You're welcome. Y'should never be lonely. Too wonderful for that."

Dean didn't have a response, and Cas's drowsiness was winning; not long after, Dean managed to get him tucked into his sleeping bag in their tent, and he pressed a soft kiss to Cas's forehead. Fumbling across the small gap between their sleeping bags, Cas found Dean's hand again, and that's how he fell asleep.

Chapter End Notes

So much for the slow burn tag...

*Scarborough Fair* by Simon and Garfunkel (If you look at the lyrics attached to the youtube video, Dean would've been singing the parts in parentheses.)

*Landslide* by Fleetwood Mac

*Thank You* by Led Zeppelin
You've Got the Love

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sometimes it seems that the going is just too rough

And things go wrong no matter what I do

Now and then it seems that life is just too much

But you've got the love I need to see me through

Castiel woke with a groan, head aching and stomach tossing.

"Easy," Dean murmured from somewhere nearby. "Open your eyes. I have water and aspirin for you."

Prying his sticky lids open, Cas stared up at Dean and his beautiful smile. "It's morning?"

"Yup. A rainy, gray morning, but morning none the less. C'mon, sit up and take the meds. Then I'll see about getting you some breakfast."

Squirming into a sitting position, Cas gratefully took the aspirin and water Dean was offering. His head spun. "I think I'm going to join you on the no-alcohol bus," he muttered.

"Yeah, that stuff's not good for you, and you, my friend, definitely over-indulged last night." Dean smiled. "Hungry?"

"I don't know."

"Well, I'm going to brave the rain and grab some grub. We'll see if you can eat it. Be right back." He leaned down and kissed Cas's forehead and left the tent.

Cas smiled as he watched him go, warmth bubbling up in his chest at the thought of what was happening between them. He shivered a bit in the damp air of the tent, reaching for a hoodie while he waited for Dean to return. It might have been late June, but the temperature had dropped overnight. He hoped Dean brought him some coffee.

"Hey - that Aaron guy knows his way around a campfire. I got pancakes and bacon. And coffee," Dean grinned, letting himself back into the tent.

"Oh god, coffee," Cas moaned, reaching out and taking the metal mug from Dean. "Oh, I needed this." He tested the temperature and took a sip. "That's good. That is so good."
Dean chuckled. "Want some food, too?"

"Yes, please."

Setting a loaded plate in Cas's lap, Dean fished a fork from his hoodie pocket. "Eat up, you need it. It'll make the hangover go away faster."

"What about you?"

"I ate while I was waiting for you to get up. Aaron seemed happy about it. Talked my ear off."

Cas scowled. "He's interested in you."

Dean smiled and settled in next to Cas, draping the extra sleeping bag over their legs. "Bummer for him. I'm taken."

Cas couldn't help the big grin that spread across his face. He finished his breakfast while Dean sat close, enjoying the warmth of their contact. When he was done, Dean set the plate outside the tent. "So pack up?"

"Yes. I want to go home where it's warm. Would you mind driving? I'm not sure I could."

"No worries. Get dressed and I'll start packing up. We'll have to set the tent back up in your garage when we get home so it can dry. It's pretty soaked."

"Alright."

Working together, they packed everything, hauling it all to the Lincoln when they were done.

"So, Sir Dean of Kashmir," Charlie grinned, "will you be gracing us with your presence next month?"

"Wouldn't miss it for anything."

Charlie high-fived Dean. "Awesome!" She pulled him into a tight hug and whispered something in his ear. Dean blushed prettily and smiled shyly at her. He rubbed his neck and she squeezed his shoulder. "You know I'm right."

"Yeah. I do."

"Good."

Jo hugged Dean next, after ensuring he had her number. "Who doesn't have a cell phone?" she groused, writing it on the back of Dean's hand.

"I dunno, just never thought to get one."

"Oh. My bad. Sorry."

"No worries."

"Anyway, call me. We'll do pizza and Dr. Sexy, ok?"

"Yeah, sure."

"You can call me, too," Aaron offered his number, "if things don't, y'know, work out," he muttered,
casting a dark look Castiel's way.

"Uh, right. Ok, time to go." Dean snatched the keys from Cas and with a final wave to the rest of the crew, hurried into the driver's seat of the Lincoln.

"I'll see you all soon," Cas smiled, waving goodbye as he joined Dean at the car. He pulled open the door and settled inside with a sigh. Dean started the engine and looked over at him.

"You ok?"

"Let's go home. We'll have the beef stew I made earlier this week and curl up on the couch and listen to records. Sound good?"

Dean smiled and reached over the seat and patted Cas's leg. "Sounds perfect."

"Do you need help?"

"Nah, I got this. Go chill out, hangover man."

Cas chuckled and left Dean to deal with the wet tent in his garage. He settled in on the couch, eventually slipping into a prone position on the cushions. The aspirin Dean had given him helped immensely, but the headache was still there, poking at the back of his eyeballs.

He woke suddenly when a cool, wet washcloth was draped over his eyes.

"Ooh, sorry. I thought it might help."

"It did - it will, I just had dozed off and you startled me."

"What else can I do to help?" Dean asked, resettuating the cloth over Cas's eyes. His fingers pulled the socks from Cas's feet, and he rubbed the soles.

"Oh god, you're going to spoil me."

"I'm ok with that. Seriously, what else can I do?"

"I've only had one other hangover in my life and it wasn't even this bad. And this isn't that bad, just this stupid headache."

"I've had a few hangovers in my time. Sometimes food helped, sometimes a hot bath. We tried food, how about the whole bath thing?"

Cas pulled the washcloth from his eyes. "You don't drink."

Dean gave him a terse smile and dug for something in his pocket. It looked almost like a poker chip. "Four years sober. I don't drink anymore," he clarified.

"Oh."

Silence reigned over the living room while Dean continued rubbing Cas's feet, although his movements seemed distracted now.

"That's a pretty major accomplishment," Cas said softly. "Four years is a long time. You should be proud of yourself."
"I am," Dean muttered. "Thanks."

"How about that bath? That sounds good."

"I was a boring teenager," Castiel told him. "Never really got in trouble. My brother, Gabriel, did that enough for the both of us. I was the studious one with the good grades and all that."

Dean sat on the bathroom floor beside the tub while Cas wallowed in the lavender scented bubbles. "Yeah, I was the GED kid and it's amazing I got that far," Dean chuckled, tugging at a loose string on his tee. "My brother's the smart one."

"I think you're plenty smart. What's he do?"

"Lawyer out in California. Represents big names and contract crap, I dunno."

"My brother owns his own candy company. Has a store in New York. He's obsessed with the stuff."

"Cool."

Cas slid down in the tub until his head was lying on the ledge. "This was a good idea," he said, feeling a little dopey from the warmth of the water. "You have lots of good ideas."

"I try," Dean grinned, reaching over and smoothing a damp lock of hair from Cas's forehead.

"You should spend the night."

"Don't you have to work tomorrow?"

"Yes, but the store is on the way to my branch. I could drop you off."

"Not sure I'm ready for that, Cas," Dean said quietly.

"Nothing needs to happen. We can watch movies and you can sleep in the guestroom." He reached over and joined their hands. "I guess I'm just not ready to let you go yet. Not when," he stroked his fingers across Dean's, "not when we're on the brink of something amazing and new. I just want to be with you."

"We never did finish Last Crusade."

"No, you fell asleep."

"Yeah, I did." Dean squeezed his hand. "Alright, I'll stay. Besides, you said something about homemade beef stew, and it's gross and raining. I wouldn't want you to have to go back out in your condition." He quirked an eyebrow and a hint of a smile played at the corners of his mouth.

"Such a gentleman."

"I try."

Cas found every fleecey, snuggly blanket he had and he and Dean settled in on the couch with the stew. It was still damp and miserable, but inside Cas's little house, they were cozy and warm. Indiana Jones begged Elsa to drop the Grail and Dean drooped beside him.

"This movie seems to have a soporific effect on you," Cas commented, running his fingers through
Dean's hair.

"Mmm, no one sleeps good in a tent."

"I did."

"No, Cas. You straight up passed out. There's a difference."

"I'm not going to live this one down for a while, am I?"

"Nope."

Smiling, Cas shifted until Dean was laying on a pillow in his lap. He stroked Dean's neck with one hand, carding through his hair with the other. In minutes, Dean was snoring softly.

"Hmm. Probably should have gotten you to bed first." Not that he really cared; it was warm and comfortable curled up on the couch with Dean, on the cusp of something new, something different in their relationship. Cas was excited to see where their new feelings would take them, but he had no intention of rushing Dean into anything. Dean was utterly and completely worth the wait.

"Mmm," Dean mumbled, caught somewhere between asleep and awake.

"Would you like to go to bed?" Cas asked. "I don't think staying like this would be good for either one of us."

"M'k," Dean agreed. He let Cas drag him to his feet and lead him up the stairs.

"Guest room is in here," Cas told him, pushing open the door. "Bathroom down the hall. Make yourself at home."

"Jus' wanna sleep," Dean slurred.

"Alright." Cas helped Dean into the room, barely getting the blankets pulled down before Dean collapsed into the bed. Dean burrowed into the mattress and Cas tugged the blankets back over him. "You're so cute," he murmured.

"You too. Cute Cas. Yeah."

"Go to sleep, Dean," Cas leaned down to kiss his forehead, but Dean surprised him and hooked a hand behind his neck, pulling him down to meet his lips.

The kiss was soft and sweet, Dean's lips plush and perfect against his own.

"Yeah, that's th'good stuff," Dean mumbled, passing out a moment later.

"So I'll come over Friday night. I can bring the stuff and we can make homemade pizza."

"I love that idea." Dean reached across the seat of the Lincoln and wrapped his fingers around Cas's. "You're so fucking perfect. How'd I get so lucky?"

"Who's lucky? I'm the one who got lucky."

"Shut up."

Cas parked the car in front of In My Time of Vinyl and pulled Dean towards him, practically
slamming their lips together. Dean made a little hitched noise in the back of his throat, hands tangling in the lapels of Cas's suit jacket. Cas teased his lips open with his tongue, sweeping along the inside of Dean's mouth.

When they finally separated, Dean's cheeks were painted a soft pink and he was breathing hard. "Damn, Cas, where'd you learn to kiss like that?"

"You inspire me."

Barking out a laugh, Dean buried his face in Cas's chest. "That was so corny!" he howled.

"It really was," Cas agreed with a giggle.

Dean's shoulders shook with laughter, face still pressed against Cas's shirt. "Dammit, don't want you to go to work."

"I don't want to go to work. But Friday'll be here before you know it. Alright?"

"Yeah."

Cas left Dean on the curb outside the store, waving madly as he drove off.

Friday couldn't come soon enough.

"Soooo?" Charlie asked, chin resting on her hands. "Did we have a good weekend?"

"Oh, god, yes," Cas said seriously. "Thank you for encouraging me to invite him. He had a wonderful time and now things are," he smiled down at his desk, "changing. For the better."

"Aww, you're on cloud nine."

"I really am. What did you say to him yesterday, by the way?"

"I told him you were a great guy and worth a chance."

"Really?"

"Yeah."

Cas blushed. "You really think that about me?"

"Cas," Charlie shook her head, "you're one of the best guys I know and you just can't see it. You and Dean? You could have something amazing. And I told Aaron to back the fuck off for real. Ugh, that little shit."

"Not his fault Dean is gorgeous and wonderful and perfect."

"Aw!" Jo squealed, coming in the office. "That is so adorable!"

"I know, aren't they the cutest?"

"Oh my god, yes. Which reminds me." Jo pulled out her phone and played with it for a moment, and a second later, Cas's phone buzzed. "Sent you a prezzie," she grinned.

Opening the message, Cas smiled. "That's wonderful. Thank you, Jo." It was a picture of him and Dean sitting on a log, Cas's head on Dean's shoulder. The fire light made their faces look ethereal,
and of course, Dean looked beautiful. "This is perfect. I love it."

"Your first picture as a couple. Be proud, son," Jo ruffled his hair as she left the office.

"You, Dean, Gilda, and I should go on a double date sometime, y'know?"

"We should," Cas smiled, staring at the picture. "We absolutely should."

Thursday afternoon, Cas took Charlie to drop off her Gremlin at the shop. While he waited for her, he wandered the lot, looking at some of the old cars the man had on sale. He didn't really know much about cars, but one caught his eye anyway.

A huge boat of car sat on the corner of the lot. 327/67, A Real Gem!, and Great Condition! were painted in neon letters across the car's windshield, and her black paint sparkled in the sunlight. Something about the car was familiar to Cas, but he couldn't figure out why. He just felt like he'd seen her before.

"See something you like?"

"Oh, I'm not interested," Cas told the salesman, "just waiting for my friend. She brought in the yellow Gremlin?"

"Yup. She's ready to roll. If you wanted a classic car, friend, this would be a nice one to have. Damn near mint condition. I know that boy didn't want to sell it, either. I doubt she'll be here long."

"That's nice," Cas said vaguely, wandering back to where Charlie was waiting for him.

Charlie bounced out of the office, smiling and waving. "So they said it'll be about a week, which isn't as bad as I thought. Anyway, Gilda can drive me the rest of the week if you can just get me home."

"Of course."

"Going to go see Dean tonight?" She linked their arms as they walked towards Cas's car.

"Tomorrow. I have to go get ingredients for dinner and then I'll head over after work."

"Going to spend the weekend?" Charlie grinned salaciously.

"If he's ready for that."

"You mean you guys haven't sealed the deal yet? He looked like a sure bet this past weekend."

"He said he wasn't ready and I wasn't going to push. It's not a big deal."

"No, you're right. I'm sorry."

Cas started the car and pulled out of the lot, sparing one last glance for the big, black car on the corner.

She almost looked - no, that's crazy, he thought - sad.

The store's door was propped open when he got there, a blessing since his arms were full of groceries. Music drifted out into the street, and Cas was pleased to recognize the sounds of Jimi
Hendrix wailing about kissing the sky.

"Dean?"

"Back here! Trying to find something."

Cas set the grocery bags on the counter, wandering down the aisles until he found Dean flipping through albums.

"Got it!" He crowed triumphantly. He held up a record with a pretty red haired lady on the cover that reminded Cas a bit of Charlie. "She's pretty recent, but man, this lady can sing. I think you'll enjoy it." Dean crossed to the record played and put the LP on the turntable.

Cas listened to the first song thoughtfully, with it's whimsical instrumentation and tempo. "I do enjoy it," he agreed.

"Thought you would. Gonna find you some Amy Winehouse and Fiona Apple too. Maybe Tori Amos."

"Tori Amos was on Charlie's list. Boys for Pele and From the Choirgirl Hotel."

"Yeah, I should have both. I'll look later." Dean reached for Cas's hand and tugged him closer. He cupped Cas's cheek in his palm and pulled him in for a sweet, lingering kiss. "Hi," he said, smiling against Cas's lips.

"Hi," Cas smiled back, kissing him again. "I missed you."

"Missed you, too." They stood there and kissed for a bit while Florence + The Machine wailed in the background. Dean's hand found Cas's waist, his fingers sliding beneath the hem of his tee to find bare skin. "Mmm, told you that was the good stuff."

"You're right about that." Cas's fingers followed a similar path on Dean's hips. "I really did miss you."

Dean claimed his lips again, tonguing softly at Cas's bottom lip as he pulled away. "I'm hungry. We can close up and head upstairs."

"Alright."

Cas shut off the turntable while Dean locked the front door and flipped the closed sign. Dean shut the lights off, leaving just the Rock 'N' Roll neon sign aglow above the counter. He took both bags of groceries and leaned into to kiss Cas's cheek.

"C'mon," he smiled, nodding towards the stairway.

Dean's little apartment was spotless, the cleanest Castiel had ever seen it. A candle in a jar flickered on the coffee table, likely the source of the soft lemony smell. Just a very faint layer of pot smoke remained, but all the dishes were done, the kitchen sparkled, and the whole place was warm and welcoming, if maybe little too warm. The windows were thrown wide open, and two ceiling fans whirled over the living and bedroom areas, and the little extra heat wasn't uncomfortable enough for Cas to complain.

"So I have one old ratty cookie sheet, but we can cover it with foil. Will that work? And I got some soda. I dunno. What else do we need?" Dean flitted nervously around his kitchen, pulling things out and putting stuff back, making a bit of a racket.
"The cookie sheet is fine. I can take care of this. Put some music on." Cas leaned in and kissed Dean's neck. "Go, I'm making you dinner."

"Ok," Dean nodded, leaving the kitchen nook and walking towards the turntable.

Cas followed him with his eyes, immediately noticing the blank spot on the wall. "Where's the Union Jack guitar?"

"Oh," Dean mumbled, distractedly thumbing through a stack of records. "I went to um, to play it. Didn't sound right. Took it into a dude that does service."

"Ah." Cas pulled the fresh dough out of the bag and laid it on the cookie sheet while he turned the oven on. "Do you have a knife and cutting board? I bought a bunch of different toppings because I wasn't sure what you liked. You can veto anything I have."

Music drifted from where Dean stood as Jimmy Page lit up the speakers. "Ok." Dean joined Cas in the kitchen, sliding his arms around his waist and hooking his chin on Cas's shoulder. "Cutting board and knife are in the cabinet over the sink and I'll eat all that. I'm not picky."

"Good." Cas reached for the board and knife and starting chopping a green pepper, while Dean dropped soft little kisses all over his neck. "You're distracting me. You want dinner or not?" Cas teased.

"Maybe I want you for dinner."

Cas's hands froze as Dean sucked his earlobe into the wet heat of his mouth. "I uh, I thought you weren't -"

"Wasn't ready last week. Maybe I am now."

"We should at least eat first, maybe?"

"Mmm. Maybe." Dean kissed his neck one last time before snatching a piece of pepper and sliding away.

Flustered, Cas finished chopping the toppings and assembled the pizza. He slid it in the oven and set the timer for fifteen minutes.

"Come sit while we're waiting," Dean called, patting a spot on the sofa next to him. Cas settled in next to him and Dean wrapped an arm around his shoulder and pulled him close.

"Hi," Dean murmured, kissing a spot just below Cas's ear. "How long until it's ready?"

"About fifteen minutes."

"Good, plenty of time."

"For what?" Cas asked, confused.

"For this." Dean pulled Cas in, bringing their lips together. The kiss started off sweet, chaste, but Dean pushed closer, sliding his hands to Cas's hips and pulling him tight against him. Cas reached up and took Dean's face in both his hands, holding him in place against his lips. Moaning into the kiss, Dean licked along the seam of Cas's lips and he happily let him in.

He tasted so good; verdant and fresh like the little piece of green pepper he'd stolen from Cas's cutting board, mixed with the more herby flavor of weed, likely from earlier in the day.
For the briefest of moments, Cas wondered if he should be concerned about Dean's weed habit, but Dean pushed him down on the couch and covered him with his own body, lips never separating.

"Fuck, Dean," Cas gasped as Dean left his lips to attack his neck again.

"Later. Pizza, remember?"

"Guh," Cas responded intelligently, squirming slightly as wandering fingers traveled underneath his shirt.

"You know I wanted you the second you came through my door?" Dean whispered, breath hot in Cas's ear. "You were all wet and lost looking and I just wanted to bring you up here and warm you up - the old-fashioned way." He nipped at Cas's earlobe.

"I remember thinking how gorgeous you were and how bad I felt that I didn't have a turntable. You looked so disap-" he yelped as Dean lightly bit his neck, "disappointed!"

"I was, but only because I wanted you to have a reason to come back. You came back anyway, didn't you?"

"Yeah. I'll keep coming back, too."

Dean slammed their lips together again, overwhelming Cas with his intensity. He clung to Dean's shoulders, let Dean take his time and direct the kiss. "Fuck, Cas," Dean breathed, pulling back. He laid his head on Cas's chest.

"And so today, my world it smiles, your hand in mine, we walk the miles, thanks to you it will be done, for you to me are the only one."

He felt Dean smile as he sang along with Robert Plant.

"Happiness, no more be sad, happiness...I'm glad."

Cas ran his fingers through Dean's crazy blue hair and kissed the top of his head. Dean returned the kiss with one of his own to the bottom of Cas's chin before laying back down.

"If the sun refused to shine, I would still be loving you. When mountains crumble to the sea, there will still be you and me."

"I love your voice," Cas murmured.

They listened to the end of the song in silence, neither one moving when side one of Zep II finished. The skipping noise was oddly soothing, and it was comfortable, laying on Dean's battered couch with the man snuggled on top of him.

Of course, that's when the oven timer went off.

There was a tension in the air as they cleaned up from dinner. Cas finished drying the dishes while Dean lit a few more candles and dug around for another album to put on.

"What's that one?"

"Uh, Days of Future Passed by the Moody Blues. I like side two the best," he explained simply, moving the arm of the turntable onto the record.
The music was sweeping, and reminded Cas of a long drive through the country.

"Tuesday afternoon. I'm just beginning to see, now I'm on my way. It doesn't matter to me, chasing the clouds away."

"He has a pleasant voice," Cas remarked, settling back down on the couch with Dean.

"Yeah. I'm a fan."

"Can I buy this one?"

"Uh, sure. You uh, you ready to head home?"

"Well, no, I uh," Cas felt wrong-footed. "Did you want me to leave?"

"No, I just, I um," Dean snorted and shrugged. "I'm out of practice."

"Didn't seem out of practice earlier."

"Heh."

"I hope it's not too forward, but I did hope you'd ask me to stay. I packed a bag hoping you would and it's down in my car, and -"

Dean cut him off with a kiss and Cas melted back into his arms. "Stay," he breathed against his mouth.

"Alright."

Dean's bed was covered in silky pillows and different colored throws. There seemed to be no set decor, although a lot of the prints seemed Indian in nature. The way Dean had it wedged into an alcove meant it was mostly surrounded on three walls and it felt more like a nest than a bed. A wrought iron lamp hung above, and Dean's eyes glittered in the light of the flame as he lit the thick candle inside.

He stepped down from the bed, reached for Cas's hands and pulled him in.

"Are you alright?" Cas asked softly.

"Nervous."

"Why?"

"Because you mean a lot to me and I don't want to fuck this up."

"You won't," Cas promised, sliding his hands under Dean's t-shirt. "I won't let you."

"When the sun goes down, and the clouds all frown, night has begun for the sunset."

He slid Dean's shirt up his chest, revealing more tattoos as he went, and Cas pulled the shirt over Dean's head and let it fall to the floor.

"Shadows on the ground; never make a sound, fading away in the sunset. Night has now become, day for everyone."

The song coming from the speakers had a tribal, primal beat to it and Cas felt his heartbeat pound
with it as his arousal built. Dean's eyes were dark as his fingers slipped down to toy with the button on Cas's jeans.

"You are so lovely," Cas told him, dragging fingers over the flowers tattooed on Dean's chest and down his arms. "A human garden."

"My mother loved flowers," Dean explained quietly.

*Loved not loves, Cas thought sadly. Past tense.*

"Hey, come back here. Don't - I didn't mean to make you sad. Cas, not tonight. Later. Ok?"

*We'll talk about this later, Cas thought. He pulled Dean closer and kissed his nose. "Alright."*

They went back to undressing each other as the music changed to something more lighthearted and bouncy.

*A nightingale plays a dark mellow phrase, of notes that are rich and so true. An aerial display by the firefly brigade, dancing to tunes no one knew."

Dean pushed him against the wall, opening his jeans completely while nibbling and kissing at his neck. "Want you," he growled, and Cas pushed forward, flipping them around and pushing Dean against the wall instead.

"Naked. Now," Cas demanded as Dean's hands tangled in his shirt. Clothes were yanked from each other's bodies as the song drove on.

*In twilight time, dream with me awhile. In twilight time, dream with me awhile."

*Building castles in the air. Whistling to the wind. As nature bows down her head, see what tomorrow brings."*

*Twilight time, dream with me awhile."

As it finished and slowed and changed to something else, Cas tumbled them into the bed, Dean beneath him, naked bodies sliding together across the satiny bed coverings.

"Cas," Dean murmured.

"Ssh."

"No, I don't - I don't have anything."

"I brought stuff. I told you - I hoped you'd ask me to stay."

Dean stared up at him, eyes sparkling in the candlelight. "Will you - will you fuck me?" he whispered, as though he was afraid to ask for it.

"Anything you want."

*Nights in white satin, never reaching the end. Letters I've written, never meaning to send."

Dean watched through hooded eyes as Cas retrieved the lube and a condom. His expression was open, expectant. Crawling back into the bed, Cas leaned down and kissed Dean. "Relax," he murmured, sliding a hand down Dean's side. "I won't hurt you."
"Beauty I'd always missed, with these eyes before. Just what the truth is, I can't say anymore."

"I know."

"Cause I love you. Yes, I love you. Oh, how, I love you."

Dean spread his legs invitingly at the sound of the lube being opened, and Cas slid his slicked hand down to find his hole. He circled the ring of muscle gently, watching Dean's face for discomfort.

There was none, just the anxiousness of arousal and anticipation.

"Do it," he rasped. "Please."

Nodding, Cas slid his index finger inside of Dean's heat, leaning forward to capture the hitched sound that came from him. "Relax," he reminded him.

"Gazing at people, some hand in hand. Just what I'm going through, they can't understand."

Dean writhed beneath him as he added a second finger, keeping his pace slow and steady. Leaning down, he took Dean in his mouth.

"Some try to tell me, thoughts they cannot defend. Just what you want to be, you will be in the end."

"Cas!" Dean gasped, hand finding his hair. He tugged slightly, the sensation making Cas moan around his dick. "Fuck, fuck."

"And I love you. Yes, I love you. Oh, how, I love you. Oh, how, I love you."

Reaching up, Cas found Dean's other hand and wove their fingers together. Dean pulsed and throbbed in his mouth, and Cas pulled off with a pop. "You're close."

"Fuck, yes." Dean was wrecked, pink and flushed from his cheeks to his chest, heaving like he'd run a marathon.

Cas slipped a third finger inside him, twisting and scissoring to open him further. "Such a good boy," he whispered, tongue darting out to lick at Dean's balls.

Dean groaned above him, hand slipping from Cas's hair. "Fuck," he whimpered.

"Do you like that? Being called my good boy?" Cas asked, climbing Dean's body while keeping his hand busy below. "You are so good, Dean. Perfect, wonderful," he stopped his ascent to pull a rigid nipple into his mouth, reveling in the broken sounds Dean was making.

"Nights in white satin, never reaching the end. Letters I've written, never meaning to send."

Fumbling slightly, Cas managed to open and unroll the condom onto himself with one hand. He dribbled a fair amount of lube onto his hand and stroked his length, coating everything liberally.

"Cas, please, please."

"Beauty I'd always missed, with these eyes before. Just what the truth is, I can't say anymore."

He pulled his hand from Dean's body, grabbed both of the man's thighs and pulled him back down the bed, lining up in the process. "Are you my good boy? Answer me."

"Yes, Cas, I'm you're good boy, I'm whatever you need me to be, please, please, please -"
"'Cause I love you. Yes, I love you. Oh, how, I love you. Oh, how, I love you."

The music crescendoed, and Cas slid inside of Dean while claiming his mouth again, and the noise that left Dean's throat was nothing short of stunning. Once fully sheathed inside, Cas had to take a moment to calm down, afraid he would come the instant he moved.

"'Cause I love you. Yes, I love you. Oh, how, I love you. Oh, how, I love you."

The album ended, the scratch of the skipping sound echoing out of the speakers, but Cas was glad for it. Without the music to distract him, he could feel and hear every little hitched breath, broken moan, every little moment of ecstasy from the man beneath him.

Dean was wrecked. Utterly wrecked. A high flush lined his perfect cheekbones and his pupils were so blown with lust, his eyes looked almost black in the flickering candlelight.

"Move, Cas, please, please," he begged. "Please."

Unable to deny him a moment longer, Cas pulled back and thrust home again, Dean's back arching off the mattress as he dug his fingers into Cas's shoulder blades.

It was intense, the way Dean reacted to him, hips working to meet every thrust, and despite his efforts to make it last, Cas came after just a few thrusts, groaning at his lack of stamina. "It's been a long time," he apologized, staring down at Dean.

Dean smiled. "It's ok."

"But you didn't -"

Pulling his hand onto his stomach, Dean grinned when Cas found the mess. "Like the second you were inside me I came. It was just too much and it's been a long time for me, too."

They both laughed softly, and Cas leaned down to kiss Dean. "You're so beautiful," he whispered against his lips.

"Look in the mirror sometime."

Chuckling, Cas gently pulled out and took the condom off. He wrapped it in a tissue Dean offered him and leaned over to set it on the floor, out of the way where either of them would step on it. He grabbed his own shirt and wiped Dean off, barely finishing the job before the man pulled him back into his arms.

"Stay," Dean mumbled sleepily in his ear.

"Told you I would. What about the candles?"


Cas could feel it when Dean dropped off, and he carefully untangled himself and squirmed out of bed, blowing out all the candles and getting rid of the condom. Finished, he climbed back in, smiling as Dean imitated an octopus and wound himself around him.

Kissing the top of Dean's head, Cas yawned, drowsy and content.

"Goodnight, Dean."
Chapter End Notes

*Days of Future Passed* by The Moody Blues. Side II starts at 19:07.
Cas woke to the sound of a softly played guitar and a honey warm voice singing quietly. The sun was just beginning to light Dean's little apartment. Blinking open his eyes, he spied Dean sitting on the end of the bed, one of the Martins in hand. He was still naked as far as Cas could tell, and the tattoos on his back rippled with every movement of his arms.

Roses grew on his left shoulder, morning glories on his right. Vines of bougainvillea and clematis drooped invitingly down his spine and lily of the valley bloomed along his waistline. Tulips on his biceps, forget-me-nots on his elbow, yarrow and statice on his forearms - Cas could identify them all. An avid gardener himself, Cas appreciated each and every flower decorating the man before him. He also adored the little trail of honey bees and butterflies trailing up the left side of Dean's neck.

"You came in from the rain, smell of flowers on your skin. A grey and rainy day, but you brought the sunshine in."

Propping himself up on one elbow, Cas smiled as he listened to Dean sing.

"How do I deserve the miracle of you? Funny 'cause you say, I'm a miracle, too."

"Fallin' in love, it wasn't in my plans. But here you are, here I am. Fallin' in love, what a thing to do. Fallin' in love, fallin' for you."

Dean stopped to write something down.

"That's beautiful," Cas said softly. Dean jumped a bit.

"Hey," he said, pulling the guitar strap from his shoulder. He carefully set the instrument on the floor. "Did you like it?"

"Yes. Who sings it?"

Smiling bashfully, Dean mumbled "I do. It's mine. A Dean original."

"Wow. That's lovely. You're so talented."

Dean blushed and ducked his head. "It's not that great."

"Yes it is."

He crawled back up the bed, settling between Cas's legs. Dean laid his head on Cas's belly. "You're so nice to me."
"You deserve nice things," Cas told him, stroking his fingers through Dean's hair.

A warm breeze lifted the curtains in the window above the bed. It was comfortable, laying there with Dean, and Cas thought he might drift back off like that.

"You deserve nice things, too," Dean said softly, nuzzling into Cas's stomach. "Lots of good things." He kissed the skin just below Cas's belly button, sliding down his body and pressing kisses along the little trail of hair leading south.

Grinning, Cas tightened his fingers in Dean's hair. As Dean traveled downward, he pulled the sheet with him, wrapping his beautiful lips around Cas once he was exposed. "Dean -" Cas growled, tugging on his hair. Dean moaned around the cock in his mouth, twisting his tongue through the slit. He opened his jaw wider and took Cas all the way down. "Fuck, Dean, just like that. You're perfect. So perfect, so good for me."

Dean's hips were working against the mattress as he slid up and down on Cas's cock. He hummed and growled, and every noise created vibrations that served to push Cas closer and closer to the edge.

"Dean - Dean, stop."

Pulling off with a pop, Dean raised his head. His lips were red and swollen, wrecked. He looked gorgeous. "Did I do something wrong?"

"No, come up here. I was close and I want to take you with me."

"Ok."

Dean tumbled into his arms and Cas kissed him, sweeping his tongue through Dean's mouth. "Fuck, I can taste myself. That's hot." He kissed him again, sliding a hand down to cup Dean, smiling into the kiss when Dean made a little helpless noise and thrust into his hand. He pulled Dean flush against his chest, fingers walking along Dean's hip, sliding across his ass to find his hole. He dipped a finger inside, and Dean writhed above him. "Look at you, still wet and open from last night."

"Yeah, Cas, do it. Do it."

Fumbling under dozens of pillows, he found the lube bottle from the night before. Blindly, he drizzled the stuff on Dean's crack, smiling when he gasped from the coolness of the liquid against his heated skin. Cas dropped the bottle, using both hands on Dean to push the gel towards his hole, sliding fingers inside of him.

Dean whimpered and buried his face in Cas's neck as he rocked his hips against Cas's. The contact was electric, Cas's heartbeat accelerating as he felt himself get close again. "Mmm, want to ride me?"

"Fuck, yes."

"Condoms in the bag. Over there," Cas pointed.

"I know for a fact I'm clean. I was tested within the last two years and I haven't been with anyone -"

"You haven't been with anyone in that long?"

"No," Dean blushed. "Just didn't - I mean -"

"Don't worry about it. I'm clean, too."

"Good," Dean said, moving to his knees and dropping onto Cas's cock. They both groaned as Dean
seated himself, raising his torso up and dropping his hips to take him deeper.

"God, fuck, Dean." Grinning, Dean braced his hands on Cas's chest and slid up and down, riding him in earnest. His chest heaved as a red flush dripped from his face onto his neck and chest. And the noises he made - Cas wanted to swallow each one, keep it forever. Broken little gasps and hitched sounds, half sobs, moans, groans, Dean lost himself to pleasure and it was Cas's pleasure to watch it happen. His moves were liquid, sinuous; he was beautiful. "So lovely," Cas whispered. He squirmed into a sitting position, wrapping his arms around Dean's waist and directing his movements for a moment.

Beads of sweat formed along Dean's neck and shoulders before dripping down his chest, Cas catching a few on his tongue before sucking Dean's nipple into his mouth, dragging his teeth gently along the hardened nub.

Hips stuttering, Dean whined, arms moving from Cas's shoulders to cling around his neck. Cas continued to lift Dean's hips, moving him up and down on his dick.

"You are so incredible, do you know that?"

Dean whimpered.

"My sweet, good boy. So perfect. So good for me." Cas had no idea where that was coming from; it just seemed natural to him. Dean was good, so very good, and he deserved to know it. His words seemed to steal Dean's ability to maintain a rhythm, barely holding on as it was. "Are you close?" Cas growled. Dean nodded frantically. Reaching for Dean's legs, Cas gripped him just below the bend of his knee, unfolding him and laying him out flat on the bed. Looming over him, he took Dean's wrists and pinned them to the mattress. "Think you can come on just my cock?"

"Y-yeah. I'm so close. So close."

"Good."

Cas slammed his hips into Dean and Dean screamed, back arching off the bed. His fingers curled and uncurled as he strained against the grip on his wrists. His hips seemed to have a mind of their own, chasing every movement Cas made, and Cas was relentless, a violent, punishing rhythm right from go, not giving Dean a minute to recover between thrusts, to even breathe.

He changed the angle, making sure the head of his dick dragged across Dean's prostate on every movement, and Dean screamed again, a garbled sound that included Cas's name, coming all over his own belly and chest. He went limp, still lifting his hips to accommodate Cas but otherwise still. Cas tumbled over the edge a moment later, chest pressed to Dean's with his name on his lips.

He laid there for a moment, catching his breath while Dean did the same beneath him. Cas released his hold on Dean's wrists, rubbing them in apology when he saw the red marks his fingers had left behind.

"I hope they bruise," Dean said softly, leaning up to lick the sweat from Cas's neck.

"That wasn't too intense?" Cas asked, concerned.

"That was fucking perfect," Dean smiled sleepily. "You're fucking - fuck -" he muttered, "too tired to think of good words."

Cas kissed the spot just below Dean's ear, across his chin, his cheek, before finding his sweet, soft lips. "I'll tell you who's perfect," he murmured, kissing Dean repeatedly.
"Mmm," Dean's pretty eyes slipped shut, and he was snoring softly a moment later. Sex seemed to overwhelm him in the best of ways, and Cas watched him sleep for a bit before gingerly pulling out.

Dean was a mess, he realized, as he sat back on his heels on the bed. Come coated his chest and dripped onto the sheets beneath him. Retrieving a warm, wet washcloth and towel from the bathroom, he gently cleaned the other man, wiping down the insides of his thighs with gentle strokes. Finished, he pulled one of the many pretty throw blankets over Dean, smiling as he mumbled in his sleep and pulled a pillow into his arms.

In the bathroom, he rinsed and wrung out the washcloth, hanging it over the shower bar. Dean's building must've been older than Cas realized; there was a massive claw foot tub that would definitely be big enough for them both to enjoy when Dean woke.

Yawning, Cas decided he could sleep a little more as well, and went back to the bedroom, crawling into the bed beside Dean. Still asleep, Dean seemed to realize he was there anyway, rolling and settling into Cas's arms.

He kissed Dean's forehead, contentment settling over him like the warmest blanket imaginable, and he closed his eyes and followed Dean into sleep.

Dean leaned back into Cas's arms and hummed. "This was a good idea," he mumbled.

Dragging a soapy washcloth across Dean's arms, Cas kissed his neck. "Hooray for big old bathtubs."

"You spoil me, you know that?"

"Good. I suspect you haven't been spoiled enough in your life." Dean didn't respond, and Cas kissed the other side of his neck. "Are you ok?"

"Yeah, I'm good."

Cas let the washcloth go and reached for a cup sitting on the floor. "Close your eyes," he warned, before pouring the warm water over Dean's head. He scrubbed Dean's hair, enjoying the happy noises Dean made as he dragged his fingertips over Dean's scalp. Cas used the cup to rinse all the suds from his hair before pulling Dean back against him.

"All nice and clean."

"Take such good care of me," Dean told him, and Cas didn't care for the slight note of confusion in Dean's voice - like he didn't understand how someone could care for him.

"Does it make you uncomfortable?"

"N-no, I um, I'm just not used to it," Dean said softly.

"Well, get used to it. I like caring for you, making you feel good. It makes me feel good." The tension in Dean's body relaxed as he leaned back in Cas's arms again. They sat curled together in the hot water until it starting to go cool. "We should get out," Cas told Dean.

Dean's stomach growled loudly in response.

"Ok, definitely time to get out, you need food."

"That was kinda embarrassing," Dean chuckled, sitting forward so Cas could get out of the tub. He let Cas help him up and wrap him in a fluffy towel. "So was this like, I dunno, aftercare?"
"Hmm, it did seem to go a little dom/sub earlier, didn't it?"

"Just a bit."

"Would you like it to get a little more intense? Would you want to scene once in awhile?"

"I'll be honest - I'm pretty happy with what it is. I don't know that I want to be submissive or whatever, but I do like it when you - when you take the lead," Dean said softly.

"So you liked the hold on your wrists, you like when I call you good boy, tell you how wonderful and perfect you are for me?" Cas walked closer to Dean, watching the other man's eyes darken. "You like it when I control the situation?"

"Yeah," Dean whispered, leaning into the touch as Cas cupped his cheek.

A bleak thought crossed Cas's mind. "You've been alone a long time, haven't you? You're touch starved. I don't want to take advantage of you like this, when you're desperate for companionship. You have to know I wouldn't use our friendship or your loneliness against you. I truly want to be with you. I'm hoping this is the start of something - long term."

"I want to be with you, too. You're not - you're not taking advantage." His stomach growled loudly again, and Dean blushed.

"Ok. I think we have a lot to talk about. For now, let's get dressed and head down to Lafitte's for breakfast, ok?" Cas looked at the clock. "Or brunch, as the case may be. Wait, do you need to open the store?"

"I'll open from one to six, if you want to stick around and hang out. Or you can go. I mean - shit. Whatever you need to do, Cas."

"But I can stay if I want?"

"Yeah."

Cas smiled and kissed Dean's cheek. "Then I'm staying."

They squeezed onto the same bench in a booth at Lafitte's and shared two huge plates of all day breakfast. Benny Lafitte, the owner, walked around the place introducing himself, pleased as punch when Dean gushed on and on about how good his pie was. That earned him a free slice of salted caramel apple pie, and Dean beamed as he ate it.

Cas took Dean's hand as they walked back to the store, and he helped Dean open the shades and turn on the lights.

"What are we listening to?" he called, flipping through a stack of albums near the turntable.

"I dunno. Pick one!"

Cas chose a hot pink album and put it on the turntable, carefully lifting the arm as the disc began to spin.

"Strange brew, kill what's inside of you."

"She's a witch of trouble in electric blue, in her own mad mind she's in love with you, with you. Now what you gonna do? Strange brew, kill what's inside of you."
"Ooh, *Disraeli Gears*. Excellent choice." Dean came around the corner with his arms full of more albums.

Cas had his head tilted towards the speaker, listening carefully to the voice singing. "He sounds familiar."

"*Tears in Heaven? Beautiful Tonight?*"

"I know both of those songs!"

"Eric Clapton," Dean grinned.

"Huh. Imagine that. I'm buying this one."

"Ok." Dean pulled an LP from the stack near the turntable. There was a painting of a beautiful woman on the cover. "Ever hear the song *Layla?* Kinda slow - *Layla, got me on my knees, Layla, beg you darlin' please?*" he sang.

"Yes, I know that one, too. Also Eric Clapton?"

"Yup." Dean carefully took *Disraeli Gears* off the turntable and put the other disc on. "Clapton had a bunch of different bands back in the day which included Derek and the Dominos. This is the original version of *Layla*." A rocking guitar riff blasted out of the speakers.

"*What'll you do when you get lonely, and nobody's waiting by your side? You've been running and hiding much too long. You know it's just your foolish pride.*"

"*Layla, you've got me on my knees. Layla, I'm begging, darling please. Layla, darling won't you ease my worried mind.*"

"I like this a lot better!"

"See?" Dean beamed. "Told ya." Dean turned to look at the store. "Wow this place is a mess."

"Let me help you clean," Cas told him. "I'd be happy to."

"Really?"

"Of course. And then I'll run to the store and get stuff for dinner. That is, if you wouldn't mind me staying again tonight."

Dean grinned and pushed Cas back against the counter, leaning in for a hot kiss. "What do you think?"

"Mmm, I'm thinking I should run home and grab a change of clothes and some bubble bath because I really like your tub."

"I think that's a great idea."

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Cas left just after five and was back by six, in time to help Dean close the store. "I brought a couple of pie pans with me," he announced, setting a large box on the counter. "I think you need more pie in your life."

Dean was staring at a thick ledger, eyes moving as he read what was on the page. He didn't seem to really notice that Cas was back.
"Dean?"

"Oh, hey," Dean smiled, looking up. He slammed the ledger shut and shoved it under the register. "Pie, huh?"

"Yes - you seem distracted. Are you ok?"

"Yeah, I'm fine, just going cross eyed over my books."

"Why don't you use the iPad I saw in here once? There's some fantastic bookkeeping apps I could help you set up."

"Oh. The iPad was a gift from my brother and I don't really need it or know how to use it so I just sold it."

"Ok. No worries. I can help you with your books. I have a bachelor's in accounting. Math is my strong suit."

"Heh. It's not mine, that's for sure. I'll keep that offer in mind." He moved to poke through the box. "Ooh, what's in here?"

Cas yanked the box off the counter. "Surprises. Close up and come upstairs."

"Alright."

Upstairs, Cas unpacked the box, sliding two of the items under his pillow on Dean's bed. The rest was mostly groceries, and they went in the fridge.

"So what are we eating?" Dean asked, wrapping his arms around Cas's waist.

"Homemade mac and cheese."

"Holy shit, marry me," Dean said.

"Ok."

Time froze for a moment.

"Uh -"

Turning in his arms, Cas kissed his nose. "I won't hold you to it."

"Not that I wouldn't want to."

"Dean, it's ok. I'm good, you're good. No worries, as you like to say."

"Ok."

"Help me cook?"

"Uh, sure."

"There's a pound of bacon in the fridge. Chop it into small pieces while I do the onion."

"Bacon and onion in the mac and cheese? You are speaking my language."

"It gets better. I make a crust from panko and it's actually mac and cheese pie."
"Oh god, I love you." Again, time froze in the little kitchen. Dean was blushing profusely when Cas turned around. "I uh - I think I might actually mean that one." He fumbled for the fridge handle. "Bacon! I'm going to cut the bacon."

"Dean." Cas reached for his hand and tugged him closer. "I love you, too."

"But it's only been -"

"Do we really need a time limit?"

"I guess not."

Cas pulled him into a kiss, smiling against Dean's lips. "Let's make dinner," he said quietly, pressing his forehead to Dean's. "And we can talk, or climb in the tub or whatever. Alright?"

"Ok."

After dinner, they curled together on Dean's couch to watch some old western he loved, but they were making out five minutes into the movie. "Bath?" Cas asked, coming up for air.

"Ok."

Dean went to run the water while Cas fetched one of the surprises from under his pillow. Dean was naked, a pleasant surprise, when Castiel returned to the bathroom.

"What's in the bottle?" he asked, taking it from Cas and helping him tug his shirt off.

"Sandalwood and rose bubble bath."

"Sounds girly."

"So?" Cas challenged. He unscrewed the top and held it under Dean's nose.

"I lied. That's awesome."

Smiling, Cas dumped a portion of the stuff in the tub while Dean slid his hands around to unbuckle his belt.

"Too many clothes, Cas."

"Alright, alright." He straightened and let Dean finish undressing him.

Dean's tub was set up with the faucet in the middle of one of the tub's sides. That meant Cas could lounge at one end, Dean at the other, with their legs tangled together in the middle. Dean lifted his left leg and rested it on the edge of the tub.

"I love your tub. For real. I think you should write a song about it."

"You are so silly," Dean smiled.

There was a window over the tub, high enough to protect modesty, but low enough that the last beams of evening sunlight lit the room with a warm glow. Cas laid his head on Dean's ankle, running his fingers through the damp hair on one perfect, slightly bowed leg.

Dean's eyes were closed, his expression blissful and content. "This stuff does smell good," he
"Told you."

"Makin' me sleepy."

"Supposed to turn you on."

"I never need much help there," Dean grinned.

Sitting up, Cas shifted until he was lying in Dean's arms.

"Hi," Dean kissed the tip of Cas's nose.

"Kiss me for real."

Dean complied immediately, using his tongue to open Cas's mouth. "Taste like mac and cheese," Dean told him. "That is so not a bad thing."

"We should go to bed. I brought massage oil and I'm going to get you all loose and pliant, do whatever you want after. I can fuck you, you can fuck me, we can go to sleep. Whatever you want. We should get out of here and go to bed."

"Yeah, we should."

"Dean?"

"Yeah?"

Cas propped himself up, looking into Dean's eyes. "I love you."

"Love you, too," Dean said, his voice soft.

"Best weekend ever," Cas smiled, leaning up to kiss Dean.

"Yeah it was. All good things though, huh?"

"What do you mean?"

Dean shut the trunk of Cas's Lincoln. "You're heading home and the weekend's over and I don't want it to be."

"I can come stay next weekend. I do have to work Saturday though, but I can stay here when I'm not at work. That way, you can still open the store."

"Right."

Cas frowned at the face Dean was making. "What is that face?"

"I dunno. I just hate Sundays, I guess?"

"I know. I'm sorry. I wish I could stay longer, but there's laundry to do and I need to go to the grocery store. I'll be back Friday night, and you have my number. Call me during the week."

"Ok." Dean's voice was very small.
"Dean - when I said I loved you, I meant it. Ok?"

"I know. I'm sorry. I'm just - this is so good, and so amazing and I don't - don't wanna lose it," he mumbled, staring down at the toe of his shoe.

"You won't." One last kiss, and Cas hugged him tight. "I'll be here by six on Friday, ok? I'm going to make you fajitas."

"That sounds great - but you shouldn't always have to buy all the food and -"

"Dean, stop." Cas put his fingers over Dean's lips. "I do this because I want to. I don't mind. Alright?"

Dean nodded.

"Ok, time for me to go. Be good," he winked, hugging Dean again before he got in the car.

Cas was singing *Thank You* under his breath when Charlie entered their shared office Monday morning.

"Good weekend, huh?" Charlie asked, taking in Cas's face.

"The best."

"Good," she smiled. "Gilda and I were hoping you and Dean could come over Saturday night. *Cards Against Humanity* and Gilda's cooking."

"That would be fun. I'll ask Dean when I talk to him next."

"I've never seen you smile so much. It makes me happy that you're this happy."

"Me, too," Jo added, dropping a stack of documents on Cas's desk. "It's a nice change from Mr. Castiel Serious Assistant Branch Manager Novak," she grinned.

Balling up a piece of paper, Cas playfully threw it at her head. "Stuff it, Harvelle."

"No horseplay, please. We are all adults here," Naomi told them imperiously as she walked by. "Back to work."

Cas, Jo, and Charlie all made faces at each other, but Cas couldn't help the little smile that tickled the corners of his lips.

He was just so happy.

He and Dean spoke on the phone several times throughout the week, but when Cas called Thursday, Dean didn't answer. He tried twice more before finally going to bed. It was probably nothing; the phone was downstairs in the shop, and maybe Dean couldn't hear it from upstairs.

When he arrived Friday evening, the shop was dark - but the door was slightly ajar.

"Dean?" he called, pushing the door open. There was no answer, and Cas shut and locked the door behind him, setting his bags on the counter. "Dean?" he called again.

Still nothing.
Walking towards the back of the shop, he pulled the door open, climbing the stairs quickly. Pushing the door open at the top, he was almost knocked over by a cloud of pot smoke - and the pungent, sharp odor of alcohol.

"Dean?"

The smoke was mostly dissipated, although a slight cloud still hung over the living room. All the shades were drawn, and the upstairs was dark.

"You should leave," Dean growled. Cas could just make out his shadow on the couch. "Can't say I'm real good company tonight."

Frowning, Cas flipped on a lamp.

Dean was sprawled across the couch in just a pair of boxers, an overflowing ashtray beside him and a mostly empty bottle of Jack Daniels in his hand.

"Dean -"

"Yup!" Dean waved the bottle at him. "I'm the fucking loser who just threw four years of sobriety out the window. Go me!" He took a slug from the bottle, missing his mouth and sending some of the whiskey dripping down his chest.

"What happened?"

"Nothing happened!" Dean yanked himself to his feet and almost fell back. He probably would have if Cas hadn't dashed forward and grabbed him. "Why are you here?" Dean asked sadly, slurring his words. "Could do so much better, y'know? Don't deserve this."

"Alright, that's enough. We're going to get you cleaned up and tucked in bed and we'll talk about this tomorrow."

To his horror, Dean burst into tears.

"Oh, Dean. It's alright. Come on." He pried the bottle from Dean's fingers and set it on the coffee table. Hooking an arm around Dean's waist, he led him to the bathroom, helping him through a shower and into clean boxers. Dean sobbed the whole time, incoherent words and apologies tumbling from his mouth. Cas almost had him to bed when he froze in the middle of the room.

"Sick," he said helplessly.

They got him back to the toilet just in time. Dean heaved, arms wrapped around his middle, and the stench of stale alcohol and bile made Cas's own stomach turn. He put a wet washcloth on Dean's neck, gently running his fingers through his hair in what he hoped was a soothing manner.

"Are you done?" he asked.

Dean nodded, sniffling.

"Alright, time for bed. Come on." He helped Dean to his feet and led him to the bed, holding tight to Dean's shaky form. "Sleep. I'll be here."

"You won't leave?"

"Couldn't make me if you tried."
That seemed to satisfy Dean, and he rolled into the mound of pillows on his bed. He passed out seconds later.

Sighing, Cas went back to the coffee table, grabbing the bottle and dumping the small amount that was left down the sink. "What the hell happened between now and last weekend?" he wondered. Remembering his groceries, Cas walked back down to the shop. Noticing the turntable was on, he reached to shut it off - and saw the letter wedged underneath.

Debating with himself about whether or not he should pry into Dean's personal business, Cas cursed himself and reached for the envelope. The letter inside was from his own bank, and his heart sank. He knew damn well what it was and it explained exactly why Dean was so upset.

It was a foreclosure notice.

Sighing, he laid it back on the counter, not wanting to pry any further than he already had.

That was when his eyes caught on the name - Dean M. Winchester.

Chapter End Notes

**Macaroni and Cheese Pie**

Dean's song was written by yours truly.

Also, please go to the first page and check out the awesome banner.
Wild Horses

I know I dreamed you a sin and a lie

I have my freedom but I don't have much time

Faith has been broken, tears must be cried

Let's do some living after we die

Winchester.

Winchester.

Cas's heart pounded.

"It's the middle of my World of Warcraft time, this better be good, Novak."

"Charlie?" Cas voice cracked.

"What's wrong, buddy?" Charlie asked, her voice changing as she instinctively caught the seriousness of the situation.

Cas dragged a shaking hand through his hair, letting his head fall back against the counter. He was sitting on the floor behind it, directly underneath the blue neon sign. "I found some things out and I need answers, but I don't know how far to look without betraying Dean's trust."

"What did you find out?"

"He's got a foreclosure notice sitting here, and his last name isn't Michael, it's Winchester. Why would he lie?"

"Winchester - didn't he give you a record called something Winchester?"

"Oh, god -" Cas breathed. In the background, he could hear Charlie typing.

"Whoa," she said a moment later.

"What?"

"He's John and Mary Winchester's son, but did you know that Dean released his own album in 1999? It was called Wildflower. Looks like it did pretty good, got close to gold." Some more clicking and Charlie sucked in a harsh breath.

"What? What's wrong?"

"Uh. Cas, I think you should talk to him because this is - this is bad. Really bad."

"Just tell me, or I'll look it up myself."

"Well, uh, looks like his mom died in '83. Was murdered, actually."

"Oh. Oh no."

"Yeah. She had a stalker. He wanted her to run away with him - look, I'll just read you the article."
She cleared her throat. "Martin Azazel was obsessed with Mary Winchester and convinced they were meant to be together. He told friends they were like Christine Daee and the Phantom -"

"Oh, that's disgusting," Cas seethed.

"Yeah. Anyway," Charlie continued reading, "Mary Winchester rebuffed Azazel and filed a restraining order against him. On November 2, 1983, Azazel told a friend he was going on a date with Mary. According to his own testimony, Azazel decided that the way to convince Mary to come away with him was to kill her two young sons, Samuel, six months, and Dean, four years. Mary found him just as he set fire to Samuel's nursery, where Dean was also sleeping at the time, having crawled into his little brother's crib. Mary managed to get both boys out of the room before Azazel dragged her back into the nursery. According to his own testimony, he was overcome by rage and beat Mary severely, before leaving her to burn with the nursery. Severely injured himself, he confessed to everything shortly before dying of his wounds."

"That's horrible," Cas whispered. "Do you think Dean witnessed all of this?"

"I don't know. My heart hurts," Charlie said quietly.

"What happened to his father?"

"Committed suicide in 1995."

"Shit -"

"And I found the brother. Samuel Winchester - he's a lawyer for a talent agency in LA. Married to Jessica Moore MD, no kids that I can see."

"I wonder if I should contact him."

"I'd talk to Dean first."

Sighing, Cas rubbed tired eyes. "He was drunk. When I got here tonight? He was so drunk. Four years of sobriety gone. I'm so worried about him."

"Oh shit, Cas. I just looked up his account. He's really fucked. He's three payments behind, and that's well over twenty grand. Looks like Crowley tried to work with him, but he's in deep. He's been consistently in arrears for the last year."

"Crap."

"Yeah. Look, I'll work your shift tomorrow. He's going to need you."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah. Just, Cas - I know you're in love with him, but maybe - I mean -"

"Spit it out," Cas said flatly.

"Just be careful," Charlie murmured. "Dean's life seems pretty fucked up and I don't want you to get hurt if this thing you guys have falls apart - never mind. I just - fuck."

"I know. I do. And I appreciate you caring. I love you, Charlie."

"Love you, too. Call me if you need me. I'll talk to Naomi in the morning to see if there's anything we can do to at least give Dean time to pack stuff up before they seize the building."
"Alright. Goodnight."

"Night. Try and get some rest."

"I will."

Charlie disconnected, and Cas sighed heavily. He didn't know what to do, and his head was spinning with the new information. Pulling himself off the floor, he double checked to make sure the door was locked before gathering his groceries and heading up the stairs.

Dean's apartment was wrecked. Dishes were piled in the sink, at least two ashtrays he could see were overflowing, and laundry and garbage were piled up here and there. Cas put his groceries away and went to check on Dean.

He lay on his side, arms squeezed tight around a pillow, and Cas could tell his sleep was anything but restful, judging by the pinched expression on his face. Sitting on the edge of the bed, Cas gently combed his fingers through the slightly greasy, faded blue spikes of Dean's hair.

"Mmm, Cas - don' - don' go," Dean mumbled, not really awake.

"It's ok. I'm not going anywhere. Sleep," Cas soothed. He rubbed Dean's neck, watching as the tension in body gradually diminished. He waited until he was sure Dean was well and truly asleep before standing and leaving the bedroom area.

Looking around the apartment again, Cas noticed the gold record and Johnny Cash guitar were no longer on the wall, and he had a sinking suspicion as to where they - and the Townshend guitar - might be. And it wasn't a repair shop.

In the kitchen, he found a big black trash bag, and started circling the apartment, dumping the ashtrays and picking up items that were obviously trash. He gathered all the laundry into one big pile near the stacked washer and dryer, starting a load before continuing to clean.

In the living room, he clumsily knocked over a carved wooden box. The contents spilled across the floor, and frowning, he reached down to put several baggies of pot back into the container. What he thought were rolling papers, however, turned out to be receipts for Sioux Falls Pawn. Looking over them, he frowned at the shamefully low amount of money Dean had received for both guitars and the gold record. Cas pocketed them, determined to go retrieve the items before the pawn dates were up. Dean had lost enough already.

Cas finished cleaning up, looking around the apartment in satisfaction. The dishes still needed to be done, but he could do that while he cooked dinner. He pulled a skillet out and set it on low heat while he chopped chicken and veggies, and forty-five minutes later, the kitchen was clean and the fajitas were done.

Sitting on the couch, Cas ate his dinner, yawning in between bites. It was well after eleven, and he silently thanked Charlie for taking his shift in the morning. There was no way he'd be alert enough to work, let alone the dread he felt at the very idea of leaving Dean alone.

Finished, he decided he should try and get some food into Dean as well, so he made another plate, with the fajitas cut into small, fork sized pieces.

"Dean," he said softly, sitting on the edge of the bed. "Wake up. C'mon," he nudged Dean gently, frowning at the distressed noise the other man made. "Wake up. I want to get some food in you."

Dean blinked, rubbing at his eyes. "Not hungry," he mumbled, barely conscious.
"I know, I'm sure you don't feel hungry, but getting some food in your stomach will help stave off the inevitable hangover you'll have in the morning. Alright?"

Nodding, Dean squirmed up the bed until he was sitting up slightly. Cas filled the fork with some of the food and held it out, and Dean obediently opened his mouth for the bite. He let Cas feed him about half the contents of the plate before finally raising his hands in surrender.

"No more, please. I'm sorry."

"It's alright. You ate something. I'm glad." Cas carried the plate out to the kitchen and returned with a large glass of water. "I want you to drink all of this for me. I don't want you to get dehydrated."

Dean took the cup with shaking hands. It took him about five minutes, but he drained the whole thing. "Can't believe you're still here," he mumbled, handing the cup back.

Cas frowned. "Where would I go?"

"Why would you stay? I'm a fucking mess."

"Dean, just because you're having a bad day -"

"It's a lot more than a bad day."

Silence fell over the apartment. Cas didn't know what to say. He felt like he should tell Dean about knowing his last name and seeing the foreclosure notice, but he also knew Dean needed to sleep off the lingering effects of the alcohol in his system.

"You should sleep," Cas said finally. Dean nodded and laid back down. "I'm going to clean up and then I'll join you. Rest," he said, leaning to kiss Dean's temple before standing and heading back to the kitchen.

Twenty minutes later, Cas shut off the lights in the kitchen, brushed his teeth in the bathroom, and joined Dean in bed. Dean was still awake, staring up at the ceiling, his eyes deep, dark pools in the dim light from outside.

"I thought you'd be long gone," Cas said, pulling back the sheets and climbing in beside him. He opened his arms. "Come here." Dean rolled into his embrace and buried his face in Cas's neck. A shudder ran through his frame. "It's ok, Dean," Cas soothed, pressing a kiss to his forehead. "Whatever it is, we can deal with it tomorrow. Right now, you need rest. You need to sleep this off, and in the morning, I'll make breakfast and we'll have a long, long talk."

"And then you'll see," Dean muttered.

"See what?"

"Why I'm no good for you."

"Oh, Dean. Please just sleep. You need it and this isn't helping." Wetness dripped onto Cas's neck and Dean shuddered again. "Don't cry. Please don't cry. Its ok. I promise." Cas's words only served to make Dean cry harder, and what had started as sniffles evolved into full blown sobs, Dean's body shaking in Cas's arms. He stroked his hand down Dean's spine and did his best to soothe and comfort him, but Dean was inconsolable.

In the end, all Cas could do was hold him close, and Dean eventually cried himself to sleep.
Not surprisingly, Cas was up before Dean the next morning. There was next to nothing in Dean's cabinets and the only food in the fridge was the leftover fajitas. Cas knew he could make an omelet with the leftovers, but there were no eggs. He scrawled a note for Dean and left it on the pillow where he'd be sure to see it. Once he was showered and dressed, he gathered his things and left for the store.

Cas thought about Dean's empty kitchen the whole way to the store, which is why he managed to fill an entire cart with groceries. He'd be damned if Dean was going to go hungry all week when Cas could easily do something about it.

Back at the Dean's an hour later, he let himself in with a few of the bags and headed up the stairs, stopping just before he reached the door.

" - and you should have called me. That was a hell of a way to find out," a voice Cas didn't recognize said.

"Didn't want you to worry."

"You think I'm not worried now? Jesus, Dean. Just tell me one thing - you're not using again, are you? I mean, at least nothing stronger than pot. And you didn't start drinking again?"

"No - dammit, you just - I'm fine. I don't need a fucking chaperone." Frustration bled into Dean's voice.

"Can you blame me for being worried?"

Cas pushed the door open.

A man stood in the center of the room. He was tall, taller than Dean, with floppy hair that flared out from his face when he turned to look at Cas. "Who are you?" he asked.

Dean crossed the room and took the bags from Cas's hands. "This is Cas, my boyfriend," Dean said softly. "Cas, this is my brother, Sammy."

"Oh," Cas said.

"It's actually Sam," Sam told him, holding out his hand to shake. "Just Dean is convinced I'm still some chubby twelve year old."

"Sorry," Dean muttered.

"So, Dean didn't tell me you were coming by."

"You've been here all of fifteen minutes and started shit the minute you came through the door, so when was I supposed to tell you? Besides, he spent the night."

"You don't need to get an attitude with me!" Sam turned to Cas. "Maybe now isn't a good time. You could come back later?"

"No, what the fuck?! Where do you get off showing up here unannounced and derailing my plans?"

"Plans? Dean, we have to talk! Shit hit the fan and you need to deal with it -"

"And I will. I will. But you - you need to go, so I can -" Dean scratched his head. "I need to talk to Cas. Ok? So just - go get a room or something, ok? Can you do that for me, Sammy? Please?"
Cas looked from one brother to the other. Dean was pleading with Sam, his expression desperate, and Sam looked torn between being furious and giving in.

"Ok. Fine. I'll get a room. But we are going to talk about this and figure out what to do and -" Sam was staring at the wall of guitars. "Where's the gold record?" He turned back to Dean who was staring at the floor, cheeks flushed a deep red. "Dean?"

"I um - I -"

"Right." Sam pursed his lips and blew an angry breath out through his nose. "They were my parents, too, y'know?"

Dean nodded, tears forming in his eyes. "I know," he whispered.

"I'll be back at three." Sam didn't wait for an answer, just turned on his heel and left.

"I have more groceries in the car. I'll be back." Cas followed Sam, not at all surprised to find the man standing next to his Lincoln.

"I'm sorry," Sam said. "You didn't deserve that. I didn't know you'd be here, hell, I didn't even know you existed."

"That's alright." Cas opened the trunk and gathered the rest of the grocery bags.

"Are those for Dean?"

"Yes."

"You care about him."

"I love him."

"And you've known him how long?" There was a challenge in Sam's voice, but Cas wasn't backing down.

"Long enough. Now if you'll excuse me -"

"Don't get the wrong idea about me. I know I'm coming off as a jerk and a hardass, but you don't know all the other stuff. I know you don't - because he doesn't talk about it. He pretends it didn't happen. So yeah. Just keep that in mind. The Dean you think you know? He doesn't exist."

Cas froze on the sidewalk, watching as Sam got into a black Charger and pulled away from the curb. Cas shivered even as he stood in the hot summer sun. Sam's words had chilled him to the bone.

Dean helped put the groceries away. He was quiet - too quiet. "You cleaned," he murmured. "Didn't have to do that."

"I wanted to." Cas started making breakfast, watching from the corner of his eye as Dean wandered out to the living room. He picked up the wooden box and opened it, staring at the small baggies
inside longingly. "I don't mind," Cas told him.

Shaking his head, Dean set the box back on the coffee table. "Not like it helps, anyway." He sighed heavily. "I'm sorry about Sam. I didn't know he was just gonna show up like that."

"He's worried about you."

"Yeah."

Castiel finished the eggs and slid them onto plates. He crossed the living room and sat beside Dean on the couch. "Here. Eat."

"If my stomach calms down enough."

"Still feeling bad?"

"First hangover in four years? Yeah, it's a doozy." Dean picked up his fork and picked at the eggs.

"Just eat what you can."

They ate in silence, Castiel trying to come up with a way to broach the subject, address the elephant in the room. He could only assume Sam had somehow received notice of the foreclosure, which is why he'd shown up on Dean's doorstep. Dean was right, when he told Sam that he and Cas had to talk. It was just a matter of getting the conversation started.

Looking over at Dean, Cas followed his eyes to the blank spot on the wall where the gold record had been. He realized Sam had given him an invitation to start the conversation.

"So uh, Sam said something about the gold record. He said they were his parents, too."

"Yeah. I um - my last name isn't Michael," Dean said softly. "It's Winchester. And if you googled them, I'm sure you know everything."

"I know what happened to them. I'm fairly sure that's not everything. But why did you lie? I wouldn't have judged you, Dean."

"You would have pitied me, and that's worse. I don't want pity. I just - what we had, what was growing between us? It was awesome. And it was based on just who I was, not my history or who my parents were - I'm not making any sense." He set his plate on the coffee table and dropped his head into his hands.

"I suspect you could use a shower and a few more hours of sleep."

"Yeah, probably. But we need to talk. Shit's going down and you deserve to know."

"I found the notice last night," Cas said quietly. "I do know about the foreclosure."

"So you already knew my last name?"

"Just since last night."

"Huh." Dean stood and took both their plates back out to the kitchen. "And you're still here."

"I don't see how it changes much. You're still the Dean I fell in love with."

He was facing the sink and Cas couldn't see his face, but the slump in Dean's shoulders was
disheartening. "Shouldn't love me," he muttered.

"Why not?"

"Because I'm a fucking mess," Dean said bitterly. "I thought you'd at least be able to see that."

Cas walked up behind Dean and wrapped his arms around his waist, frowning at how Dean's body tensed. "That doesn't matter to me. Everyone is messed up in some way."

"You don't know -"

"Then tell me."

"I can't," Dean whispered helplessly.

"It can't be that bad," Cas soothed. He turned Dean in his arms and pulled him close. "Why don't I run a bath? We can wallow in the bubbles and you can tell me what's going on. Alright?"

Dean looked up, his eyes empty. "You're fooling yourself, Cas."

"What do you mean?"

"You think you can fix me. You think you can love me and everything will be ok. But you don't know how fucked up, how fucking broken I am. And that's - that's -"

_The Dean you think you know? He doesn't exist._

Cas's heart was sinking fast. "Dean, I'm sure whatever it is, it's not a dealbreaker. I love you."

"You love the Dean you think you know," Dean said sadly, his voice cracking. Cas cringed at the inadvertent echo of Sam's words.

"Dean -"

"Cas, maybe you should just - maybe you should go," Dean mumbled.

"What? Why?"

"Because Sam is gonna come back and there's things him and I need to deal with."

"At three. He's coming back at three."

"Cas -"

"Why are you pushing me away? What are you so afraid of?"

Dean shoved out of Cas's arms and wandered back to the bedroom, dropping down onto the mattress.

"Dean? Please talk to me."

"You should go."

"I don't want to. I want you to talk to me." He sat beside him, dismayed when Dean flinched away from the arm he draped over his shoulders. "What are you so afraid of?" he asked again.

Dean made a little choked noise. "Everything," he mumbled.
"Dean -"

"My dad killed himself. Right in front of me. Sat there and told me all the ways I'd fucked up first. Heh. Thought he was gonna kill me. Nope, put the gun to his head and pulled the trigger. I didn't talk for six months afterwards. I didn't exist."

Cas didn't know what to say to that. He tightened his grip on Dean and pulled him closer.

"I've been locked up in the loony bin three times. Two of 'em included rehab. I'm not just a fucking alcoholic, I'm a fucking heroin addict too. I'm certifiably nuts. You've been lucky, haven't seen that side of me yet. You won't like it. Remember that weekend you couldn't get ahold of me and I told you I was sick? I sat on this couch and stared at a knife all weekend, trying to convince myself to just get it over with. I'm such a fucking wreck, I can't even man up enough to off myself."

"Dean -"

"I watched my mother burn. Her hair - it was so beautiful, so long - it burned right up, right off her head." He was shaking, sitting there in Cas's arms, his voice so small and far away.

"Dean, that doesn't mean - everything that's happened in your past, it doesn't mean we can't have a future."

"What do I have left here? I've been open for two years, haven't made a profit ever. I've been behind on the mortgage for a year. The people at the bank, they worked with me out of respect for my Uncle Bobby, but it's gone. My inheritance from him? Sunk it all into this place. All I had left was those guitars, the gold record," Dean swallowed, "and my car. My baby. It's all gone now."

"You still have me," Cas said fiercely. "I'm not going anywhere. Do you understand me?"

"We've known each other two months, Cas. You really wanna saddle yourself with this shit? You can do better."

"I want you."

Dean sucked his bottom lip into his mouth and gnawed on it. He stood, walking across the floor to where the Page guitar still hung. "Y'know," he said, hand touching the spot where the Cash guitar had been. "I remember life before the fire. I remember Mom and Dad's friends. We lived in Lawrence, but we used to drive out to Nashville all the time. They were gonna go country. Mom had been working with Johnny and June Cash, they'd been writing together. I remember sitting on Johnny Cash's knee while he held my fingers in the correct chord positions. I remember sitting on June and my Mom making pie and Johnny and Dad grilling. I remember so much."

Cas's eyes filled with tears.

"We had a good life. Mom and Dad, they were gonna be big in country. They were gonna duet instead of just Dad singing. I remember. We were just waiting for Sammy to get a little bigger and then we were gonna move. I remember all of it," Dean's voice cracked, his shoulders shaking. "I've let them both down."

"No, you haven't. You've been through hell and you're still standing -"

"I'm not. I'm not still standing. I'm faking it. It's all a lie. And I dragged you into it, because it felt so good, just for once. To have someone in my life who didn't know who I was, didn't care. Fuck, Cas - " Dean turned, tears streaming down his face. "In another life, we could have had everything."
"No, don't you do this. Don't you break this apart before it's even really gotten started."

"Sam's going to ask me to come back with him. He's going to want to get me help and get this place packed up and stuff."

"I'll help you. I promise. You don't have to do this -"

"He's going to ask."

Cas sighed, deflating. "And you're planning to say yes?"

"What other choice do I have?"

"Dammit, Dean."

Dean picked up an album and put it on the turntable. "You should go."

"Childhood living is easy to do. The things you wanted I bought them for you. Graceless lady you know who I am. You know I can't let you slide through my hands."

"Just answer one question. Is that what you want? Or what your brother wants?"

"Wild horses couldn't drag me away. Wild, wild horses, couldn't drag me away."

"Just go," Dean whispered.

"I watched you suffer a dull aching pain, now you decided to show me the same."

"Fine. But I'm coming back tomorrow. Once you're more clear headed and not under Sam's influence, we're going to talk, do you understand me?"

"No sweeping exits or offstage lines. Could make me feel bitter or treat you unkind."

Dean nodded woodenly, watching as Cas gathered his things. "I'll see you tomorrow, then."

"Wild horses couldn't drag me away. Wild, wild horses, couldn't drag me away."

Cas leaned into kiss him, but Dean flinched away, arms wrapped tight around his midsection.

"Alright then," Cas said softly. "Until tomorrow. I love you, Dean Winchester."

He left, unable to look back at Dean, the words of the song still echoing in his head.

"Wild horses couldn't drag me away. Wild, wild horses, we'll ride them some day. Wild horses couldn't drag me away."

"Wild, wild horses, we'll ride them some day."
Cas was so upset by the time he reached his own neighborhood, he drove right past his house. Cursing, he turned the Continental around and found his own driveway. He'd gone to the pawn shop on the way home and was now $2500 poorer, but he figured it was worth it to have Dean's treasures safe in his trunk.

The disappointed look on that thieving pawn shop's owner face hadn't hurt, either.

As he hefted his duffle, the sky rumbled, the first drops of rain hitting as he unlocked his front door. Cas's cell buzzed in his pocket.

A really tall, really grumpy looking dude just paid off the back payments on Dean's mortgage. He paid the next payment, too.

Sam, Dean's brother, Cas texted back.

Ooohhhhhhh, Charlie responded. He could practically hear her voice in the long, drawn out text. Are you ok?

Not really.

Want me to come over after work?

No. I'm ok. I think I just need to be alone.

Things went bad, then? :(  

Extremely.

I'm sorry, Cas.

Me too. Talk later.

Cas dragged his duffel downstairs to the laundry room and dumped all his clothes into the washer without sorting or pulling the clean items out. He hung his garment bag on the rod and wandered
back upstairs to the living room. Collapsing wearily on the couch, he stared at the pile of albums neatly stacked next to the turntable.

His heart hurt.

Cas sat for a long time, not sure what to do with himself. He'd planned to work, then spend the day with Dean and now he had an entire afternoon free. It was barely noon.

"Fuck it, I'll just clean," he mumbled and that's what he did. Starting upstairs, Cas dusted, vacuumed, and washed everything that sat still long enough, working his way downstairs. All the bedding in both the guest and master bedrooms got washed, rugs went outside to air, every piece of furniture was dusted or waxed, and when all of that was done, it was only six, so he went outside and weeded all the flower beds.

He dropped a Jim Croce album Dean had given him and drank a few shots of Jack Daniels when he was done. The music made him sad, however, and it was only a few songs in before he shut it off. Exhaustion hit around nine, and he happily collapsed into bed, grateful to not have to waste any more effort on thinking.

Except he couldn't sleep.

Cas lay awake for a long time, muscles aching from the hard work, staring at the ceiling and wishing for sleep. He just couldn't get Dean off his mind. He couldn't get Dean's broken expression and hopeless eyes to leave him alone. Dean's face kept swimming in front of him in the dark, and Cas had to fight every urge he had to get in the Continental and drive across town.

Frustrated, he tossed and turned most of the night, dozing off and on until dawn, when he finally admitted defeat and dragged himself from bed. He had cold cereal for breakfast, and showered after, heading out to do his grocery shopping for the week once he was dressed.

Pulling into his driveway later, he was extremely surprised to find Sam Winchester sitting on his front porch. Dean's brother tossed him an awkward wave, joining him at the car to help with the groceries.

"Hey! I uh, just wanted to come talk to you. I feel really bad about yesterday and I felt like I owed you an explanation because I came on really strong and I know you must think I am a grade A jerk right about now," Sam explained, reaching into the passenger seat to get a few bags. "But it's ok if you don't want to talk to me, I mean, I could turn around and leave and," he sighed, "I'm babbling."

"It's alright. Would you like to come in? I'll make some coffee."

"Coffee sounds good." Sam smiled earnestly at him, looking rather young all of sudden. He trotted up the stairs after Cas, holding the screen door so Castiel could unlock the front door. They made inane small talk about the weather while Cas put his groceries away and made coffee. "So, Dean told me what he told you - about being depressed, and being an addict, and about all the other crap about my parents' deaths. I was kinda surprised. He doesn't really tell anyone that, so he must really like you."

"Imagine that," Cas said drily.

Sam winced. "Yeah, I'm sorry. I was harsh yesterday, and you didn't deserve that. Just he's been through so much and if something had happened, I would have - I would have never forgiven myself. I should have been checking on him, I should have come to visit, instead of just taking his constants "I'm ok's" at face value. He's not ok. At all."
"I know. I just wish I'd have seen it sooner."

"Would you have hesitated to get involved with him if you had?"

Cas frowned. "I'm not that shallow, Sam."

"Not what I meant. I'm sorry - it's just that you're only his second relationship and I wouldn't even call the first one a relationship to begin with. That's entirely too generous and more than that fucker deserves." He caught Cas's raised eyebrow. "Guess you want to know about that."

"Not if you don't want to tell me," Cas replied, sipping his coffee.

"Do you know about Dean's album?"

"Wildflower?"

"Yeah. Man, it was good. Really good. I thought he was going to be the next big thing, but his manager - bastard named Alistair - he sunk his teeth into Dean, moved him out to L.A., and basically held him hostage for months. It was bad. I couldn't call him, he couldn't call us. Bobby, the guy who raised us after Dad - y'know - always beat himself up for not going after Dean sooner."

"What happened?"

"Drugs, alcohol, sex - you name it. We get a call from a nurse one day after Dean ended up in the hospital. Jerk shoved him down the stairs, broke his ribs, broke his wrist, gave him a concussion. He'd apparently been knocking Dean around for quite a while at that point. We went and got him, brought him home. He was fucked up. Addicted to heroin, booze, it was bad. Bobby ended up having to put him in rehab. Again."

Cas stood and fetched the coffee pot, refilling both their cups while Sam continued to ramble.

"He got hooked after Dad died, he's tried to kill himself a couple of times, and then Alistair, guess he realized Dean was easier to control all fucked up on booze and drugs - Cas, what I need you to understand is that no matter how hardass I come off, I have to protect him. That's my priority. And if something had happened to him -" Sam swallowed audibly.

"He had me."

"I know. I know he did. He told me. I'm sorry that I didn't realize how important you were to him, or how much he cares about you, but you have to understand. The only other relationship he's ever been in was so god awful abusive - hell, I didn't even know if he was capable of having a relationship. And I know what you're thinking, that I shouldn't doubt my brother, and I don't, I swear, but I worry. Because he saved me. He saved me and he practically raised me when my dad wasn't able, and I owe him everything. And even though I'm married now, I've got Jess, and my life is good - my life would be so dead without Dean in it. I got lazy. I got lazy and I wasn't checking on him, and every time I called and he said, yeah, I'm good, I'm ok, I bought it."

"He says you want to take him away."

"I want to move him back to L.A. There's an inpatient facility with a huge success rate. I just want him to be healthy, I want him to look in the mirror and not hate the guy staring back." He set his coffee mug on the table. "He wants to come back when he's done, though. I hope you guys can at least stay friends, but I'm pretty sure he wants more than that. And you guys can write to each other while he's inpatient."
"I'm willing to wait for him. Dean is utterly and completely worth it."

Sam smiled. "He really did find a winner this time, didn't he?"

Cas flushed. "I think uh - I think I found the winner."

Leaning back in his chair, Sam dug in his pocket and pulled out a sparkly guitar keychain with a single key hanging off of it. "After talking to you, I feel completely comfortable leaving this with you."

Puzzled, Cas picked up the key and studied it.

"It's the key to Dean's building. When he gets back, we're going to have to pack it up and likely sell everything, but I'm going to pay the mortgage until then. I make a shit ton of money, and so does my wife, and we don't really spend it. We're boring. We live in a tiny house and drive old cars and keep adopting mutts. Boring. So I can handle his mortgage for a few months. Anyway, I'd appreciate it if you could look after the place for me, make sure no one breaks in and any needed maintenance is done." Sam set a piece of paper and a business card on the table. "And that's all the ways you can contact me, should you need more money or anything. I set up an account at your bank and the utilities will be automatically debited every month, so no worries about that either. Is this ok with you?"

"I'd be honored. I'm grateful that you trust me with this."

"I'm grateful he has someone in his life he can trust, because he doesn't trust anyone anymore. Anyone that's not family. But since I've been here, he's mentioned you more times than I can count, and a Charlie, who I think I met at the bank, Jo, Aaron, and a few others. I've never heard him mention friends before. So that's a positive, too."

"We have a LARP group. Dean fit right in."

"Oh yeah, he used to LARP all the time. Wow, he really has a life here. If he can just find a job when he gets back -"

"My friend Ash owns an auto shop. Dean said he's good with cars."

"He's more than good. He has his ASE. Went to tech school and everything."

"I'm sure Ash can find a place for him then. If not, I know Benny at the diner is looking for help. He has options."

"That's great!" Sam looked at his watch. "I gotta go. We've got to get packed."

"I was hoping to see him again before you left."

"I don't know," Sam said as he stood. "He's been a little fragile. It might be easier if he just saw you when we got back."

"I understand," Cas said, even as his heart broke. He'd give anything to see Dean before they left.

"Anyway. I'll be in touch. Thanks for everything." Sam patted Cas's shoulder and let himself out, leaving Cas sitting at the table and staring into space.

The day dragged after Sam's visit. Cas couldn't bring himself to play any records, his emotions already too raw. He started a pot of spaghetti sauce, letting it simmer throughout the day. Around six,
he let himself out the back door to retrieve basil and oregano from his garden, almost tripping over
Dean seated on the deck stairs.

"What are you doing here?" he blurted, startled.

Dean flushed. "I wanted to come say goodbye, but I suck at goodbyes, and I ended up just sitting
here because I lost the nerve to knock. I'm pathetic."

"No you're not," Cas sighed, settling in beside him. He wrapped an arm around Dean's shoulders,
pleased when he didn't flinch away. "I'm happy to see you. I'm glad you came by. Can you stay for
dinner?"

"Yeah. Not leaving until noon and I told Sam I was coming over."

"He was ok with that?"

"He likes you. You must have made a hell of an impression."

"I like him, too. He cares so deeply for you."

"Too much, sometimes."

Silence fell between them, as they watched a couple of blue jays screech and chase each other
through the dappled sunlight streaming through the trees in Cas's backyard.

"I smell garlic," Dean said.

"All day spaghetti sauce. I'd just stepped outside to get basil and oregano, which I promptly forgot
when I almost tripped over you."

Dean chuckled. "Guess we better go get that, then?"

"Yes. Come on."

Letting Cas lead him out to the garden, Dean admired the flowers while Cas snipped herb stems. He
stopped near Cas's pride and joy, a Mr. Lincoln rosebush. "This is beautiful," he said softly,
reverently dragging his fingers down a velvety, blood red petal.

"That was my sister's favorite rose. I raised that bush from cuttings I took from her plants."

"Was?"

Cas frowned. "Anna died when I was thirteen. Leukemia. My family just kind of fell apart after that,
and when I came out at nineteen, they disowned me. Gabriel is the only one I still have any type of
relationship with. I have regrets," Cas told him, standing and brushing the dirt from his hands. "My
father wanted to make amends, but I denied him, and he died before I got over myself."

The sun caught in Dean's green eyes as he looked at Cas over the heads of tall purple and white
cosmos. "So I'm not the only one with the fucked up backstory."

"No, you're not. But it's fair to say that yours is a bit more devastating."

Dean chuckled bitterly, fingers still playing with the rose petals. "Devastating. That's accurate. I
guess Sam told you everything, huh?"

"The reader's digest version, I believe." Cas gathered the herb stems and stepped carefully over rows
of plants to stand beside Dean, smiling at him as a honey bee buzzed lazily around his head. "I think the bee thinks you're some type of strange blue flower," he teased, chuckling a bit more as second bee joined his fellow.

"Maybe they want to hang with the ones on my neck?" Dean mused.

Cas kissed Dean's cheek. "Come on, come help me finish dinner. It's the last time we'll see each other for a while. Let's make the most of it."

Dean turned his head and caught Cas's lips, leaving a sweet kiss behind. "Ok," he whispered.

"Go ahead and drain that, it should be done."

Dean nodded and lifted the pasta pot from the stove, dumping the contents into the strainer sitting in the sink. "God that sauce smells incredible."

"I'm glad you came over," Cas told him, taking the strainer from him. "I would have made all this food and it would've sat and gone bad."

"Hey, I don't think I can eat that much," Dean grinned.

Cas stirred the pasta into the sauce and handed the bowl to Dean. "Set that on the table and I'll grab the bread."

"Alright."

They settled at the table and Cas poured tall glasses of iced tea for them both. They ate in companionable silence, one handed, since Dean decided to weave their fingers together halfway through the meal. Sweet smiles were traded back and forth, though they didn't talk much.

After, they worked together to clear the mess, and a heavy, charged silence weighed in the air between them. Cas didn't know what would happen next - if Dean would stay or leave, if they would talk, if they'd just hang out. Furthermore, he didn't know what he wanted, other than wanting Dean to stay.

"Do you have to rush off?" he asked as they put the last of the dishes away.

"Not really. I could stay awhile. I feel like I should tell you a little more about myself anyway."

"You don't have to. When you come back -"

"No, Cas. I think when I tell you all this crap, you'll need time to think. I'd rather give you that time while I'm gone."

"Alright." He led Dean out to the living room, shutting off the kitchen lights as they went.

Dean crossed the room to the turntable as Cas sat on the couch. He flipped through the albums, smiling as he found Winchester's Rifle. "Honestly kinda surprised you didn't figure me out sooner," he said softly, sliding the LP from the sleeve.

"Mary. Eyes so bright and beautiful. Mary. Light of my life, love of my soul. The fire of your love keeps me warm at night. Mary, Mary, baby, you shine so bright."

"You can hear how much your father loved her."
"He did. He really did. She was everything to him. I think he died that day, too, y'know? Just took him twelve years to finish the job."

Dean settled on the couch beside Cas, and they listened to the album for a bit, Dean humming along to the next track, *Open Road Lovesong*.

"Alastair was good to me at first," Dean said quietly. "Treated me like a king. I dunno. I guess it was more part of the whole control thing he had going on. He'd buy me really nice stuff, like a Rolex, Armani clothes, whatever. I realize now it was more about getting me to wear what he wanted than treating me nice. He used to tell me I deserved to be spoiled, that I was talented and gorgeous and I ate it up. I think in a lot of ways, I was starving for affection. And he gave it to me, in his own twisted, fucked up way. I was nineteen, Cas. I was a virgin, and fucking mental health mess, I must've had a neon sign over my head." Dean rubbed the palms of his hands over his jean clad thighs.

Cas stayed quiet, instinct telling him that Dean needed to get this off his chest, and that the best thing he could do was sit and listen.

"Anyway, one night we're at a bar and he's grinding on me and stuff. He got me pretty drunk - in retrospect, he probably dropped a roofie or something in my drink - he was fifty-four and I was fucking nineteen, and I woke up in bed with him the next morning, naked and sore. I should have said something then. But he'd hold me in his arms and tell me how much he wanted me, how perfect I was - and I ate it up. I moved in with him, despite my Uncle Bobby telling me it was a bad idea. Moved out to LA, away from what little family I had. The album released and *Wildflower* did really good. Everywhere we went, it was on the radio. Al would say, this is it, Deano, you're the next big thing.

"But then, I started fighting back. I didn't like the clothes he was buying for me. They just weren't my style. I didn't like the demands he was putting on the people setting up the tour. They weren't my demands. I didn't like the fact he prevented me from having contact with my baby brother. I didn't like being stuck in his house with no way to get out and go places. I started drinking. A lot. And then I got my hands on the fucking heroin again. It was easy for him after that. I'd do anything for another fix and he knew it, used it against me. He'd get me so blissed out and high and then I'd have little snatches of clarity, moments when I'd realize he was on top of me and I didn't want him there. I'd fight back." Dean sighed and dropped his head into his hands. "He started hitting me and I was so fucking shocked, I just took it. He'd get me high, fuck me, hit me when I fought back," he muttered, voice muffled. "I let him do that to me. I let him convince me I was worthless without him. What kind of pathetic -" he trailed off.

"You weren't pathetic," Cas assured him. "You were young, depressed, impressionable, and he knew just which buttons to push to control you. He used you, Dean. You're lucky you got out alive. You've overcome so much, you are so remarkable, so wonderful, and you just can't see it. At the end of the day, that's what breaks my heart about you. That you can't see the beautiful soul you really are."

Dean's eyes filled, tears threatening to spill out. "I don't know why you think I'm so great," he murmured.

"Because you are. You're one of the best things that ever happened to me, and if you think I'm not willing to wait for you, you're wrong. I'll wait," he told him, reaching for his hand and kissing Dean's knuckles. "I'll wait as long as you need me to."

"I've never even slept with anyone other than you and him. What if I can't keep you satisfied?"
"Guess what? I'm asexual. I don't usually experience sexual attraction to begin with, but you - you changed everything for me. Full disclosure? I was a virgin until you."

"But you - you seemed to know what you were doing, and you said that it had been a long time -" Dean stammered.

"We were caught up in the moment and I was too embarrassed to admit I was a virgin. I'm almost forty, after all. And I do watch porn. I do get off. I'm not completely uneducated," Cas chuckled. "I'll be honest, Dean," Cas said, his voice dropping a few octaves, "I've got it bad for you. The things you do to me, the things you make me feel," he kissed Dean's hand again, "it's exhilarating. And in all the ways that count, we were each other's firsts."

"But I wasn't -"

"Yes, you were. I was the first you chose. The first you slept with out of love. And you were my first everything. We are each other's firsts, Dean." Watching arousal darken Dean's eyes, Cas closed the slight distance between them and kissed him. When he pulled back from the kiss, Dean's cheeks were flushed and he was breathing a bit harder. "I'm sorry, Dean. Maybe this isn't the best time and I shouldn't have mmmph!"

Dean cut him off with a passionate kiss of his own, pushing closer into Cas's space. His hands landed on Cas's waist as he moved closer, the kiss growing more heated and aggressive.

"Dean, I -"

"Ssh," Dean breathed against his lips. "It's our last night for a while. Take me to bed, give me something to remember. Please."

Cas's hands found Dean's cheeks and pulled him tight, as he took control of the kiss, sliding his tongue between Dean's lips.

Somehow, they managed to stumble up the stairs, dropping articles of clothing along the way, Dean letting loose a carefree laugh as they tumbled onto Cas's bed, more or less naked. Cas's boxers were still trapped around his one leg, and Dean was still in possession of one white crew sock, but their bodies were enticingly bare as Cas pressed Dean into the mattress.

"What do you want?" he asked breathlessly. "Tell me what to do."

"Fuck me."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. God, Cas, you feel so good when you do that. Please, I need it." He kissed Cas's neck, his lips hot against his skin. "Need it," he said again.

Leaning forward slightly, Cas dug blindly through his nightstand drawer, fumbling for the bottle he hoped and prayed was still there. Dean kept distracting him with wet kisses along his neck, his hands drawing patterns across his spine. Cheering when he found it, Cas slid back down, lips finding Dean's again.

"I just want to make sure this is what you want, because we could do it the other way. You could fuck me," Cas told him.

Dean's eyes darkened a bit more. "Really?"
"Yes."

"I've never done that before. I mean -" he flushed. "Alastair was all top, all the time."

"I'm not Alastair," Cas said firmly.

"No. No, you're definitely not." Dean thought about it for a second. "When I come back, ok? Because right now - I just need to feel you. I want to fidget on the plane tomorrow and think about what we did, feel what we did. If that's ok?"

"Of course, beautiful." Setting the bottle aside for the moment, Cas kissed and licked a trail down Dean's chest. "You want something to remember? I'm going to give you something to remember." He sucked Dean into the back of his throat without another word.

Gasping, Dean's hands shot into Cas's hair, fingers weaving into the strands. The tug and slight pain fueled Cas's own arousal, and he drove his hips into the bed as he increased suction. Dean writhed beneath him, chanting his name on every labored exhale. He reached for the bottle he'd left beside Dean's leg. "Hand me a pillow," he growled at Dean, grinning to himself when it landed gracelessly on his head. "Lift your hips."

Shaking a bit, Dean complied, and Cas shoved the pillow beneath him. His legs fell open, exposing everything to Cas's appreciative eyes. His rosy pink entrance was right there, and without another thought, Cas leaned back in and dragged his tongue across it.

"Oooh, fuck!" Dean all but screamed, and Cas clamped his hands on Dean's inner thighs, spreading him open and holding him down. He swirled his tongue around the tight ring of muscle, coaxing it to open. Pointing his tongue, he pushed inside as Dean fell apart above him. "Lift your hips."

Looking up through his eyelashes, Cas grinned. "Come," he ordered, taking Dean back into his mouth.

Dean's hips slammed into Cas's jaw as he came, flooding Cas's mouth with the salty, bitter taste of come, his first taste ever. He sucked Dean through it, soaking up the noises he seemed helpless to hold back. Reaching down between the mattress and his own body, Cas tightened his grip around the base of his dick, unwilling to let go just yet - although he definitely could have.

Above him, Dean had gone limp and still against the bed, his chest heaving and a thin layer of sweat coating his freckled skin. Slowly kissing his way back up Dean's body, he lifted his legs and helped Dean wrap them around his waist before slowly sinking into the open and waiting body beneath him.

Dean's fingers dug into his shoulders as Cas fully sheathed himself inside the heat of Dean's body. "I don't know if I can come again," he murmured. "But fuck, you feel so good, Cas. So good."
Cas smiled and kissed him, thrusting a few times before he was helplessly coming as well, face buried in Dean's neck. "I was going to - I wanted to make you come again, but I went sooner than I wanted to. I wanted it to be perfect. So you'd have that something to remember," he muttered.

"It was perfect," Dean whispered. "You're perfect."

They lay there, entwined in each other, waiting out their pounding hearts.

"Do you have to go?" Cas asked softly.

"Not just yet."

A few moments later, Cas reluctantly pulled out, going to his bathroom for a washrag. Dean surprised him by following him, and they ended up in the shower instead, gently washing the mess from each other's bodies. Wrapped in towels, they tumbled back into bed, trading soft kisses as they lay with their hands joined.

Cas fell asleep. He didn't mean to. But morning came, and he woke up alone in his sunny bedroom.

He hadn't even gotten to say goodbye.

Rolling to his side, he found one of his perfect Mr. Lincoln roses on the pillow beside him, underneath a folded piece of paper.

Dear Cas,

I'm shit at goodbyes. I should have woken you up and told you goodbye, but I wussed out. I picked this rose for you, from your garden, and I kinda feel like a jerk for that, too, since it's your sister's rose and all. Anyway. I left something for you on the turntable downstairs. Please don't let anything happen to it. It's the only one I have left.

I love you.

I don't know if that means anything in the current state of mental health (or lack thereof) that I'm in at the moment, but there it is. I love you. And I've never loved anyone else. This is kind of a big thing for me.

Sam says I'll be able to write to you, and I will. I'll send my address as soon as I can.

So until we see each other again, I love you. I'll be thinking of you.

Love,

Dean
I Won't Give Up

Chapter Notes

Warning for more discussion of what Alastair did to Dean.

Also, many of you suggested ideas for this fic that made me laugh, because you hit the nail on the head with where this was heading. Kudos to my readers for being amazing and very astute. Love you guys.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Well, I won't give up on us

Even if the skies get rough

I'm giving you all my love

I'm still looking up

The LP was sitting innocuously on top of his turntable, with a post-it note that had a simple love you scrawled on it. Cas picked it up, smiling at the young man with bleached blonde hair. Where on Earth had they dug up that horrible Hawaiian print shirt? Dean looked so young, his cheeks still round and clinging to that little bit of childhood chubbiness. He was fresh faced and beautiful, his lips bright pink and almost feminine in their fullness.

Cas slid the album out of the sleeve and put it on the turntable. Wildflower was the last song on side B, and although he planned to listen to the whole album, he wanted to hear the title song first.

"Wildflower, turn your face to the sun. Don't be afraid. Your life has only just begun. Though the wind is strong and days are fleeting, your roots are dug in deep. Wildflower, wildflower, grow. Wildflower, wildflower, grow."

The sound of a guitar was the only accompaniment to Dean's husky voice, and Cas was surprised just how young he actually sounded. Guitar strings squeaked underneath the lyrics as he floated along the chorus, and Cas had to remind himself that the nineteen year old had actually written the poignant song that spoke of overcoming challenges and moving on.

The other original songs on the album were telling as well, especially one called Miss You, where he sang about the smell of pie, blonde hair, and the general feeling of safety. It was clearly about his mother, and it broke Cas's heart to listen to it. Dean had also covered Open Road Lovesong from Winchester's Rifle, his version a little more stripped down and more folk than rock and roll; and a surprisingly ethereal version of Ramble On.

Cas listened to the entirety of the album three times before realizing that it was ten a.m. on a Monday morning and he was severely late for work.

"Don't worry about it," Charlie told him when he called, "I covered for you. You're fine. Enjoy the day off, ok? But can you pick me up later? I have to go get my car and Gilda's got a thing."
"Of course. And thank you. I really don't feel like being at work today."

"I can imagine. Love ya, buddy."

"Love you, too," Cas smiled into the phone before disconnecting the call. Charlie truly was his best friend and he was lucky to have her in his life.

Leaning back into the couch, Cas sighed, unsure what to do with his now completely open day. He'd cleaned everything in sight over the weekend, so that was out. Sighing, Cas hauled himself off the couch and wandered out to the backyard. He ended up spending most of the day amongst the flowers and bees, tending to his gardens and mowing and edging the lawn. By the time he was done, it was nearly four, and he had just enough time for a quick shower before fetching Charlie from work.

She leaned across the seat of the Continental, pecking Cas on the cheek before settling into her own and buckling the seatbelt. "I'm going to treat you to dinner afterwards, no arguments."

"No arguments," Cas agreed with a smile.

"So how are you?" Charlie asked as they pulled away from the bank.

"I'm alright. We had a chance to spend some time together before he left and we talked about a lot of things. We're going to write to each other while he's gone."

"That's good. But his brother's a jerk?"

"Not even a little. Dean's been through hell. I had no idea, and Sam just feels extremely protective where Dean is concerned - and no, before you ask, that is not my story to tell."

"Fair enough."

They pulled into the garage a short time later, and Cas wandered the lot while Charlie talked with the mechanic about her Gremlin. He came across the big, black car again, only this time something pinged in his brain. Fumbling for his cell phone, he pulled up the cover art for Winchester's Rifle.

"Son of a bitch," he muttered.

This was Dean's car. He was sure of it.

"I see you're back. Change your mind?"

"How much?" Cas asked.

"19k."

"I have 18k in cash." It would drain his entire savings account, but it would be so utterly worth it.

The guy scratched his nose. "Not what I'm asking, son."

"It's been here a while, hasn't it? Wouldn't 18k in cash be better than trying to hold out for another grand?"

The old man seemed to think on it a bit. "How soon could you get the money?"

"I can be here after five tomorrow with a cashier's check. I'll even let you charge a thousand to my Visa right now to hold it. I want this car."
"What changed your mind?"

Cas stared at Dean's Baby, his heart pounding. "Love," he answered simply.

"I can't believe you're draining your savings account for a car."

"Worth it," he took the cashier's check from Jo. "So worth it."

"If you say so."

Cas walked away from her, heading back to his office to punch out. Twenty minutes later, he was back at the dealership and signing the papers.

"I can arrange to tow it or your other car out to your house."

"The Lincoln. The truck driver can leave it in the driveway. I'll drive the Impala."

"Good choice. I'm glad she's going to a good home. The guy that brought her in was barely fighting back tears when he left her here. I think he was in a bad spot financially. That's why I was asking so much - I gave him more than she was worth."

"You did?"

"Yeah. But the 18k you gave me means I broke even, and that's good enough."

Cas reached for his wallet. "Here. Charge another 1k and then you've got the full amount."

"Now why the hell you wanna do a damn fool thing like that? Papers are already signed."

"Because the man you bought it from? He means the world to me, and you helped him out when he really needed it, unlike some others in this town who took advantage of him. So let me help you out."

"Alright. Sure do appreciate it, son." The man ran Cas's Visa and handed it back. "You care about him a lot, huh? You're buying the car for him, aren't you?"

"Yes. I just wish I'd have realized sooner. I would have bought it that day."

"He's lucky to have you," he said, handing the receipt and the Impala's keys to Cas.

"No," Cas smiled. "I'm lucky to have him."

The Impala felt incredible beneath him as Cas pulled away from the dealership. She was solid, strong - *Dean on four wheels*, Cas thought. He took her out on the highway, opened her up, and loved the way she roared beneath him. It was a near empty tank and several hours later before he took her home, safely stowing her in the garage after moving the Continental.

Opening the mailbox, he was surprised to find a letter with a California postmark, and D. Winchester in the return address.

"Already?" he smiled, tucking the letter into his back pocket. He gathered the rest of the mail, dropping everything on his kitchen table once he was inside. Upstairs, he changed into sweats and a tee and hung his suit in the closet, laying the Impala's keys on his nightstand. He took the letter and headed back downstairs, curling up on the couch to read it.
Hey Cas,

So I'm here and settled in. Address is at the bottom of the page. I've been here one whole day already and want to go home. I forgot how much this whole process sucks. It's like taking an almost healed scab and scratching it open until it bleeds and bleeds. I like the doctor assigned to my case. She's cool and into a lot of the same music I am. The group therapy sucks. A few people want to talk about themselves the whole time, and by the time I get myself together enough to talk, we're done, because they talked the whole effin' time. It's frustrating.

Hope things are good on your end. Not in a great place tonight and I don't really feel up to writing, but I do know it'll get better and I'll get better. Anyway, you've got my address now, so send me a card or something if you feel like it. No pressure.

Love you,

Dean

Cas frowned. He could feel Dean's depression coming through the words and it broke his heart. Standing, he got a legal pad and a pen and sat to write a letter of his own.

Dear Dean,

It was good to hear from you. I'm sorry you're having a rough time adjusting, but I am glad you realize it will get better. Because it will. I was thinking about you today. I think about you a lot. I miss you very much. It's lonely here without you, but I'm looking forward to when you are well and come home. I look forward to you being able to smile without forcing it. You deserve to be happy. You deserve to have a good life, and good things.

Cas stopped, debating with himself whether or not to tell Dean about the Impala. He chewed on the end of his pen, finally deciding not to - he didn't want Dean to have misplaced feelings of guilt about the money Cas had spent on the car and Cas decided he wanted to surprise Dean with the car when he got home.

I think treatment will change things for you, especially if you give it your all and work hard to get well. I can't imagine talking in group would be easy even without the motormouths, but I do hope you manage to share your experiences. Please don't hold back. Tell your team everything that's bothering you so they can help you deal with it.

I'm sorry if that got too preachy. I just want you to be well. Please write to me anytime you want, and I absolutely plan to write to you often. Because I want to write to you, not because I feel obligated. So please don't think that.

All of my love,

Cas

p.s. I listened to Wildflower. You're insanely talented and I'm in awe. Thank you for sharing that with me.

Saturday, there was another letter in the box.

Hey Cas,

Thanks for the compliments about my album. That means a lot. Writing that album was a very raw
thing for me.

I'm feeling kinda rough today, so it was great to get your letter. I like what you said about not holding back, because Sam says the same thing, and I don't know - maybe I'll actually listen if it's coming from both of you. I can't even tell you how much I just want to get up and walk out of this place. I'm so tired of poking at old wounds. I'm just tired in general.

This is different than the last time. The last time I was inpatient, the focus was more on my addiction than my mental health. This time, it's all about my mental health, and sometimes that's just - sometimes it's too much. I don't want to talk about me, I don't want to talk about him, I just want to go home. I cried myself to sleep last night, like a fucking toddler. It's hard not to feel completely emasculated in here. It's hard not to resent these people, even though the logical part of my brain knows they're trying to help me.

I would give anything just to lay in your arms and have you hold me - and that's new, too. I've never felt such a need to be with someone. I've never been in love and I am in love now. I told Sam last night that I couldn't understand why I felt like this, when it's been all of two-three months, and he told me not to fight it. He said it took him three days to know that Jess was the one. He says sometimes you just know. So maybe that's what it is?

Fuck, Cas, I feel like this letter is all over the place, but then again, I'm all over the place. I hurt and my thoughts are all scattered because we're digging in deep and the fragments of my thoughts are falling out everywhere.

I miss you. I miss you so much and I swear I'd give anything -

I'm sorry. I'm sorry I'm a fucking mess and you probably don't need this.

Love,

Dean

Cas wasted no time in responding.

Dear Dean,

Don't for one moment think you need to hide your struggles from me. I want to know. I want to share this journey with you. I want to be able to comfort you in any way I can. Please don't hold back out of consideration for me. I don't want that. I'm so sorry you're hurting, and I also would give anything to hold you in my arms. I wish to God I could comfort you.

I'm glad Sam said what he said. He's right. Sometimes you just know. I've been alone for so long and you showed up and changed my life for the better. You've filled my life with sunshine and music, and joy I've never had the pleasure of knowing until now. You are so strong, and you inspire me to be stronger, to be better, to be a rock for you. I am here. I am waiting for you. When you are hurt and sad, please remember that someone loves you just the way you are. Broken, healed, whatever - I'm yours, and you're not getting rid of me that easily.

If you can call, call anytime. I don't care what time of day it is. I'll stop everything to talk to you.

Be strong, my beautiful Dean. I love you, and I know I'll see you soon. This will be over before you know it, and we'll start our future together, whatever that might be.

All of my love,
"I know how we can save the store," Charlie announced.

"What?"

"I know how we can save the store. I’ve been working on it since he left and I’ve got a business plan and I’ve got people ready to help. I just need to get you on board."

Cas scratched his head and stared at Charlie across their shared office. "I'm confused."

She huffed. "Ok, so I'm brilliant, right?" Cas nodded. "I've come up with a business plan that could turn In My Time of Vinyl into a profitable enterprise. You and me with our incredible math related brains could totally make this happen, and we could have the place turning a profit by the time Dean gets back. And I know Ash is ready to hire him, but what do you think he'd rather do, run a successful record store, or be a mechanic?"

"Run a successful record store," Cas answered. "I'm listening. What do you have in mind?"

"We start online. I bet he's got some valuable vinyl in that place and doesn't even know it. I have a list of the fifty most desired albums. Hell, copies of Winchester's Rifle go pretty high at auctions. Apparently, it's pretty rare and people want it. A copy recently went for $75 at an auction and it was damaged. Also, we clean the store, top to bottom, organize by alphabet and genre, and advertise. I already talked to Benny at Lafitte's. He's willing to run a promo where customers can get 20% off their meal if they bring in a receipt from the record store."

"Really?" Cas asked, surprised. "I didn't think he knew who Dean was."

"He said, the dude with blue hair that loves my pie. He knows who Dean is."

"Huh."

"So anyway, I'm ready to get in there Saturday and start doing an inventory. Gilda said she'd help, and then you can come over after work. Sunday, we can start by moving all the records upstairs and then thoroughly clean the store. What do you think?"

A bubble of hopeful enthusiasm filled Cas's chest. "I think we need to go for it!"

---

_Dear Cas,_

_Thanks for that last letter, although I'm not as strong as you think I am. I keep having breakdowns, keep falling apart in the middle of therapy. I don't remember it hurting this bad the last time. What the hell is wrong with me? Why can't I just get over this shit and move on? They keep poking at the Alastair thing, they keep insisting that I attach a label to it - but it's not a word I want to think about. It was just sex. Why do they have to make it this big thing?_

_I can't sleep. Last night I laid in bed and stared at the ceiling and now today I'm dragging. I don't know what's happening to me. I thought this was supposed to help me, but I feel like they're tearing me apart and why can't they just let me be?_

_Fuck, Cas, can't you see how fucked up I am? I'm not worth waiting for. I am not worth wasting your life on. You're amazing. You have such a good heart and you deserve to have someone who can love you like you love them. I don't think that's me. I don't think I'm ever going to be ok._
Sam was just here. He told me to calm down, that it's only been a week. I don't think he gets it. He's never been like this, he's never had to feel like this.

Cas, I'm so sorry. You don't have to write me anymore. I'll understand.

Dean

Cas sat on his couch, eyes burning with tears as he read Dean’s letter. Despair and hopelessness radiated from the scrawled words, and he could feel the level of Dean's desperation. He'd known this letter was coming - Sam had called and warned him. He was prepared for it, but that didn't mean it hurt to read it any less.

My beautiful, wonderful Dean,

I am so sorry you are hurting. I am. But that doesn't give you the right to decide what I want - and what I want is you. This is only the beginning of your treatment. It's going to hurt. You're going to ache. But part of going through treatment is learning how to deal with the life you have now, and how to move forward. I know you can get through this, because I know how strong you are. Despite what you think about yourself, you truly are the strongest person I know. It hurts to see you hurt. It hurts to know I can't comfort you physically, although I try my best to comfort you with my words.

Know this -

I'm not going anywhere. You can't get rid of me, and you don't have the right to tell me to walk away. I am an adult. I love you. I'm staying by your side. When you are well, and healthy, and more centered and sure of yourself, if you don't want me then, fine, I'll walk away. But I will not allow you to dismiss me when you're in the early stages and everything is upside down and sideways. It may be cruel for me to say you're not in your right mind right now, but it's the truth. You're in no position to make final decisions about our future.

I love you so much. When I said I would wait for you, I meant it. Please allow me to do this for you. When you come home, if you still want to move on, then I'll respect your decision. But not now. Not now.

I love you.

Cas

Saturday afternoon, Cas joined Charlie at Dean's store. He and Gilda called out titles to Charlie as she added them to a spreadsheet. When a crate was fully inventoried, Aaron and Jo carried it upstairs to Dean's apartment. By eight that evening, the store had been emptied, all the crates moved upstairs.

"Did you see this guitar?" Jo exclaimed. "It's from The Who! Pete Townshend broke it onstage and gave it to Dean's dad. There's a little note on the side from him."

"And this picture? This is Jimmy Page, and this guy is Dean's dad!" Charlie said, reading the back of the picture. "Holy cow!"

Cas took the broken guitar Jo handed him. "That's insane. I guess I just didn't realize how famous the Winchesters were."

"Cas, look at this." Charlie held up another snapshot.

In the black and white photo, four adults and one preschooler sat around a kitchen table. Mary
Winchester leaned against June Carter-Cash, both women laughing uproariously. John Winchester and Johnny Cash were making faces at the little boy sitting on Johnny's lap. The kid had a look of abject confusion on his face, while all four adults were clearly in stitches.

"Do you think that little boy is Dean?"

"I know it is," Cas said softly.

"I bet he has some incredible stories to tell. I wonder how much he remembers."

"More than you would think," Cas said sadly, carefully tucking the photo into a box. "Alright, I think we're probably done for tonight? Cleanup tomorrow?"

"Definitely. I'm going to cross reference my inventory with the most valuable vinyls list I have and see what I come up with. Benny's coming in the morning with breakfast. He's taking the morning off to help us after the Sunday breakfast rush. We'll meet back here tomorrow, ok?"

They all nodded their agreement, and Cas saw the group out, locking the door behind his friends. He turned to look at the empty store.

"This is going to work," he told himself. "It's going to work."

Dear Cas,

I'm sorry for my last letter. I was a fucking wreck when I wrote it. I'm not much better now, to be honest. I finally put a name to what Alastair did to me. It's a word I never thought I would associate with myself, but they're right - he raped me. It wasn't sex. It was rape. I'm having a lot of trouble handling that idea. I don't know why. There's another lady here who was raped by her uncle when she was a teenager and she doesn't have any trouble accepting that label. I don't know why it's such an issue for me. Pam (my doctor) says she thinks it's because there's such a stigma related to male rape in this country, in the world in general. That men are raised to believe that only weak men or "fags" (fuck I hate that word) get raped. Pam was telling me about a fifteen year old boy who was coerced into bed by an older woman and it left him emotionally fucked, and all his friends were congratulating him and throwing him high fives. The kid ended up killing himself because no one would take him seriously.

When I finally came to terms with it, I was in group, and I had a fucking meltdown. I cried so hard - and I can't even tell you how much I hate crying in front of people. My father thought men that cried were weak, pussies - I hate that word as much as I hate the other one. I hate it. My father was a dick. I've had to come to terms with that, too. I've cried so much this week. I feel like someone ripped me open and spread me out on the ground.

So that's it. Alastair raped me. My first sexual experience and it was forced, and not what I wanted. I don't understand why I let him do that to me over and over again. If it hadn't been for that nurse - fuck, I would have probably let him keep abusing me until he finally killed me or I overdosed. I don't know.

I told Pam about how you said we were each other's firsts in all the ways that counted, and she agreed with you. She thinks you're a really good thing in my life. She's right, but I don't know if I'm a good thing for your life.

They made me take a sleep aid last night. I still didn't sleep much. Unearthing all this trauma has made it the main feature of my dreams, and that is so not cool.
I miss you. I miss you so much.

Love,

Dean

Cas found the letter in his box Tuesday afternoon, after a long weekend of cleaning and organizing Dean's store. Charlie said as of that morning the online store was already turning a profit, and she and Gilda would be spending the evening at the store, packing the hundred some albums that had sold for shipping.

They were close to feeling comfortable enough to reopen, but they needed someone to run the place. Aaron had agreed to take some of the daytime hours during the week. Cas and Charlie would split evenings and weekends. The problem was, Aaron couldn't cover the entire week, and they weren't sure they could afford to hire an employee.

Cas was sure they'd figure it out.

Dear Dean,

I just finished your last letter. Again, I ask you to wait on decisions about our relationship until this is all over - however, I absolutely assure you, you are a good thing in my life. The best thing, actually.

I can't imagine how difficult it's been to deal with what happened to you, to attach that word to it. I think Pam is right about male rape being downplayed or treated as taboo. It's hard for a female to get the world to believe her when a man rapes her; I can't even imagine how it would be to face it as a male victim.

I know I've told you before, but I will tell you again and again until you believe it - because it's the truth. You are so very, very strong. You're incredible. You're a rock. I know you can't see it right now. I know you might never see it. But you are so strong. I am so grateful to have you in my life.

And I want you in my life. That's the biggest thing I wish I could get you to believe. It gives me such joy to think that when this is over, you're coming home to me, that we'll get to start our future. If that sounds like I'm thinking permanence, it's because I am.

I heard a song on the radio today, and it made me think of you. If you get any internet time, look up I Won't Give Up, by Jason Mraz. It sums up how I feel. Listen to it and imagine me saying the words to you.

I love you.

I will tell you a thousand times, a million times, I will breathe the words into your skin the next time I see you.

I love you. I love you. I love you.

All of my love,

Cas
I Won't Give Up By Jason Mraz

Wildflower Cover #1 by living-in-exile

Wildflower Cover #2 by monsterattheendofthisbook

Thank you for both of those. #2 is closer to what I had in mind, but I love both of them, and really appreciate the work you guys put in.

Next chapter is the second-to-last, and should be a hella lot fluffier. Love you guys!!
Cas and Charlie reopened the store on a Sunday, about three weeks after Dean left. Thanks to Charlie's ad campaign, they were busy most of the day, and by the close of business, Charlie informed him that there were albums that would need to be reordered, special order requests, and a suggestion that In My Time of Vinyl sell rock memorabilia, like tees and stickers. When they locked the doors at eight, they were jubilant, if a bit tired, and Gilda's suggestion of Lafitte's for a late dinner was well received.

Charlie and Gilda piled into one side of a booth, Cas and Aaron on the other. Benny took their order himself, pulling up a chair to sit with them while they ate. It was loud and wonderful, and the only thing Cas missed was Dean's presence.

"Heard from Dean lately?" Charlie asked, as they settled their bills.

"No. Haven't gotten a letter in about a week and a half. Sam said he's struggling, and doesn't want to talk much. It's been hard."

"He's almost at the one month mark," Charlie mused. "Maybe this is the rock bottom he had to hit before he starts digging himself out."

"I'm worried about him," Cas said softly, counting out some ones for the tip. "I have to believe it'll get better. I'm just - his last letter was so bleak. He's hurting."

"Well, hopefully by the time he gets back, he'll be coming back to a thriving business. Today went a lot better than any of us were expecting," Gilda told them.

"I hope we continue on this path. It was a good day." Cas smiled at his friends.

They separated a short time later, and Cas drove home in the Impala, tired but content. Stopping a bit too hard at a light, a clunk and clatter from the passenger seat startled him a bit. Looking down, he found a battered box of old cassette tapes.

Checking to make sure the light was still red, he reached into the passenger well to retrieve them.
Each tape was hand labeled in Dean's careful print. Titles by Led Zeppelin, Metallica, and Motorhead were cram­med into the box, along with a tattered copy of Winchester's Rifle. All the tapes were plain old Memorex, and he smiled to think of Dean transferring vinyl albums to cassette.

He popped open a tape called Road Mix #3, and the first song kicked off with driving guitars. The light changed and Cas pulled away from the intersection, left foot tapping against the floorboards and fingers drumming on the wheel.

"Life's like a road that you travel on. When there's one day here and the next day gone. Sometimes you bend, sometimes you stand. Sometimes you turn your back to the wind. There's a world outside ev'ry darkened door, where blues won't haunt you anymore. Where brave are free and lovers soar. Come ride with me to the distant shore.

"We won't hesitate to break down the garden gate. There's not much time left today."

Cas gunned the engine, smiling to himself as he imagined driving down the road at Dean's side, Dean grinning as he drove his beloved car down some no-name highway.

Yeah. That was what he wanted.

"Life is a highway. I wanna ride it all night long. If you're going my way, I wanna drive it all night long."

"Hello?"

"Hey, Cas, it's Sam."

"Oh. Hello. How's Dean? I haven't heard from him in almost two weeks."

"Yeah, he's having a real rough time, which is part of why I called, even though he specifically asked me not to, but I know he wants this and -"

"Spit it out, Sam."

"Yeah, sorry," Sam chuckled. "Anyway, at the one month mark, he gets a weekend off. And I know he wants you here but he's scared you'll be freaked out by the state he's in. Jess and I tried to tell him that wasn't true -"

"It's definitely not true." Cas opened another tab on his laptop. "I'm buying airfare right now."

"Great! If you can, come on Thursday. Jess and I will take you out to dinner and we can talk a bit before we pick Dean up Friday afternoon."

"I can do that. When does he go back?"

"Sunday by six."

"Alright. I'll book a flight for early Monday, if that's ok?"

"Yup. Damn, Cas, I can't thank you enough for this. I mean, I think he would have been ok if it was just me and Jess, but he misses you so much. I think seeing you might help. Knowing that you're ok with him just the way he is -"

"And I am. I've told him over and over again. He's not listening to me."
"I think he's trapped in something of a feedback loop of depression and self loathing. Dredging all of this up has been really hard. I just want to warn you - he's lost a lot of weight and he's not sleeping very well, so don't let his appearance upset you too much. It's how he gets. When he's really depressed, his appetite is the first thing to go, and the insomnia takes over. It's hard, but he's going to get through it."

"I know he will. He just needs to believe it." Cas finished his airfare order. "I'm arriving 6:30pm on Thursday night at the Southwest terminal. See you then?"

"Yeah, sounds great. Thank you again. Can't wait for you to meet Jess."

"Looking forward to it."

They said their goodbyes and disconnected. It was after eleven by the time he'd laid out his suit and made his lunch for work. He hoped Naomi wouldn't give him a hard time about the vacation days - it wasn't like he took them all that often, anyway.

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Dear Cas,

Sorry I haven't written. I'm not in a good place right now. I can't sleep, can't eat. I feel like I'm not even functioning sometimes. I'm crying all the time but I'm just kind of - numb. How am I going to be better in a month? A year? How will I ever be better?

I'm sorry. I just - I have nothing left to give.

I love you.

Dean

He read the letter as Charlie drove him to the airport. "Oh god, he's hurting. This is the worst letter I've gotten yet and I doubt it's even a hundred words."

"Good thing you're headed out there, huh? Give him some serious TLC."

"I intend to."

Charlie pulled up to the drop zone, reaching over to pat Cas's leg. "Go take care of your man. Jo, Aaron, Gilda, and I will keep things going. The store's doing great."

"I'm not going to tell him that. I'd rather show him when he gets home."

"Probably a good idea. Love you bud. See you Monday."

Cas clambered out of Charlie's car, struggled briefly with his garment bag, suitcase, and laptop bag. He waved goodbye and headed into the terminal. Check in was fairly painless, and at 6:30 on the dot, they were touching down in LA.

Finding Sam in the crowd was easy, seeing as how he towered over many of the other people, and he strode forward through the crowd, a big smile on his face and a beautiful blonde by his side.

"Cas, Jess, Jess, Cas," he grinned, making easy introductions.

Jess pulled Cas in for a tight hug. She was as tall as Cas was - probably a good thing, since Sam was so tall. "It's so good to finally meet you. We've heard so much about you from Dean."
"Good things?"

Laughing, Sam patted him on the back. "You shitting me? Pretty sure Dean thinks you hung the moon."

"So you're a bank manager?" Jess asked over a patio table at In'N'Out.

"Mmm-hmm," Cas hummed over his double meat animal style. He was pretty sure he'd died and gone to burger heaven. "Assistant manager. I share the position with my friend Charlie."

"LARP Charlie? Dean adores her," Jess said.

"Yes. She's a wonderful person," he said, thinking about how she'd nearly single handedly turned Dean's business around. "I love being her friend and working with her."

"Do you like it? The bank thing?" Sam slurped noisily on his milkshake. He snuck a bite of burger to Grady, a pit bull mix, curled up at his feet. Bones, and Fletch, their other two dogs, slept on the sunshine heated concrete outside the restaurant.

"It's alright. It's not what I set out to do, but it's close enough that I'm happy."

"What did you want to do?"

"Own my own accounting firm. Boring, I know, but I've always liked numbers."

"Yeah, well, I rep snotty actors. So it's all good. Not exactly what I pictured, either."

"Well, at least I got my dream job," Jess grinned.

Sam threw a fry at her. She tossed it right back. It bounced off Sam's shoulder and Grady caught it in midair.

Cas smiled at them. They were an adorable couple, clearly stupidly in love with each other and their doggie children. He hoped that's what people saw when they looked at him and Dean - minus the dogs, of course.

"What did Dean want to do?" he asked softly.

"Be a rock star, but I was never really sure if that's what he wanted, or if it was what Dad wanted. I think Dean just wants to be happy, safe, secure. I don't think he cares what he's doing. I will tell you this. When you get back to Sioux Falls, look in the trunk he uses for a window seat. My Mom and Dad's songwriting journals are in there, and so are a few of Dean's. He's so talented. Mom and Dad were good, but Dean - Dean's the next level. If he moved somewhere like LA or Nashville, he could make it as a songwriter. Especially with my connections."

"I listened to Wildflower. I was blown away by the depth of emotion in his songs."

"I know, right?" Sam enthused. "Even his version of Ramble On is something so different from the original. I don't know if it's his voice or his arrangements, I don't know. I just know he's talented as fuck."

"Tell me something I don't know," Cas murmured.

The New Hope Behavioral Health Center sat well up on a hill, overlooking LA. It was about an
hour's drive from Sam and Jess's Pasadena home - a drive that probably would have taken less time if not for the traffic.

A pretty lady in an Aerosmith shirt greeted them at the counter, hugging Jess and Sam in welcome. She turned to Cas. "You must be the famous Cas Novak."

"I am. You must be the famous Pam," he smiled back.

"Ooh, I like you already. Dean talks about you constantly. He really gets a lot from your letters. Thanks for writing him this week, even though I know he wasn't responding."

"I wasn't about to let him forget how much I love him."

"He does tend to get lost in his own head. We're at the rock bottom stage of treatment right about now, which is why we offer the weekend break. He does need to be supervised at all times, and bathroom times should be carefully monitored."

Cas frowned. "Is he suicidal?"

Pam nodded. "Let's take this somewhere private," she said, leading them down the hall to an office with rock posters on the wall. Cas could easily see why Dean liked her.

"Like I said, man," Sam told him, settling into a chair with a sigh. "It's been rough."

"I think seeing you will help, though. That's why Sam called you."

"Jess is right. Seeing you will help him. I want to warn you - I'm pretty sure he didn't sleep last night, and he's spent most of the day laying in bed. He's pretty much not eating at all right now, so watch that, too. We threatened him with an NG tube if he didn't put on some weight, and that at least got two bottles of Ensure in him today. It's something."

"Does he have anorexia?" Cas asked softly.

"No, it's not really that, although if not watched carefully it has the potential to develop into an eating disorder. It's more that his emotions are so difficult to process right now, his body is rebelling. It doesn't want food, it doesn't want sleep - it wants to feel better."

"Also, the pot kills his nerves when he's like this and makes it easier for him to eat. That's why I never really got on him about the pot, and we never saw the danger zones he'd get to on the booze and heroin," Sam explained.

"Cas, something Sam and I have talked about," Jess said, pushing a strand of hair out of her face. "This is a lot to take in, a lot to process. We know you didn't know what you were getting into with Dean when you started seeing him. No one in this room would resent you if you wanted to walk away."

"Wh-what?" Cas stammered.

"This is a shit time to be building a relationship. If you don't want to deal with this, we understand. You can walk out that door and get a cab and get the hell out of here. We won't tell Dean you were here, and when it's all over, you can break it to him gently."

Anger rose in Cas's chest. "That's what you think of me? That I'm so fickle that I'd leave him now? I knew he had issues right from the beginning. He was lonely, miserable, he'd get lost in his own head sometimes. I could see that. I knew he was depressed. Admittedly, I didn't know how bad it was. But
this changes nothing. I am still in love with him, I will still see him through this, and when it's over, we'll begin our future together in whatever capacity he desires - be it partnership or friendship. I love him. This will not change that.” He crossed his arms over his chest and glared at Sam and Jess.

Pam looked impressed. "I told him you were good for him."

Cas hung back slightly, watching as Dean stepped through the double doors of the locked ward and threw himself into Sam's arms. Jess joined the hug, stroking a hand through his hair and whispering soothing words. From where he stood, he could see how Dean's arms had gotten rather bony, tightly wrapped around his brother's waist.

"Have a surprise for you," he heard Sam tell Dean, and then he and Jess both stepped aside.

He was shocked by Dean's waiflike appearance and naturally light brown hair for only a moment before Dean sobbed out his name and crashed into him, wrapping his arms tight around Cas's waist and crying into his shoulder.

"It's ok, I'm here. I'm here. It's ok. You're alright. I've got you." He wrapped his arms tightly around Dean as a hard shudder ran through his body. "It's ok. It's ok."

They led Dean from the building, out to Sam and Jess's car. He refused to be separated from Cas, and the moment they settled into the backseat, Dean was out like a light.

Sam peeked in the rearview mirror. "Is he asleep?" he asked incredulously.

"Gone," Cas confirmed, his shirt uncomfortably wet, first with Dean's tears, and now with a thin line of drool.

"Go figure."

Dinner was painful. Dean was clearly still groggy from his hour long nap in the car. Sam had made chicken noodle soup, knowing anything else would be difficult for Dean to eat. He did eat a little, but mostly just pushed noodles around the bowl. He kept looking over at Cas as if confirming that he was still there. No one talked much, and by 8:30, they were giving it up for a lost cause. Sam and Jess disappeared upstairs, their dogs trotting behind them, leaving Dean and Cas on the couch.

"Would you like to get a shower? I'll help you. We could go to bed after. Sam and Jess's guest room is quite comfortable."

"I can't have sex, Cas," Dean said softly. "Not right now. It's too - it's too -" he took a shuddering breath.

"I would never ask that of you. We won't do anything you're not comfortable with," Cas soothed. "But you don't smell fresh and you look beyond exhausted. I just want to help you get cleaned up and help you get a good night's rest. Ok?"

"Ok." Dean let Cas help him off the couch and down the hall to the guest room.

He opened Dean's duffel and pulled out sweats, a tee, and boxers, then fetched his own set. "Come on," he murmured, leading Dean to the bathroom. "Bath or shower? The tub isn't as large as yours but I think we can make it work."

"Bath, please."
"Alright." Cas ran the water, and while the tub filled, he gathered Dean into his arms, pulling him close. "It's ok. I won't do anything you don't want. I promise."

Dean nodded into the space between Cas's ear and shoulder. He let Cas carefully peel his clothes away, and they settled into the tub. Cas draped his leg over the edge to make more room for Dean.

He did his best to hide his dismay as he washed Dean's body. Dean had never been anything but slim to begin with, but now, Cas could count his ribs and his wrists were bony. It bothered him so much to see Dean looking so careworn - he hadn't realized how dramatically someone could lose weight in such a short time.

Holding a hand over Dean's eyes, he gently rinsed suds from his hair. "It's so strange to see your hair like this," he mused.

"I needed a haircut and I can't bleach and redye in the facility," Dean mumbled. "They made me take out my piercings, too, and now my ears look weird without the gauges."

"It's not that noticeable." Dean didn't say anything else, but sat still as Cas finished bathing him. "All nice and clean," he smiled, laying a kiss on Dean's shoulder.

"Thank you," Dean said softly.

"My pleasure. Let's get dried off and get you to bed. Ok?"

"Yeah."

Dean slid forward a bit and pulled the drain, wrapping his arms around his folded knees as Cas got out and retrieved towels for both of them. He dried himself off briefly before wrapping the towel around his waist, while he watched Dean stare at the rapidly disappearing water. Cas extended a hand and Dean took it, letting Cas help him from the tub.

"Are you alright?" he asked quietly, as he rubbed Dean's skin with the towel.

"No. But I'm - I think I just want to go to bed."

"Alright."

They dressed and hung their towels, and shortly after, were snuggled side by side in the comfortable guest bed. Dean lay on one side, facing the wall, curled in on himself. Cas sighed. He wanted nothing more than to pull Dean into his arms and offer whatever comfort he could, but Dean seemed so skittish.

Shutting off the light, Cas pulled the blankets up to his chest. He wasn't tired yet, not really, so he laid there in the dark, unsure of what to do.

A muffled sniffle came from next to him.

"Dean?"

"M'fine," Dean mumbled, voice cracking.

"Come here," Cas said, "let me hold you."

Choking back a sob, Dean rolled over and into Cas's arms. He twisted his fingers into the fabric of Cas's tee, and Cas tightened his arms around Dean, pulling him as close as he could.
"It's ok. It's ok. Let it out. Let it go." He kissed Dean's forehead, as Dean shook and fell apart in his arms. Cas wasn't surprised to find tears sliding down his own cheeks.

"It hurts so bad. I can't - can't do this. I can't. It's t-too much. Just w-want to forget. Why can't I just forget? I'm n-never - never g-going to be ok, Cas."

"Yes, you will. You will. I promise. This is rock bottom, Dean. This is as low as you can get. The only place left to go is up."

Dean shuddered but didn't respond. Cas rubbed his back and hummed softly, kissing Dean's forehead and holding him close as he gradually calmed. The tension in Dean's body seeped away, as he relaxed into Cas's hold.

"M'glad you're here," he mumbled.

"I'm glad I'm here, too."

The fingers holding Cas's tee in a death grip loosened as Dean's breathing evened out from the ragged sobs, and Cas felt him drift off to sleep.

"Sleep well," he breathed, kissing Dean's forehead again. "I'll be here when you wake."

Cas woke to a sunny bedroom and Dean wrapped tightly around him. He could smell coffee, and there was definitely someone up in the kitchen. Carefully prying Dean off of him, he climbed out of bed and headed for the caffeine.

"Mornin'," Jess greeted him with a smile. "Sleep ok?"

"Yes. Better yet, Dean slept all night."

"Of course he did," she said, handing him a cup of joe, "he was with you. You might even be able to get him to eat today."

"I'll do my best. Where's Sam?"

"Running. He and the mutts go out every morning, rain or shine. Help me make breakfast? I'm just doing eggs and pancakes. And bacon. We usually don't have it, but Dean loves it."

"Happy to help."

They worked together easily, Jess flipping the pancakes while Cas manned the eggs and bacon.

"You know," Jess said quietly, adding chocolate chips to a cake before flipping it, "Sam worries about Dean so much. He's aware of how much Dean sacrificed for him."

"Not sure I follow," Cas frowned.

"When I first met Sam, we were both volunteering at the same homeless center. A mom with two kids came in, and that was bothering him to begin with, but he noticed the older brother wasn't eating. Kid was maybe eight. He kept sliding food off his plate to his little brother's and mom's plates when they weren't looking. Sam noticed. He made another plate and went to go sit with them, and when he came back, the older brother was eating from the plate Sam had brought him." Jess flipped the pancake onto a platter. "I asked him about it. He said the boy said his mom and brother needed the food more than he did, and that it broke his heart - because it was the same thing Dean had done for him. He said, I just needed that boy to eat. I needed him to understand he's just as important as
his brother. Sam would give anything to help Dean, you know?"

"I do. I've seen it in action."

Jess patted his arm as Sam unlocked the front door and stumbled through, flushed and soaking wet with sweat. He unleashed the dogs, and the three of them tripped and jostled each other on the way to the water bowls.

"That smells fantastic," he enthused. "Do I have time to shower real quick?"

Jess pulled a face. "Ugh, please. Go."

"Dean still asleep?" he asked, reaching into the fridge for a bottle of water.

"Slept all night according to Cas."

"Wow! Awesome! Be right back." Sam left the kitchen, chugging his bottle of water. Grady looked up and noticed Sam was gone, and took off and up the stairs after him. There was a little crash and a muffled curse from Sam.

"That dog is constantly trying to get in the shower with him and some days he succeeds!" Jess laughed.

Cas chuckled. "Grady seems to be joined at the hip with Sam. It's cute." He finished his coffee, thinking he would make Dean a cup as well - but maybe coffee wasn't a great idea. "Jess, do you have any tea? I think coffee might be too hard on Dean's stomach, since he hasn't been eating."

"Good call," she agreed, digging a box of chamomile out of a cabinet. "But he'll probably bitch."

"I'd actually be very happy to hear him bitch about something."

"Me, too."

They finished breakfast, Jess sliding everything into the oven to keep warm, while Cas brewed and prepared a mug of tea and headed for the bedroom.

"Take your time," Jess called as he left the room, "this stuff'll keep."

Dean had gathered Cas's pillow into his arms in his sleep and had his face buried in it. Cas stood in the doorway and watched his back rise and fall with his slow, deep breaths. From what little he could see of Dean's face, he was deeply asleep and peaceful. Cas frowned at the idea of waking him up.

He read a book for about ten minutes before making a decision.

"I'm going to eat," he told Jess and Sam, walking back out to the kitchen. "He's sound asleep and I think it would be better to leave him that way. Can always reheat."

"Damn straight. Let him sleep," Sam agreed, raising his coffee mug in a salute. "Park it, have some chow." He slipped a piece of bacon under the table to Grady.

"Good lord, Sam, isn't that dog fat enough?"

"Fat!" Sam said, outraged. "Not an ounce of fat on my boy's body." He pulled Grady half into his lap and offered him more bacon. "Who's my good boy? Huh? Yeah, you're my good boy."

"Yeah, so? He's my buddy. I adopted him when he was two," Sam explained to Cas, "he'd been part of an illegal fighting ring and when I found him in an alley, he was half dead. Vet said he wouldn't make it. But you showed him, didn't you boy? Didn't you? I love the other two, but Grady is special."

"Something smells good," Dean said softly.

"Hey, good morning!" Sam grinned, standing up and pulling his brother into a hug. "We've got everything, what do you want to eat?"

Dean melted into Sam's hug for a moment before pulling back to look at the others, a special smile directed Cas's way. "Whatever smells so good."

"Jess made chocolate chip pancakes. Sit, I'll get you a plate." Cas pulled out a chair for Dean, leaning down to kiss his forehead as he sat. He busied himself making Dean's breakfast while Sam, Jess, and Dean chatted. Bones laid his tawny head in Dean's lap, and he stroked his fur while listening to Sam prattle on about some movie star he was repping.

Taking the time to quietly observe Dean while he warmed breakfast and prepared a cup of tea, Cas was pleased to see how rested Dean looked. He was sleep rumpled, hair going in a million different directions, and there was definitely a line across his face from the sheets, but his eyes had a twinkle in them that hadn't been there the night before. He smiled easily at Sam's corny jokes, and accepted the love Bones was showering on him.

Dean looked at peace. That was good enough for Cas.

"So, Jess, the mutts, and I are heading out for the day. We see Dean all the time, so we thought we'd head down to Santa Monica and let you guys have the house and my car. We'll be back around dinner time. Sound good?"

"Don't have to do that," Dean mumbled, taking his plate as Cas sat down next to him.

"Nah, man, we want to. I just saw you three nights ago, and Cas hasn't seen you in a month. Have some time alone to talk or -" Sam flushed slightly and waved his hands in the air, " - you know."

"Gross, Sammy," Dean muttered, his cheeks turning bright red.

Cas reached under the table and squeezed Dean's fingers.

"Uh, anyway," Jess said, standing and gathering leashes. "We're gonna head out. So you guys do as you please, help yourself to anything in the fridge, and we'll see you later. C'mon, Captain Awkward," she grabbed a protesting Sam's arm and dragged him from the room and out the front door, mutts trotting happily after them.

"Eat up," Cas urged, pushing Dean's plate closer to him. "I'm going to start the dishes and then we can decide what we want to do today, alright?"

Dean nodded, cutting into a pancake with the side of his fork and putting a tiny bite in his mouth.

_It was something_, Cas thought.

"So, what would you like to do? Go to Hollywood, the beach, what?"

"What would you like to do?"
"I've been to LA before," Dean said. "You choose."

"No. This is about you, and giving you a break from the facility. I'm here to make you feel better, to make sure you have a nice weekend, and I don't care what we do as long as it's something you want to do. Alright?"

Dean flushed. "If I had my way, we'd just stay in."

"Then that's what we'll do. Let's go to the store and buy a bunch of junk food, hit up Redbox, and lay around all day. I'll give you a massage and we'll be lazy. How does that sound?"

The relief on Dean's face made Cas's heart warm. "Perfect. Absolutely perfect. Throw a bath together in there at some point, and I'm really onboard. I know Sam and Jess won't mind if we use their big tub upstairs."

"Alright then. Eat up and we'll go out and get the goods."

Dean smiled and dug into his pancakes while Cas cleaned up, and he was thrilled to see that Dean ate his entire breakfast. In fact, he ate off and on pretty much the whole day, and by the time Jess and Sam got home, Dean was sound asleep, tucked into a mound of pillows and blankets in the guest room.

"He looks content," Sam said, peeking into the room.

Cas looked up from his book. "We had a good day. We were lazy. Laid around and ate junk food, watched Adam Sandler movies. He laughed a lot. It was a good day."

"That's great. You're so good for him."

"He's good for me, too."

Sam smiled. "Night, Cas," he said, pulling the door shut.

Closing his book, Cas set it on the nightstand and shut off the light, snuggling down beside Dean. "Goodnight," he whispered, kissing Dean's cheek.

"Love you," Dean mumbled, just barely awake.

"I love you, too."

Chapter End Notes

For the record - it's the Tom Cochrane version. *Life is a Highway*

And yes, that is a sweet ass '65 Impala in the video.
It Might Be You

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Something’s telling me it might be you

It’s telling me it might be you

So many quiet walks to take

So many dreams to wake

And there’s so much love to make

I think we’re gonna need some time

Maybe all we need is time

And it’s telling me it might be you

All of my life

Cas woke up with his arms full of Dean and sunshine heating a stripe across his back. He was warm and comfortable, and Dean smelled wonderful. His back was pressed to Cas’s front and he was breathing deep and steadily. Burying his face in the back of Dean’s neck, Cas took a deep breath and sighed, tightening his arm around Dean’s waist.

Carefully, so as not to disturb Dean, Cas reached for his phone on the nightstand and took a picture of Dean snuggled in his arms. In the picture, Cas was smiling softly and Dean’s face was slack and relaxed as he lay lost in peaceful dreams. The love he felt for the man welled up inside him, and he kissed Dean’s temple as he put the phone away. This was what he wanted - today, tomorrow, every day for the rest of his life.

Cas wondered what Dean would say if he asked him to marry him - but it was probably too soon to be thinking that way.

Closing his eyes, he fell back asleep picturing Dean in a tuxedo, standing across from him and exchanging vows while they held hands. Dream Dean’s face was beautiful, peaceful, pure joy making his pretty eyes sparkle. They sealed their bond with a kiss, and Castiel woke again.

He’d moved to his back, and Dean was slung across his body, fingers tracing patterns on Cas’s chest.

“Good morning,” Dean said softly.

“Morning. How did you sleep?”

“Really good. Deep. I don’t think I woke up once all night.”
“Glad to hear.” Cas kissed Dean’s forehead. “I slept good, too. Want to get in the shower with me? I’d like to take you out to breakfast this morning.”

“Maybe in a bit. I kinda just want to stay right here. I’ll be alone tonight and I just want to soak this up as long as I can.”

“Halfway there, Dean. In a month -”

“I know. I do. And I’m going to do everything I can to focus on that and keep moving forward, but in the meantime, I just want to soak up these last few moments with you. If that’s ok.”

“That’s perfectly ok.” Cas tightened his grip on Dean, pulling him closer into his arms. “This last month will go so fast. And then you’ll be on a plane home, coming back to me.”

“About that - I wanted to ask but I keep chickening out. I um - I don’t fly well, and I was wondering if you’d be willing to fly out here and fly back with me,” Dean said, “but you don’t have to, I mean, I’d be ok -”

“Of course I’ll do that for you. I’d be happy to.”

Tension bled from Dean’s limbs as he relaxed back into Cas’s arms. “Wow, thank you. I appreciate it.”

“No thanks needed. I’m happy to do that for you. And you never need to be afraid to ask me for things. Alright?”

“Yeah, just be patient with me. Might take me awhile to learn that lesson.”

“I’ll be endlessly patient with you.”

Dean nuzzled his face into Cas’s neck, kissing the skin under his ear. “So good to me.” He pushed up on one arm, leaning in for a real kiss. His lips were soft and sweet, and the kiss was chaste but fervent. “Could kiss you forever,” Dean murmured against Cas’s lips. “Could spend every day kissing you.”

“That sounds wonderful,” Cas said, pulling Dean down for another kiss. He slid a hand up Dean’s leg to rest on his hip, fingers sliding underneath his shirt to find the skin above his waistband. They kissed slow and sweet, and despite Cas’s best efforts, arousal built, heat growing into an itch under his skin. “Dean, I -”

“No one said we had to stop.”

“But you -”

“I’m fine. I’m fine, Cas.”

Growling slightly, Cas flipped Dean onto his back, pressing him into the mattress as their kisses grew more insistent. Dean’s fingers slipped under Cas’s shirt, pushing the fabric upward. He dragged his nails over Cas’s nipples and he gasped into Dean’s mouth.

“Liked that, did ya?”

“Tell me what you want, Dean. Please. I don’t want to push you too far.”

“I’m good, baby, I’m good.”
“I don’t have any lube or anything. I didn’t bring it. I didn’t think -”

Dean’s eyes twinkled. “Who needs lube?” He pushed Cas’s shirt further up his chest, helping him out of it and tossing it carelessly to the floor. “There’s all kinds of fun we can have without it. All kinds of fun.” Dean’s hands slid down Cas’s back and into the waistline of his boxers, pushing them down over the curve of his ass.

Lost in kisses, Cas sucked in air through his nose, not willing to break his lips away from Dean’s. He tasted so sweet, felt so good moving beneath him.

“Cas,” Dean murmured, as Cas ducked his head to attack Dean’s neck.

He sucked a bit of Dean’s skin into his mouth, dragging his teeth and pulling blood to the surface. Dean let out a guttural groan as Cas marked him, his fingers digging into the flesh of Cas’s ass. Getting his hands under Dean’s shirt, he pulled him into a half sitting position, yanking the tee up and over Dean’s head. They worked together to get their boxers off, and when Cas laid Dean back down, he pressed their naked skin together.

“Feel so good, Dean,” he murmured, reaching between them, wrapping a hand around both of them.

Dean sucked in a breath and pushed his hips up into Cas’s grip. “Fuck -” Dean gasped. “Yeah. Just like that. Just like that.”

Cas tightened his grip around them, dry drag making him see stars.

“Wait, give me your hand,” Dean said. He took the hand Cas offered and sucked all of his fingers into his lush mouth.

“Jesus -” Cas breathed, watching as Dean soaked each finger before turning the palm of Cas’s hand, laving at skin and leaving wet spit slicked flesh behind.

“There. Try it now.”

Reaching between them again, Cas gripped them both tightly. Dean moaned and let his head fall back into the pillow as he fucked into Cas’s fist, the firmness of his erection hard and hot against Cas’s own.

“Gonna come, Cas, I’m gonna come.”

“Not yet,” Cas growled, squeezing the base of Dean’s dick. “Not yet.”

Dean whined, his body trembling from the feedback of denied orgasm. “Fuck, fuck,” he whimpered.

Cas pulled back and grabbed Dean by the ankles, sliding him further down the bed. “I’ve always wanted to try this,” he said, turning so that he was hovering over Dean. He leaned down and sucked Dean into the back of his throat.

“Oh, fuck, fuck!” Dean’s whole body was shaking, but he got the idea, stretching his head up to take Cas into his mouth.

Electric sparks of pleasure raced down Cas’s spine and he groaned around the cock in his mouth. He could taste the salty slickness of Dean’s precome, and he licked it up. Dean had stopped for a moment, and slurping sounds could be heard, but before Cas had a moment to clear his head enough to ascertain what those sounds meant, Dean was closing his hot mouth around him again.
Wet fingers slipped between his ass cheeks, and somewhere in the distant corners of his mind, he now knew what the slurping sounds had been, but he was far too distracted by Dean gently sliding a finger inside of him.

“Fuck!” he shouted, the surprise blowing the steady rhythm he’d been using on Dean. He heard a low chuckle behind him, as Dean found his own rhythm, sliding his finger inside while he swallowed Cas’s dick. His finger pressed firmly on Cas’s prostate, and it was just too good, too much. Cas came sharply and unexpectedly, Dean coughing slightly.

“Guess that was good, huh?” Dean rasped.

Cas could only whimper in response from where he lay shaking, his head on the bed between Dean’s knees. “You’re a sex god,” he wheezed after a bit.

“Nah. Just a dude with a boner,” Dean replied, a suggestive tone in his voice.

“Yeah? What do you want me to do about it? You broke me.”

A hearty, happy laugh bubbled out of Dean and the sound made Cas warm from his head to the tips of his toes. He pulled himself up, rearranged his body so that he was facing Dean. Dean looked utterly debauched, with his cheeks flushed red and his hair everywhere. He tracked Cas with lust-blown eyes as Cas crawled up the bed.

“Shit. Look like you’re hunting me,” Dean said softly, arousal bleeding into his voice.

“Maybe I am. Maybe I’m the big, bad wolf.”

Reaching up, Dean hooked a hand around Cas’s neck and pulled him down for a kiss. “Maybe you’re a pussycat.”

Cas held his hand out to Dean. “Get it wet,” he demanded. Dean obeyed immediately, eyes hooded and hungry as he carried out his task. Shifting them both, Dean allowed Cas to manhandle him into a position that had Cas sitting up against the headboard, Dean against his chest.

“Watch,” he growled in Dean’s ear. “Look in the mirror over there,” Cas ordered, as he wrapped his wet hand around Dean again. Against the wall across from the foot of their bed was a chest of drawers with a large mirror over it, and Dean stared at himself, eyes darting away after a moment.

“No, watch. Look how beautiful you are.” Cas slid his free hand up Dean’s chest, tugging on a hardened nipple. “See yourself the way I do,” he murmured, sliding his hand up and down Dean’s length. “See how gorgeous you are? How perfect, lovely, how sexy you are?” Dean whined and tried to turn his face away. “No, look. Please. Look at you. You’re close and you’re flushed and breathing hard. Watch. Please.”

Dean obeyed this time, locking eyes with his double in the mirror. His breath grew shallower, his dick throbbing in Cas’s hand as he relentlessly pushed Dean over the brink. Cas held Dean close as he shuddered through the aftershocks, petting his hair and whispering sweet words.

“You are,” he kissed him just below the ear, “so good for me. Perfect.”

Dean turned in his arms and kissed him softly. “No. You’re good for me. You changed everything. Don’t you know that? You’re good for me.”

“I love you so much,” Cas said softly. “I didn’t even know it could be like this.”

“You think I did? You said to me, right before I left, that in all the ways that count, we’re each
other’s firsts. And that’s true. It’s so true.” Dean turned his head to kiss the skin below Cas’s ear. “I love you. I love you so much it terrifies me.”

“Don’t be afraid. I’m not going anywhere.”

“I think I might be starting to believe that.” Dean’s eyes sparkled in the morning sun as he stared up at Cas, both of them soaking in the warmth and the contentment of being together.

It was the most perfect moment Cas had ever known.

After a brief period of recovery, Cas managed to drag a perfectly content and sated Dean from the bed and into a hot shower. Cas tilted Dean’s head back into the stream of water, shielding his eyes as he rinsed the soap from his hair.

“This will sound so stupid, but I love shit like this.”

“Why would that sound stupid? I love having sex with you, but the intimate moments like this are what truly make me happy.”

“Yeah?” Dean blinked the water out of his eyes. “Really?”

“Really. I just love being with you. Sex is a bonus. An incredible bonus, but a bonus.”

Dean plastered his wet back to Cas’s chest so Cas could wash his belly. “Huh. So if it never happened again?”

“I’m not saying I wouldn’t miss it, I would, but it’s not why I’m with you. Get what I’m saying?”

“I think so.”

Cas swept his hands across Dean’s chest. “Do you have any idea, any inkling at all of how much I love you?”

“I think maybe I’m starting to get a clue.” Dean turned in his arms. “But some positive reinforcement wouldn’t hurt.” He grinned, waggling his eyebrows suggestively.

Twenty minutes later, an irritated Sam was banging on the door complaining about the lack of hot water while Cas towel dried a giggling and flushed Dean.

“I think your brother’s a bit irritated with us,” Cas told him.

“Ask me if I care,” Dean grinned, pushing Cas against the door and kissing him. “I’m happy. I’m in love. That should be good enough for him. These next four weeks are going to go by so slow, though. I want to be home with you.”

“I think it’ll go fast. You’re doing better, you’ve got the goal in sight. You can do this, Dean.”

“I know I can.”

Cas leaned forward and kissed the tip of Dean’s nose. “I’m so proud of you.”

“You know, for the first time in probably forever, I am too. I’m proud of myself.”
They went to Santa Monica for the day, and Cas happily shelled out the money to ride the rides on the pier and for a late lunch at In’N’Out. Dean snuggled against him in the back of Sam’s car on the way back to the facility, but he was still smiling when he waved goodbye.

Cas took that as a good sign.

Home by early Monday afternoon, Cas sorted through a few days worth of mail. He called Charlie, happy to hear that the store had done wonderfully over the weekend, and seemed to be well on the way to developing a solid customer base.

“We did killer numbers over the weekend. In fact, there’s this girl that keeps coming in, Krissy? She’s offered to help out with extra hours in the evenings when she’s not in class.”

“College student?”

“Yeah. She loves the place. Loves the vibe. I think we can trust her. She said she’d come by with her dad Saturday so he can vouch for her, but she seems like a good kid. Plus, she liked my Live Long and Prosper shirt. She’s basically a tiny me,” Charlie said proudly.

“Huh. What should we pay her?”

“Better than minimum, definitely. We can figure that out later. How was your trip?”

“It was good. Dean was a little shaky at first, but he was happy to see me and when we returned him to the center on Sunday, he was in good spirits. One month left, and then he’ll be home. I can’t wait.”

“Do you think he’ll be ok with what we did?”

“Honestly, I don’t know and I am concerned he’ll be mad at us. But I’m hoping he’ll be able to see it as the gesture of love it was meant to be.”

“Me too, especially since I just put in an order for some tees and stickers. I had to reorder a couple of albums, and I had a big special order from Benny for new 45’s for his jukebox. Dean’s making money now. He can pay the mortgage, he can afford basic human needs, hell, he could probably start padding his savings account. Things are looking up.”

“I can’t wait for him to see how well things are going.”

“When does he come home?”

“End of the month. I’m going to fly to LA and fly back with him.”

“Huh.”

“What?”

“No, I’m just thinking - you should take a week and a half and drive out in his car. Wouldn’t that be cool? Road trip!”

Cas grinned. “That is a great idea!” he enthused. “I love it!”

“See? I’m awesome.”
“You are, Charlie, and you have no idea just how much.”

They talked for a bit more, ending the conversation after Cas’s massive yawn. He promised to take a nap, heading up to his room after they disconnected.

Back at work the next morning, he took his vacation request to Naomi’s office. He tapped on the door and she called for him to come in, listening patiently while he made his request.

“I see no reason not to grant this, Mr. Novak. You’re one of our most valued employees and don’t ask for time off often.” She signed the paper and handed it back to him, smiling over the top of her tortoise shell frames. “Although, you have asked for several days lately. Everything is alright, I trust?”

“Yes. I um - I have a boyfriend, and he’s been in treatment in California. Those days are for when the treatment is finished. He asked that I escort him home to Sioux Falls.”

Naomi slipped the glasses off and set them on her desk. “You know, I knew Bobby Singer for years. I was excited for Dean when he decided to open the store. I thought it would be good for him. I know it’s been a struggle.”

“I wasn’t aware that you knew Dean at all.”

She nodded. “I’m the one that asked Crowley to intercede on his behalf when he fell behind on the mortgage. I don’t know why, other than perhaps I thought he’d taken one too many blows in his life. Charlie says the store is doing well now. You two are a good team.”

“It’s all for Dean. We’re just trying to set him up for success.”

“I think you must love him quite a bit.”

“I do,” Cas smiled.

“Does he feel the same?”

Thinking back over their weekend together, Cas couldn’t help how his smile widened. “He does. Definitely.”

Dear Cas,

Kind of a rough week. Pam says I backslid a little bit, but that it’s nothing to worry about. I was good until Wednesday, but I had a nightmare and it kinda threw me off for the rest of the week. But it’s Friday, which means I get to spend the evening and part of tomorrow with Sam and Jess. We’re going to get dinner and go see a movie.

I miss you already. Feels like you were just here, but it’s already been almost a week. I wish this were over, but then again, I only have three weeks left, so suck it up, Winchester!

I’m on Lunesta now for sleep. I think it’s helping - the Ambien sure didn’t. Pretty sure the current antidepressant is working better than the stuff they had me on at first. But holy crap - the dreams, dude. They are so friggin’ weird! Pam says that’s a normal side effect, and it sure beats the nightmares, but weird, weird, weird. Last night I dreamt I was driving around in my car and chasing down monsters. Sammy and I were some kind of special forces ghost hunters and you were
(you’ll love this) an Angel of the Lord. In fact, at one point, you got all growly and in my face and said “I pulled you out of hell, I can throw you back in.”

I gotta admit, it was hot as hell. Ha! Pun intended. (By the way, Angel of the Lord Cas looks a hell of a lot like John Constantine!) I could probably wax poetic about how you really are my guardian angel...

They threw us a little pizza party and Star Wars marathon last night. It was pretty cool, definitely a good way to pass the time. I’m glad they did it yesterday, because Thursday was hard and I needed the pick me up.

God, I wish I was home. Promise not to make fun of me when I’m demanding snuggles all the time? Wow, I’m a five year old girl. Snuggles. What the actual fuck?

I love you. I can’t wait to see you again.

Love,

Dean

P.S. Look up It Might Be You by Stephen Bishop. Pretend I’m singing it to you.

Cas pulled up the song right away, smiling as he listened to the singer. He’d have to get Dean to sing it for him for real when he got home. He folded Dean’s letter, tucking it underneath the others in his nightstand drawer. Pulling out a legal pad and a pen, he wrote his own letter, telling Dean again how proud he was of him and how much more upbeat he sounded. He let Dean know his vacation had been approved and told a small white lie about purchasing airfare.

When he was done, Cas pulled out his laptop and mapped out the trip to LA and sent it to his printer. Then, he mapped out the trip back from LA, adding a short detour in Las Vegas. He booked a room for two nights at the Venetian. He booked another night in Denver, figuring they could use it as the halfway point between Sioux Falls and Vegas.

After setting up and printing his itinerary, he estimated the fuel costs for the Impala and almost cancelled the whole thing. Almost.

Satisfied, he shut off the lamp and snuggled down in bed, excited about his plans.

They exchanged letters back and forth over the next few weeks. Each letter from Dean was progressively sunnier and more enthusiastic as he neared the end of treatment. Dean would be released on a Saturday morning, and the Wednesday before, Cas got off work and went home, prepared to spend the evening packing the Impala. He’d leave at dawn, and would make LA by Friday evening.

As he was settling down for the night, he made one last check of his email before packing his laptop, surprised to find a message from Sam.

Hey Cas,

So Dean and I recorded this earlier in the week. I tried to convince him to Skype you to do it, but he said he was too nervous. Anyway, download and enjoy. See you in a few days!
Attached was a video clip, and when it downloaded, Dean’s face was smiling at him.

“Hey! So I’ve been working on this song and -” he blushed. “Uh, Sammy and I are gonna do it for you. I hope you like it.”

The camera zoomed out to show Sam and Dean sitting side by side, both holding guitars. Dean looked over at Sam and nodded, silently counting down. They both started playing together, Sam lightly tapping his foot to keep time. Dean looked into the camera and started singing.

“You came in from the rain, smell of flowers on your skin. A grey and rainy day, somehow you brought the sunshine in. And how do I deserve this miracle of you? Funny ‘cause you say, I’m a miracle too.

“Fallin’ in love, it wasn’t in my plans. But here you are, here I am. Fallin’ in love, what a thing to do. Fallin’ in love, fallin’ for you.”

Sam joined in on the chorus, his voice rough and husky beside Dean’s more mellow tenor. They complimented each other nicely, and Cas leaned back against his headboard to listen to the rest of the song.

“My heart was barred, protected from pain. You found the key, now I can feel again. So much joy, I found in you. Baby, don’t you know, you make all my dreams come true.”

They went through the chorus again, and then the melody changed slightly.

“I would fight the world to keep you by my side. ‘Cause whenever I’m with you, you make me feel alive,” Dean sang, dragging out the last note. He and Sam played a small interlude, then the melody went back to normal.

“Someday we’ll be old, but this will still be true. The best times of my life, were the times I spent with you. You’re the miracle that helped to heal my pain. And it all began when you came in from the rain.”

They went through the chorus twice more, and Cas watched through the tears streaming down his face. When the song was over, Dean coughed awkwardly and looked over at Sam, who nodded encouragingly.

“So, anyway - I love you. I can’t wait to see you. I wrote this for you and I hope you liked it. See you soon,” he smiled, sitting the guitar aside.

Jess moved in front of the camera, likely to shut it off, but Dean was still talking.

“Do you think he’ll like it?” he asked Sam.

“He’d be nuts not to. I’ve never seen you like this - I love it, man. I freaking love it.”

“Me too,” Dean said softly. “I’ve never been so happy in my life.”

The camera shut off then, and Cas swiped at his still streaming eyes. He watched it twice more before finally forcing himself to shut off the computer and go to bed.
He got to Sam and Jess’s place at six on Friday and pulled the Impala into the driveway just as Sam stepped out onto the porch, Grady right behind him. Sam’s jaw dropped.

“How?” he spluttered, staring at the car, as Grady got on with the very important business of attempting to lick the skin off Cas’s palm. “I thought he sold it!”

“He did.”

Sam stared at him for a long moment. “I don’t know what Dean and I did to deserve you coming into our lives but -” He pulled Cas into a rough hug, holding him tight. “Cas, dude, you’re supposed to hug back.”

“Oh,” Cas said, reaching up to hug Sam back. “You surprised me. Sorry.”

“No worries.” Letting go, Sam ran a hand down the Impala’s fender. “He’s going to freak.”

“Is that a bad thing?”

“No. No, it’ll be a happy freak.”

“There’s something else I need to ask you, Sam.”

“Shoot, man.”

“I um - Charlie and I - we got it into our heads that maybe we could get the store going again, make it turn a profit. And uh - it’s doing better than we expected. We had to hire someone. Is he going to be angry at me for that?” He gestured to the Impala, “or this?”

“I dunno. He might be, but I doubt it. I think he’ll see it as what you meant it to be.”

“I just want him to be happy.”

Sam smiled. “That’s exactly what I meant. C’mon, grab your crap, let’s go to In’N’Out. I saw your face the last time - I know you want it.”

“I do. I really do.”

Laughing, Sam helped him unload his bag. Once he was settled, Jess and the dogs piled into the back seat and Cas tossed Sam the keys.

“Really?” he asked excitedly.

“Seems fair,” Cas smiled. “Plus I just drove for two days. Your turn.”

“Awesome!” Sam grinned. “Just don’t tell him we had the dogs in here,” he laughed, climbing into the driver’s seat.

Sitting in shotgun, Cas smiled at Sam’s joy, and thought about the next day, when they’d go get Dean.

He couldn’t wait to see him behind the wheel.
**It Might Be You** by Stephen Bishop

*Fallin' In Love* was written by Me. I'm hoping to get with one of my musical friends to get something recorded so you guys can hear how it sounds in my head.

This one is almost done. I've got a few more super fluffy happy bits to write, and then we'll send these two off to happily ever after land. Thanks for being so patient while work ate my life. I love you guys.
Thank You

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

And so today, my world it smiles, your hand in mine, we walk the miles,

Thanks to you it will be done, for you to me are the only one.

Happiness, no more be sad, happiness... I'm glad.

If the sun refused to shine, I would still be loving you.

When mountains crumble to the sea, there will still be you and me.

Sam drove to the facility the next morning, and Cas sat in the back seat chewing his nails. The Impala was back at the house, safely tucked away in the garage. After discussing it over dinner, they’d decided as a group that it might be too much for Dean to walk out of the center and see the car sitting there. They’d take him home, feed him lunch, then break it to him gently.

“So he’s doing great,” Pam smiled across the desk. “He’s not 100%, but he might never be 100% - the point is, he knows how to deal with it now. Dean knows what he needs to do to keep from getting to the point where he feels like suicide is a reasonable option. He’ll need to continue therapy in Sioux Falls. Together, we’ve Skype interviewed several therapists. He feels most comfortable with Dr. Moseley, so we went ahead and set up a few appointments. There’s a few more things to go over, but I’d rather do that with Dean here, so give me a minute and I’ll go get him.”

“This sounds promising,” Cas said to the others as Pamela left the room.

“It really does. I hope this means good things for him. I just want Dean to be happy with himself. He deserves that much,” Sam said.

Pamela ushered a grinning Dean back into the office and hugs were exchanged. Dean dropped his duffel on the floor and took the chair next to Cas, wasting no time in weaving their fingers together.

“So we’re just going over discharge notes, and I told them about Dr. Moseley.”

“Ok. And you have my prescriptions?”

“Yup.” Pam held up a sheaf of paper. “Let’s go over your crisis plan. First of all, Dean needs someone to be his lifeline - someone he can call, any time, day or night, to help him talk through things, to help him.”

“I volunteer,” Cas and Sam said in unison.

Everyone in the room laughed.

“These two, I swear,” Dean chuckled.

“Yeah, well they beat me to it,” Jess shot back.

“As far as I’m concerned, all three of you can fill this role; however, Cas is in the unique position of
being in the same state as Dean. That will be pretty helpful.” She turned to Dean. “Are you comfortable with Cas filling that role?”

Dean squeezed his hand. “More than comfortable. In all honesty? He’s probably the first person I’d call anyway. No offense, Sammy.”

“None taken.”

“Ok. So if we get in crisis mode, what does that look like?”

“Uh - crying, nightmares, feeling like I want to hurt myself, and in general, beating the shit out of myself mentally.”

“Exactly. But the goal is to not get to that point. The goal is to call someone, Cas, and tell him you’re hurting, right?”

“Right.”

“Not that the nightmares will go away completely. Of all your symptoms, that will be the one that likely flares the most. Just remember - the nightmares can’t hurt you. You’ve already lived it; it can’t do anymore damage. Right?”

“Right,” Dean agreed. “I can handle this.”

“I believe you,” Pam smiled, “but now you know what to do when you can’t handle it, right?”

“Yeah.” Dean squeezed Cas’s hand again, and Cas squeezed back.

“Watch the pot use. I don’t have an issue with it, not really, but if you need it just to get a meal down, something’s wrong. So keep an eye on it. A little grass to help you chill now and then is not a big deal. But having it everyday, sometimes more than once a day? That’s indicative of an issue flaring up. So watch it, kid.”

“Gotcha,” Dean said, tossing her a thumbs up.

“Awesome. Ok, let’s get these discharge orders signed and get you out of here. Sound good?”

“Sounds great,” Dean said, a great big smile on his face.

In’N‘Out was definitely becoming a thing for them.

“You know, I haven’t eaten anywhere else except your home while I’ve been in California?” Cas mused. “But these make me very happy,” he smiled.

“Burger heaven,” Dean agreed.

Sam came out of the restaurant with a bag and Jess sighed loudly. “Did you really buy burgers for the dog?”

“What? Grady loves ‘em!”

“That dog is so spoiled. Imagine him with a kid!” Dean laughed.
“Jess choked on her burger, and both she and Sam turned bright red.”

“‘Oh my,’ Cas said softly.”

“‘Wait - are you two -’”

“We were gonna tell you before you left,” Sam muttered. “Best laid plans and all.”

“Holy crap! Really?!” Dean’s face lit up. “You’re gonna make me an uncle!?”

“Yeah,” Sam said sheepishly. “We were going to tell you tonight but oh well. You’re going to be an uncle!”

Dean jumped out of his seat, almost upending his tray in the process. He wrapped Sam and Jess in his arms, and Cas wasn’t at all surprised to see the glitter of tears in his eyes. “I’m so fuckin’ happy for you guys. This is the best news ever!”

“How far along are you?” Cas asked, as he offered his own hugs.

“About three months,” Jess smiled.

“That’s why you’ve been wearing all the baggy shit and not drinking any wine or anything.”

“No, actually, we stopped drinking around you because it’s not fair to drink in front of you in the first place. That’s all. ‘Sides, Jess and I were never that big on alcohol anyway.”

“Man, poor Grady! Competition,” Dean laughed, sitting back down. “God, I love you guys,” he said softly.

“Love you too - Uncle Dean,” Sam grinned, reaching across the table to slap his brother on the back.

Dean headed right for the shower when they go back to Sam and Jess’s, complaining about the facility’s water pressure as he went.

“So, uh - we’re gonna head to the store. Give you guys a bit to get settled. Maybe you can tell him about the -”

“Grady, get out of the bathroom!” Dean yelled.

Chuckling, Sam went to retrieve the dog.

“As he was saying, we’ll give you guys some time.”

Sam walked back down the hall, a slightly wet Grady trotting happily behind him. “I swear, this dog.”

“It’s your fault,” Jess told him, gathering leashes, Bones and Fletch waiting patiently at her feet. “C’mon, let’s go.” She tossed Grady’s leash to Sam, and a few moments later, they were out the door. Cas picked up a magazine and sat and waited for Dean to finish his shower.

“I was hoping you’d join me,” Dean said, about twenty minutes later, damp hair going a dozen different directions. “Might’ve been fun.”
“Oh, I’m sorry.” Cas set the magazine aside. “I didn’t want to intrude and I wasn’t sure.”

“It’s all good. Do we have airfare booked?”

“About that. There’s something we need to talk about.” Cas caught Dean’s expression. “Nothing serious, I promise.”

“Ok. Just let me just throw this towel in the laundry room.”

“Alright.”

The laundry room - in the garage! Cas jumped off the couch and dashed down the hall. Dean stood perfectly still just inside the door, staring at the Impala.

“How?” he whispered, voice choked. “How did she get here? Did Sam buy her back?”

“No. I um - I did.”

Dean turned, his eyes wide and full of tears. “You did? Why?”

“Because I knew what she meant to you.”

“It’s too much, Cas, I-I can’t -”

“If it makes you feel better, pay me back a little at a time. But you don’t have to, I swear. I just - I wanted to do this for you. I um,” he scratched the back of his neck. “I found your pawn tickets and bought that stuff back, too.” A tear streaked down Dean’s face and Cas reached out to wipe it away. “Are you mad?”

“Overwhelmed. But not mad.” Dean leaned into the touch as Cas cupped his cheek. “No one’s ever done anything this nice for me before. I don’t know what I did to deserve you.”

“Dean, I think I need to clarify something to you. As good as my life was before I met you, there was always something lost and missing. I was going through the motions, to be honest. I enjoyed my job and my friends, but I didn’t have the one thing I truly wanted. I just wanted someone to come home to. And now I have it.”

“But it’s too much.”

“No, it’s not. Nothing is too much for you. Does it make you happy to see her here?”

“Fuck yes!”

“That’s all I need.” Stepping closer, he pulled Dean into his arms. “I love you. And making you happy makes me happy.”

“God, Cas - I love you so much. So much.”

They stood there for a bit, holding each other, before Dean pulled back with a smile. “It’s been months. Keys?”

“In my pocket,” Cas smiled, holding them up.

“Awesome! So we’re driving home.”

“Yes. We’re spending two nights in Vegas and a night in Denver.”
“Yeah?” Dean asked, running a hand down his baby’s fender. “She’s not going to like the Rockies at all. But we’ll be ok. Can I drive?”

“Dean - she’s yours.”

“Technically, she’s yours.”

“I have the Continental and don’t need another car. The Impala is yours.”

Dean looked up, his eyes sparkling. “Wow,” he said softly. “I gotta be honest, I never thought I’d get to drive her again. Leaving her on that lot,” he looks down and patted the hood affectionately, “that was one of the hardest things I’ve ever done. It hurt. A lot.”

“I know. But she’s yours now and no one can take her back.”

“I am gonna pay you back though. Once I find a job -”

“Take your time,” Cas said, watching Dean inspect the car and smiling to himself. Dean had a job. A good one.

“Let’s go for a spin,” he smiled. “Always wanted to take her up Mulholland Drive.”

“Let’s do it then.”

The weather was gorgeous and the scenery amazing, as Hollywood and LA spread out beneath them. They pulled over and leaned against the car, drinking root beer.

“Really would love to do this at night sometime,” Dean said. “I hate that Sam’s so far away, but I love coming out here to visit. A lot of people hate LA. I love it.”

“Maybe it’s your inner rockstar. It calls to you,” Cas chuckled.

“Ha, sure, right.”

“You know, while I was home, I read through some of your songwriting journals. You’re incredibly talented. That song you wrote for me could be a number one.”

“You know, I used to think that’s what I wanted. Now - I dunno. I just want - I just want -” Dean turned towards Cas and pinned him against the car. “I want you. The rest of it doesn’t matter. Famous, not famous, mechanic, store owner, whatever. As long as whatever I do going forward has you in it? Man, I’m good. I’m so good.”

Cas smiled and Dean leaned in to kiss him. He rested their foreheads together. Cas fumbled for his phone and took a selfie of them without really looking.

“I’m good, too,” he murmured.

Early the next morning, hugs were exchanged as Sam and Dean tossed the bags in the car.

“And don’t think I can’t smell your dogs in here, bitch. The rules are simple, Sam. You don’t take a
joint from a guy named Don and there’s no dogs in the car!”

“Stuff it, jerk. You love my dogs.”

“What’s the joint story?” Jess asked, confused.

Sam and Dean looked at each other and burst out laughing, but didn’t bother to explain.

“See ya, gorgeous,” Dean smiled, leaning in to kiss her cheek. “Keep this chucklehead in check.”

“Please,” Sam muttered.

“Will do, but what’s the joint story?”

“Ask him!”

Dean slid behind the wheel, smiling over at Cas as he buckled his seatbelt. “Ready?”

“Born ready,” Cas smiled back.

Dean backed out the driveway, honking and waving the whole way. They stopped for coffee, and once out of city limits and out of traffic, Cas slid the road mix tape into the deck.

*Life is a Highway* blasted out of the speakers.

“Hell, yeah!” Dean enthused, beating on the steering wheel and singing along. Sunlight streamed in through the windshield, reflecting off his sunglasses and lighting up streaks of gold in his hair. His smile was the most genuine smile imaginable, and Cas leaned back in the seat, content to watch him sing and drive, just happy to be together.

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“Why is it all we eat are burgers?” Dean asked, happily digging into his all the same.

“Because we love them?”

“Mmmph - good reason.” Onions and sauce dripped out of the bun as Dean bit into it.

Bobby Flay’s Burger Palace had seemed a good bet, and now they were both chowing down on burgers as big as their faces. Dean had the Philly burger, with all the toppings of a Philly cheesesteak, and Cas had ordered the Brunch burger, with a fried egg on top.

They’d already checked into their room, which Dean had declared *posh as fuck*, with the big tub they both looked forward to using. After dinner, they planned to take a walk along the strip. They both agreed not to gamble on this trip. Dean was afraid he wouldn’t know when to stop, so they decided to avoid the slots and tables. Instead, they booked a couples’ massage, planned to visit a few of the quirky museums in town, and maybe drive out to the Hoover Dam.

But right now, Cas was happy to watch Dean fight to keep his burger together, a losing effort to be sure, as chunks of onions and hot peppers slipped out of the bun.

“Stop laughing at me,” Dean chuckled. “Should’ve used a knife and fork.”

“Who eats a burger with a knife and fork?”
“Uh, the guy with egg yolk dripping down his fingers probably should have.”

Cas looked down at his hand and laughed. “Maybe you’re right!”

After dinner and some serious hand washing, they walked down The Strip, admiring the lights on the covered walkway and the glowing vintage casino signs.

“You know - I’ve been to Vegas before,” Dean said, holding tight to Cas’s hand. “But uh - I barely remember the trip.”

“Oh,” Cas said softly.

“Yeah. I was drunk pretty much the whole time, and Alastair didn’t bring any - any heroin,” he said quietly. “I got sick from withdrawal and he pretty much locked me in our room. It was awful. I don’t…”

Cas looked over at Dean, dismayed at the look of shame so obvious on his handsome face. He pulled Dean close and kissed him, trying to convey as much feeling as he could. The shame was gone when they pulled apart, replaced by a light blush.

“That was then,” Cas said softly, “this is now. You’re here with me, we’re starting our new life together. You’re sober and healthy.” He rested their foreheads together. “You’ve come so far.”

They stood there like that for awhile, close, breathing each other’s air, as people moved around them, laughing and chatting.

“We should go back to the room,” Dean said, voice husky. “I want to - I just want to be alone with you.”

“Agreed. Come on,” Cas smiled, “let’s go.”

The air between them was charged. The elevator was full of people, so they just held hands, but the look Dean was giving him was enough to set Cas on fire. His green eyes had darkened, pupils dilated. The second their room door closed behind them, Dean had Cas shoved against the door, crashing their lips together. His hands were a vise on Cas’s hips and he was sure they’d bruise. He hoped they’d bruise.

Stripping clothes from each other’s bodies with their lips locked together, Cas and Dean stumbled across the room, crashing into the bed half dressed. Cas landed on his back and Dean draped his body over him, leaning down for a kiss. He pulled back and stared down at Cas, eyes twinkling.

“Are you ok?”

“Better than ok.”

They kissed languidly, the passion cooling a bit. Dean helped Cas out of his pants and Cas returned the favor until they lay side by side in their boxers. Dean rolled over, laying his head on Cas’s chest.

“Do you remember before I left? When you offered to - uh -”

“Bottom?” Cas asked with a grin. “You don’t have to be embarrassed to ask for that. I still want to.”

“You do?”
“Yes. And I brought supplies this time.”

“Oh.”

“Whatever you want. No pressure.” He ran a hand through Dean’s hair. “Ok?”

“I want to,” Dean said softly. “But I’m - I’m nervous.”

“Don’t be nervous. It’s just me.”

“I’ve never done this before.”

“Well, neither have I. So we’ll figure it out together, ok? We’ll take our time and enjoy ourselves.”

“Ok. You’ll tell me if it hurts right?”

“Dean - do you trust me?”

“Yeah, Cas. I do.”

“Then trust me with this. I want it. I want you.”

Nodding, Dean pulled himself out of the bed, crossing the room to Cas’s suitcase. He found the bottle of lube easily. He sat down on the edge of the bed, a little hunched in on himself.

“It’s ok,” Cas said softly, sitting up and placing a kiss on Dean’s shoulder. “We can go slow. Take our time.”

“I’m -” Dean scoffed. “I’m being a child.”

Cas rubbed a hand down Dean’s back. “If you don’t want to -”

“I do. I’m nervous.”

As if Cas couldn’t see the tension in the set of his shoulders. “Take off your boxers and lay down on your stomach.” Cas got out of the bed while Dean complied, returning a second later with a bottle of lotion. He spent the next twenty minutes massaging Dean into a pliant puddle on the bed, working every last knot and worry out of his shoulders and back.

“Better?”

“Mm-hmm,” Dean said drowsily.

“We can go to sleep if you want.”

“No. I’m better now. I am.” Dean sat up and helped Cas to lay on his back. “I want to do this.” He reached for the lube. “Just tell me if something isn’t working.”

“I will, I promise.”

He slipped Cas’s boxers off and then Dean prepped him maddeningly slow, working up to three fingers at such a glacial pace, Cas felt like he would lose his mind. It felt so incredible, all Cas could really do was whimper and beg.

“Please, Dean. Please. I’m ready.”

“I don’t want to hurt you.”
“You won’t. I’m good, I swear. I swear.”

Still moving his fingers inside, Dean ran his other hand through Cas’s hair. “If I hurt you, I’d never forgive myself. Are you sure you’re ok? My first time hurt so bad, for days afterward, and if I did that to you -” Dean shuddered.

“Dean, listen to me. I’m not Alastair. You’re not Alastair. This is you and me, two men who love each other deeply. We’re in a relationship based on love and trust - no one is manipulating the other, this is an even relationship. I want this. I want you. And I’m ready. Please, Dean.”

Nodding, but still visibly nervous, Dean pulled his hand away and wiped it on the sheet. “You tell me - if anything hurts or is uncomfortable, you tell me right away. Ok?”

“Ok. Come here,” Cas hooked a hand behind Dean’s neck and pulled him in for a kiss. “Relax. It’s ok, I promise.” As Dean settled between his legs, Cas lifted them and wrapped his ankles around Dean’s waist. “Remember, all of our firsts belong to each other.”

“Ok,” Dean whispered. He reached down between them and second later, Cas felt something much larger than Dean’s fingers pushing against his hole. “You tell me -”

“I will.”

Nodding, Dean pushed inside slowly, not stopping until his hips rested flush against Castiel. A slight burn was all Cas really felt; Dean had spent nearly half an hour preparing him for this. He was loose and ready, but his fear now was that he’d come the second Dean moved.

“Are you ok?”

“Yes. I’m trying not to come,” Cas whined. “You feel so good.”

“Fuck, Cas,” Dean buried his face in Cas’s neck. “This is gonna be over for both of us the second I move. Like teenage virgins or something.”

Cas chuckled and kissed Dean’s temple. “We can always do it again.”

Dean laughed too, raising his head to kiss Cas. “Maybe if we just stay like this a while, it’ll last longer.”

“I’m not sure that would work. By the way, it feels weird when you laugh.”

“It does?”

“Yes. I can feel it. I think I like it.” He smiled goofily at Dean, and Dean laughed again. “You know, I always heard that couples who can laugh during sex are more likely to make it long term.”

“Yeah?”

“Yes.”

“We’re long term, aren’t we Cas?”

Smiling, Cas cupped Dean’s cheek. “I’m hoping for forever.”

“Oh, god -” Dean pulled back and slid back in and they both groaned. “Fuck, Cas -”

“Do it, Dean. Fuck me.”
It lasted about as long as they thought it would, which meant not long at all. Dean managed three broken thrusts before he cried out and helplessly came inside of Cas, and that first splash of heat had Cas coming as well. Dean collapsed into Cas’s chest, still buried inside.

They didn’t speak as breathing slowed and heart rates calmed. After a while, Cas felt warm wetness drip down his neck.

“Dean? Are you crying.”

“Yeah,” he whispered.

“Why? Are you ok?”

“I’m just - I’m overwhelmed. What I feel for you, fuck, Cas. I’ve never -”

“Me neither.”

“I love you so much. So much.”

“I love you, too. You’re everything I ever wanted and thought I would never have.”

They held each other close, not bothering to get cleaned up or even move. Warm, comfortable, and content, they both drifted off.

After three fun days on the road, laughing and chatting and getting to know each other even more, Cas was very happy to pull into his own neighborhood. Dean was asleep in the passenger seat when Cas pulled into the driveway, Thank You playing softly in the background. The trip had been long, but Dean had insisted on driving most of it. He’d finally given up about two hours away from Sioux Falls, when he couldn’t stop yawning.

He watched Dean sleep for a bit, smiling at the way he leaned against the Impala’s door, mouth slightly open. “Dean, we’re home,” Cas nudged him gently.

Dean sat up and blinked, looking around. He stretched lazily. “Well, you’re home. I’ll help you get your stuff in and then I guess I should head to my place.”

Cas squeezed his hand. “Stay with me tonight. It’s late and we’re both tired. We can go to your place in the morning.”

“Are you sure?”

“Are you sure you want to go home to an empty house when you could stay here and sleep all warm and naked in my bed?” He grinned.

“Well, when you put it that way…” Dean slid across the seat and pulled Cas in for a kiss. They were both clearly turned on when they pulled apart. “So, uh - does Baby fit in that garage?”

“Yes, she does. She does indeed.”

It was quite a while before they actually managed to get in the house.
“I’m coming with you.”

Dean looked up from where he was shoving his clothes back into his duffel. “Why?”

“I want to. I’m not ready to let you out of my sight yet.”

Smiling, Dean stepped close and wrapped his arms around Cas’s waist. “We just spent like four days together.”

“Let’s make it five.”

“Hmm, six.”

“Seven.”

“A week.”

Cas giggled. “A month.”

“A year,” Dean grinned back.

“Forever.”

Dean’s lower lip trembled. “Ok,” Dean whispered, leaning in for a kiss. He rested their foreheads together. “I really do need to get back, though. I’ve got to start packing that place up because Sam’s not going to pay the mortgage forever. And I gotta find a job.”

“I know,” Cas said. “C’mon. Let’s go over there and see what we can do. Just leave your stuff, because I want you back in my bed tonight.”

At least that way, Cas would be guaranteed at least one last visit with Dean; just in case got angry about the store and didn’t want to see Cas anymore. Cas hoped and prayed that Sam was right, and Dean would see what he and Charlie had done as the gesture of love it was always meant to be.

“Ok, I’ll leave the stuff. But let’s go. I’m sure there’s a lot to do -”

“Maybe not as much as you think.”

“Pfft.” Dean followed Cas down the stairs and out to the car. “I dunno. The thought of packing all that up is just - ugh.”

“I’ll help.”

“Ok.”

The drive was mostly silent. Cas sat on his hands to keep from biting his nails. He couldn’t even begin to imagine how Dean was going to react. It was early enough that the store wouldn’t be open yet, and Cas knew Charlie was waiting for them as planned - still, his nervousness was a beast all it’s own.

Dean pulled the Impala to a stop outside the store. “You got the key, right?”

“Won’t need it,” Cas said quietly, waving to Charlie as the pulled up.

“Why is Charlie here? Has she been helping you watch over the place?”
“Something like that.” Cas scrambled out of the car.

“Did you tell him?” Charlie asked in a whisper as she hugged him.

“No.”

“You ok?”

“Nervous.”

Dean walked around the car and hugged Charlie as well. “Good to see you, your majesty.”

“And you, handmaiden.”

“Knight,” Dean corrected.

“You would’ve made one hell of a handmaiden, though,” Charlie grinned.

Dean looked over at Cas. “Cas, you alright?”

“Um - Dean. Before we go in, just - I mean.”

Charlie rested her hand on Dean’s arm. “We did this because we love you. Ok? Please just keep that in mind.”

Frowning, Dean pushed past them and into the store. Cas and Charlie followed quickly, almost bumping into Dean’s back as he stood stone still in the center of the aisle.

The store was spotless. Titles in bins were organized by genre and then alphabetically by artist. On the back wall, the new merchandise display had been set up. Tees hung neatly on hangers, and small display of stickers were lined up next to them.

“I don’t - what’s going on?”

“Ok, so like I said, please don’t get mad. We know you wanted the store to be a success, so I suggested to Cas ways that we could make it a success. We inventoried all the albums and opened an online store and it did really well, so we went ahead and cleaned up and reopened and you have an employee and it’s making a profit now and we brought in some band merch and you have a lot of regular customers so please don’t be mad and oh my god, say something, Dean!” Charlie burst out in a rush of words.

Tears glittered in Dean’s eyes. “You did all this for - for me?” he asked, in a very small voice.

“We wanted to,” Cas said softly.

“But why?”

“Because you love this place. And you deserved to have something go right for once.”

“But what if I can’t - what if I can’t keep it going?”

“Dean,” Charlie smiled, “Cas and I? We can run a business on the brain side of things. We can crunch the numbers and order the inventory. But everyday, people come in asking music questions, or they ask for suggestions, and then we’re only as good as our google-fu. But you? You know this stuff. You have all of it, up here,” she touched his forehead, “but more importantly,” she touched his chest, over his heart, “you have it here, too. You’re the heart. You have regulars now, who’re dying
“Your profits the last two weeks have been incredible. But people come in and ask for recommendations, and Charlie and I only have so much knowledge. We can help you with the business side, but it still needs your personal touch. In My Time of Vinyl needs you. This is just a step up. All the really hard work is still going to be on your shoulders.” Cas took Dean’s hand and squeezed it. “Not that we won’t be here every step of the way.”

Dean still didn’t say anything, but he didn’t pull away from Cas either. His eyes swept through the store, pausing to take in new things.

“Sam can’t complain about the lack of organization anymore,” he said finally, his voice choked.

Cas and Charlie both laughed.

“You’re not mad?” Charlie asked softly.

Dean pulled away from Cas and walked down the first aisle, fingers dragging along the albums stacked neatly in the bins. He stopped in front of one and pulled out a copy of Jethro Tull’s *Aqualung*. “Remember this?” he smiled, showing it to Cas.

“Yes. First one you sold me.”

Dean nodded, a few tears sliding down his cheeks. “It changed everything, didn’t it?”

“For the better?” Cas asked.

“For the better. Thank you. Both of you. I couldn’t -” he sniffled noisily, “I could have never done this on my own.” He set the album back down and held out his arms, and Cas and Charlie surged forward, half tackling him into a group hug. “I love you guys so much,” he whispered.

“We love you, too,” Charlie said, her voice choked.

They stood there for a moment, clinging to each other.

“Uh, are you guys open yet?” A teen stood half in the doorway, a dubious expression on his face.

“Yup!” Dean said, rubbing his eyes. He looked at the kid’s shirt. “Nice Zep shirt, man.”

“Thanks. Zep is my fave!”

“Mine, too.”

“Come on in, have a look around,” Cas grinned, holding the door open.

“Yup,” Dean added with a huge smile, catching Cas’s eyes, “In My Time of Vinyl is open for business!”

Chapter End Notes
Thank You by Led Zeppelin

Almost done!
Fallin' In Love

Someday we’ll be old, but this will still be true.
The best times of my life, were the times I spent with you.
You're the miracle that helped to heal my pain.
And it all began when you came in from the rain.

One week later

“Blue or purple?” Dean held up two little pots of hair dye. Digging through a drawer he found another little tub. “Or the green I had when we met. Not doing the black tips again. That was a pain in the ass.”

“I find I’m partial to the blue,” Cas smiled.

Dean stood in the bathroom of his small apartment, his damp hair bleached white and ready for color. He’d put all his piercings back in before they left Sam’s, and was finally starting to look like himself again, except for the ribs Cas could still count.

He wasn’t that worried; he’d fatten Dean up and get that cute little tummy back in no time.

“Of course you are. Blue it is, then.” Un螺丝ing the lid, Dean hummed as he started brushing the color into his hair. “You know, I wasn’t going to do this again,” he told Cas as he worked. “I started thinking that maybe the hair color was just a distraction, like I was trying to hide from my problems.” He turned to grin at Cas. “But I realized I just really like looking in the mirror when my hair is crazy colors.”

Cas chuckled and stepped into the bathroom to kiss the roses on his bare shoulder. “You’re adorable.”

“I’m not adorable!”

“Yes, you are,” Cas smiled against Dean’s back, peppering tattooed skin with kisses. “Like an angry spitting kitten, trying to be fierce and ferocious but too cute to pull it off. Adorable.”

“Go away or I’ll dye your hair, too!”

________________________

December 2015

“There’s so much stuff, I’m running out of room to store it. I mean, I guess it makes sense to stock up since Christmas is coming and all -” Dean dropped a box of DVDs on the floor, “but I'm running out of room to live!” He gestured to all the boxes stacked up around him.

Cas dropped a box of tees on top of a stack of other boxes. “Well, clearly you need this space as a storeroom slash lunchroom for your three employees.”
“I already let them use it and hello?” Dean waved his arms expansively at the towers of boxes. “It's already a store room!”

“Only one thing to do then.”

“What's that?”

Stepping closer, Cas wrapped his arms around Dean. “Move in with me, idiot.”

Dean smiled. “How many times have you asked me that now?”

“Lost count,” Cas whined, burying his face in Dean's neck. “You keep telling me you're not ready.”

“Maybe I'm just scared a little.” Dean kissed Cas's temple. “Maybe a lot,” he amended.

“Why?”

“Old habits die hard?” Dean pulled out of Cas's arms and went to pick up another box. “Things have been so good and I’m stupid and still live with the fear of the other shoe dropping.”

“I’m not going anywhere.”

“My brain keeps telling me that, but my heart,” Dean caught Cas’s eyes, “my heart’s still afraid to make the jump.”

“You’re over my place four to five nights of the week now. You’ve got two drawers in my dresser and clothes in my closet, and bath products in my bathroom, not to mention the drawer of hair dye in a rainbow of colors. We picked out new sheets together for my bed because you said mine were too scratchy. We picked out the new towels together. You helped me buy the new couch, remember? It was your idea to get one big enough for us to lay side by side. Half your own albums and two of your guitars are at my house, not to mention all the tools in the garage that definitely don’t belong to me. You picked out the tree, you decorated it, you put the lights up outside.” Cas took the box from Dean’s arms and set aside. He cupped Dean’s cheek. “Silly,” he said gently, “don’t you see? You’re already living with me.”

“Huh.”

“If you really don’t want to, that’s fine, but this,” Cas nodded towards the boxes, “clearly isn’t working anymore.”

“What if you get tired of me?” Dean asked quietly.

“That won’t happen. I promise. Look, we could do it on a trial basis, ok? Spend the night every night for two weeks. If you’re still not comfortable after that, we can reevaluate.”

“OK,” Dean smiled and ran a hand through his festively green hair. “We can try that.”

_____________________________

*February 2016*

Dean’s stuff moved into Cas’s gradually, but in time, they’d moved all of his personal stuff out of the upstairs of In My Time of Vinyl. There was a table up there now for the employees, but most of the space was shelves for the merchandise.
Home was Cas’s house - or as Cas had begun to think of it, their house. So he wasn’t at all surprised to come home from work on Valentine’s Day and find Dean’s car already in the garage. The Impala got the premium parking 90% of the time, although Dean had suggested expanding the garage.

“Something smells good,” he called, stomping snow off his boots in the entryway. Dean didn’t answer. “Dean?”

“Upstairs.”

“Be right up,” he told him, unwinding his scarf and pulling off his trenchcoat. The snow was piling up outside, and the bank had already closed for the following day as well. He’d stopped and picked up the roses he’d ordered for Dean, and prayed his Continental would make it home in one piece.

Parking his boots in the hall closet and hanging up the trench and scarf, Cas walked up the stairs, past the good smell coming from the kitchen, with the roses hidden behind his back. “What smells so incred-” His jaw dropped as he pushed open the door.

Their room was aglow with candlelight in the dimness of a snowy winter evening. Rose petals were sprinkled across the bed, and a bottle of sparkling cider sat in a wine chiller beside two crystal flutes.

“Hi,” Dean smiled, reaching around Cas to shut the door. “Been waiting for you.”

Cas handed him the roses and Dean pulled him in for a kiss. “Your hair is pink,” he smiled, reaching up to run his fingers through Dean’s hair. “I like it. Makes your eyes look greener.” He fingered the red satin robe Dean was wearing. “And I really like this. You look so sexy.”

“It’s Valentine’s Day. Pink and red seemed like a good idea.” He inhaled the roses’ scent. “These are really pretty,” he smiled. “I love the orange and yellow ones.”

“I know. We should put them in a vase.”

“They’ll be ok for now,” Dean slid Cas’s suit jacket off his shoulders. “There’s a hot bath waiting for us, and buddy, do I have plans for you.”

“I like the sound of that. What smelled so good downstairs?”

“Dinner in the crock pot. I made beef bourguignon.”

“Ooh, that sounds perfect on a night like tonight.”

While they talked, Dean contently undressed Cas, carefully laying all the parts to his suit on the dresser. When Cas was fully undressed, Dean undid the robe’s belt and let the satin slide down his body. He pulled Cas in for another kiss, pressing their naked skin together.

Dean took his hands and led him into the candle lit bathroom. The room was pleasantly steamy and smelled like the rose petals floating in the water.

“Look at this. What a lovely surprise.”

“It’s Valentine’s Day. Had to do something really special.” He kissed the tip of Cas’s nose. “It’s another first for us,” he smiled. “Our first Valentine’s.”

“Very exciting,” Cas smiled, kissing Dean. They settled into the water, Cas’s back to Dean’s chest. “This is wonderful. I’m so glad to be home.”

“Rough day?”
“Slow day. People didn’t come out because of the snow.”

“Well, maybe you’ll get a day or two off,” Dean said, kissing the small bee tattoo Cas had gotten about a week prior. It sat just below his shoulder line at the base of his neck, and Cas loved it. He wanted more tattoos.

“Remember when you had that dream about me being an angel?”

“Mm-hmm,” Dean hummed, kissing behind Cas’s ear while his hands wandered. “I have that dream a lot. Sometimes you’re angry and scary, but in the best way, believe me. It’s hot. Other times, you’re protecting me, holding me and smiting all the bad things coming at me. Love that dream.”

“I was thinking - I’d like to get a set of wings tattooed on my back.”

Dean’s movements stopped. “Yeah?”

“Yes. What do you think about it? Good idea?”

“Great idea. Fuck that would be so hot.”

“It’s settled then. But not until summer.”

“Alright.”

Dean’s fingers were wandering again, trailing across Cas’s hips. “Are you trying to seduce me?”

“Do I even have to try?” Dean lightly ran his hand up Cas’s dick. “Looks like you’re already there,” he breathed in Cas’s ear. He rutted against Cas’s back, evidence of his own arousal more than obvious. “Let’s get out. I wanna fuck you. Can I?”

Cas groaned, letting his head loll back onto Dean’s shoulder. “Yes. Please, I want that.”

Reaching over him, Dean opened the drain and stood, reaching for towels.

“We didn’t even wash,” Cas protested.

“No worries,” Dean flashed a grin at Cas. “Probably need a shower when I’m done with you.” He helped Cas up and wrapped him in a towel, and they fumbled their way back out to the bedroom, joined at the lips. Dean kissed like a drowning man, tongue sweeping along the inside of Cas’s mouth as he tumbled them both into the bed. Dean slid down Cas’s body and sucked him down to the root.

“Jesus -” Cas wheezed.

‘Throw me the lube. It’s under the pillow.’ Dean sucked Cas back into his throat.

‘Oh god, you’re distracting me,” Cas moaned, digging for the lube all the same. His fingers wrapped around the bottle and he tossed it in Dean’s general direction. “Don’t make me come, dammit,” he ordered.

“Why?” Dean asked, pulling off with a pop.

“Because when you’re done fucking me, I’m fucking you. Two for one,” he giggled.

“I am so on board with that,” Dean enthused. He lubed up his fingers and tossed the bottle up towards Cas. Dean flipped around so his ass was within Cas’s reach. “Save time?” he grinned.
“Absolutely.” Cas fumbled the lube and managed to spill a bunch of it down Dean’s asscheek. Dean yelped at the chill and almost kicked Cas in the face, and they spent the next five minutes trying to come down from a giggle fit.

“The couple that laughs together,” Dean smiled. He’d ended up face to face with Cas after a playful, giggly pillow fight.

Smiling up at Dean, Cas pulled him down into a kiss. “I love laughing with you,” Cas told him.

“Me too,” Dean whispered, his green eyes so full of love it took Cas’s breath away.

Passion flared again, and they prepped each other side by side, kissing and touching as they eased the other open.

Dean slid on top first, pushing in gently until his hips rested against Cas’s. They moved slowly together, hands everywhere. Candlelight reflected the beads of sweat on Dean’s brow.

“You are so beautiful,” he murmured, kissing Cas. “How did I get this lucky?” His hips stuttered, and Cas swept his hands up his back.

“Come for me. Come for me, gorgeous,” Cas growled.

Dean sobbed out Cas’s name as he slammed his hips into him twice more. He stillled and rested his forehead against Cas’s, breathing like he’d run a marathon. “Fuck,” he breathed.

“Mmm,” Cas ran a hand through Dean’s sweaty hair. He let Dean rest for a moment before flipping him onto his back. Dean’s come dripped between his thighs as he pulled Dean’s legs up to wrap around his waist.

“Yeah, Cas, do it, do it.” Dean put his arms around Cas’s neck and tightened the grip on his waist. “Fuck me, c’mon.”

Cas pulled out and slammed back in, loving the way Dean’s back arched helplessly off the bed. Dean dragged his nails up Cas’s back, spurring him on. “Fuck, Dean, I’m coming, I’m coming!”

Yanking him down for a rough kiss, Dean clenched around him. Sparks exploded in Cas’s eyes as he came, Dean tight and warm around him.

In the afterglow, Cas didn’t pull out as he lay across Dean’s chest. Come still dripped from inside of him, and he could feel his own sliding out of Dean around his softening dick. Dean brushed a strand of hair from his forehead.

“Shoulda waited on the bath, huh?”

Cas chuckled. “I think we need a shower.” His stomach growled embarrassingly loud and they both cracked up. “And dinner, apparently.”

“Just a few more minutes. I just - I love when it’s like this. Just you and me and the quiet.”

Looking over at the window, Cas smiled. “Look at that,” he said, watching the snow swirl outside the window. “We just might get snowed in.”

“There’s plenty of wood for the fireplace and lots of food. I was prepared. I hope we get snowed in.”

“Me too,” Cas smiled, kissing his nose.
A short time later, they were showered and dressed in comfy sweats and hoodies. Dean finished dinner while Cas started a fire and found every blanket they owned, making a soft, warm nest on their ridiculously large couch.

“Here,” Dean smiled, handing Cas a steaming bowl of beef bourguignon with noodles.

“This looks wonderful.”

They ate curled up together on the couch, admiring the pretty roses Cas had brought Dean. Music played softly in the background. After, they just laid there together, gently touching and kissing, wrapped in several blankets.

“If I asked you to marry me,” Cas said drowsily, “would you say yes?”

Dean’s hand on his back stilled. “Uh - I uh -”

“Nevermind. It’s alright.”

“Yes.”

“What?” Cas asked, propping up on one arm to look at Dean. “Did you -”

“I’ll marry you. I want to.”

“Oh,” Cas said. “Oh.” He hopped out of their nest, ignoring Dean’s protests. At the hall closet, he pulled a small box from his trenchcoat pocket. “I didn’t mean to ask you that way,” he said, coming back to the couch and crawling back into the blankets. “I wanted to ask you the right way but -”

“No, Cas. This is more us. We don’t need it to be a big production, a big deal. You asked me just fine.” Dean leaned in for a kiss. “I love you so much. I can’t wait to be your husband.”

Cas felt the burn of happy tears in his eyes. “Oh, Dean,” he whispered. “I bought you something,” he held out the box. “I want everyone to know, so I uh -” he chuckled. “If you like it then you better put a ring on it.”

Dean burst out laughing. “Dude, you’re not allowed to take music recommendations from Charlie anymore!”

“I found Beyonce all on my own!” Cas protested.

“Ok, ok,” Dean grinned. “Sorry.”

“Anyway,” Cas flipped open the box. “Give me your hand.” Dean complied, a sweet smile on his face. Cas pulled the emerald and gold band from the box.

“Did you really buy me a ring to match my eyes?” Dean teased gently.

“Shut up.” Cas smiled at Dean. “Dean Michael Winchester, will you marry me?”

“Don’t you know it,” Dean grinned, the sappiest, happiest expression on his face.

Cas slid the ring onto his finger and pulled him in for a kiss. “I’m going to make you so happy,” he told Dean, resting their foreheads together.

As it turned out, the snow turned into a blizzard, and they were trapped inside for days - most of which they spent naked.

It was a perfect Valentine’s Day.

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**September 2016**

Castiel fastened his leather belt and looked in the mirror. His solid white friar’s costume was perfect and fit him like it had made for him - which it had.

“Lookin’ good, baby bro.”

“What are you supposed to be?” he glared at Gabriel.

“What?” Gabe spun in his green, black, and gold costume. “I’m a Norse god!”

“You’re Loki from the Avengers! This a LARP, not a comicon!”

“Yeah, well your Queen said I looked fantastic. By the by, is the fair redhead single?”

“No. And she’s a lesbian.”

“Bummer. Does Dean have a brother, then?”

“Yes. A married-with-a-child brother.”

“Double bummer.”

“Cas? Almost time to start.” Aaron popped his head in the tent.

“Well, hello there,” Gabe grinned, “who are you?”

“Uh, Aaron,” he said, blushing furiously. “I’m the Mage.”

“I’m Loki,” Gabe said.

“Yeah, that’s an amazing costume.”

“See, Cassie? Told ya.” Gabe slapped him on the back. “See ya in a bit. Gonna get Aaron to show me around while we’re waiting. That cool with you?” he asked Aaron.

“Yes, it is,” Aaron grinned.

“Oh brother,” Cas muttered as they left. He finished getting ready, pacing the inside of the tent while he waited.

“Cas?” Jo popped into the tent, beautiful in a long mint green gown. “It’s time.”

“Ok. Ok, I can do this.”

“Silly,” Jo smiled. “All the hard stuff is already done. This is the good part.” She kissed his cheek. “I’m so happy for you.” Jo looped her arm through his. “Let’s go.”

“Ok.”
Cas let Jo lead him from the tent. Across from them, Gilda led Dean from another tent.

Dean looked beautiful. He wore dark brown pants and crisp white shirt. A brown suede tunic draped over his shoulders along with a cowl of chainmail. A leather belt around his waist held his wooden dummy sword. And those boots -

“Stop staring, come on.” Jo pulled him across the lane.

“Hi,” Dean smiled, taking his hand.

“Hello, Dean.”

Gilda and Jo headed to the front where a platform had been erected. Charlie sat on her throne, resplendent in a burgundy gown and golden crown. She stood as Jo and Gilda approached. Sam and Gabe stepped up from either side. Sam wore a knight’s costume very similar to his brother’s.

“Fair citizens of Moondoor,” Garth Fitzgerald, Moondoor’s crier, addressed the crowd gathered on wooden benches on either side of the aisle. “We are here today to bear witness to the eternal joining of two of Moondoor’s citizens. Step forward, Friar Castiel and Sir Dean.”

Grinning at Cas, Dean took his hand and led him down the aisle. Cas couldn’t stop smiling. All of his friends were in the audience, and his beloved big brother was there as best man. He threw a special smile to Jess, beautiful in pale pink, tiny Emma nestled in her arms. All three dogs were in attendance, with fancy chainmail collars. Grady was very happy, sitting at Sam’s feet and panting in the warmth of the September day.

Dean and Cas reached the platform and Charlie smiled at them. “Sir Dean. Friar Castiel. I’m honored to join two of Moondoor’s most beloved citizens in matrimony. Queen of the Fae, do I have your blessing to join these two souls?”

Gilda stepped forward, her pure white gown brushing the ground. She place woven crowns of ivy, baby’s breath, and roses on Dean and Cas’s heads. “The Fae is honored to bless this union.” She kissed both of their foreheads.

“Captain of the Guard, do you approve of this union?”

Jo stepped forward, unable to hide the grin on her face. She took a leather thong and gently bound Dean and Cas’s joined left hands. “The Guard approves, your majesty.”

“Does the family of these two souls approve of this union?”

Gabe stepped forward, surprisingly serious for once. He handed Charlie Dean’s ring. “I do, your majesty.” He squeezed Cas’s shoulder and stepped back.

“As do we,” Sam smiled, handing Charlie Cas’s ring.

“Very well.” Charlie smiled down at them, clearly fighting to stay in character as her eyes welled. “Sir Dean of Kashmir, do you take Friar Castiel of Lincoln to be your lawful husband, to have and to hold, in sickness and in health, in LARP and reality, on Earth and in Moondoor, as long as you both shall live?”

“I do,” Dean whispered, eyes full.

“Friar Castiel of Lincoln, do you take Sir Dean of Kashmir to be your lawful husband, to have and to hold, in sickness and in health, in LARP and reality, on Earth and in Moondoor, as long as you both
shall live?”

“I do, forever and ever,” Cas breathed, lifting Dean’s hand to kiss his knuckles.

Charlie handed them each a ring. “Friar Castiel, place your ring on Dean’s left hand and repeat after me. I, Friar Castiel, give this ring as a symbol of my commitment and love, and as a promise to share the rest of my days with you.”

Castiel repeated the pledge and then Dean did the same.

Charlie took a deep breath, tears now streaming freely down her cheeks. “I love you guys,” she whispered. In a louder voice, “It’s my pleasure and honor as Queen of Moondoor, and by the power of Moondoor and the Kingdom of South Dakota, to present to you Dean and Castiel. Forever may their love reign.”

“Forever may their love reign!” the crowd repeated back.

Cas looked at Dean, smiling at the soft pink blush on Dean’s cheeks.

“My dear, wonderful friends. Please seal your bond with a kiss.”

Grinning, Dean pulled him in and the world seemed to melt away as they shared their first, sweet married kiss.

The cheering crowd pulled them back to reality, and Dean threw his head back and laughed. They were descended upon by the crowd, pulled into tight hugs. Congratulations abounded, and through it all, Cas never lost Dean’s hand.

He never lost his husband’s hand.
Epilogue - Ain't No Mountain High Enough

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Ain't no mountain high enough,
Ain't no valley low enough,
Ain't no river wide enough
To keep me from getting to you babe

Someday in the future

“And the Grammy for album of the year goes to -”

Cas held his breath.

“Robert Plant and Jimmy Page -”

“Dean, they won!” Cas said excitedly over the chatter on screen as the aging rockers made their way to the stage. Dean didn’t answer.

Looking over, Cas smiled. Dean was sound asleep on his back on the couch, one month old Anna Rayne asleep on his chest, her tiny fist curled up near her mouth. Fumbling for his phone, Cas snapped a picture of the two loves of his life, knowing he would print it out later and hang it up at work, along with the one he took of Dean sleeping in his arms in California, the one of them kissing on Mulholland Drive, the one of Cas kissing Dean’s hand at their wedding, Gilda’s first sonogram when she was pregnant with Anna, pictures of Sam, Jess, and Emma, pictures of Gabe and Aaron, Charlie and Gilda, Jo and Benny - Cas loved his pictures. To him, they were as beautiful as the garden blooming on Dean’s back.

Carefully lifting Anna off of Dean’s chest, he carried her up to her bedroom, tucking her into her crib. He stood there for a while, watching her sleep. Warm arms wrapped around his waist as Dean kissed his neck.

“Let’s sleep while we can,” Dean whispered.

Smiling, Cas let Dean lead him to bed.

Pulling up at In My Time of Vinyl, Cas followed the sound of music into the building. Dean was dancing around in the center of the aisle, Anna strapped to his chest in her sling. She stared up at her Daddy with wide, denim blue eyes.

Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell wailed from the turntable on the counter, and Dean sang to Anna as he danced her around the store.

If his life was a movie, Cas thought, Ain’t No Mountain High Enough would be the end credits.
Dean looked up and grinned, singing the lyrics to Cas as he danced closer. He reached out for Cas’s hands and pulled him into a kiss.

“Remember the day I set you free, I told you you could always count on me darling,” Dean sang.

“From that day on, I made a vow, I'll be there when you want me, Some way, somehow,” Cas sang back.

Dean grinned wider as they sang the chorus to each other.

“Oh baby there ain't no mountain high enough. Ain't no valley low enough. Ain't no river wide enough. To keep me from getting to you babe.”

In the movie, the camera would pan out of the store as Dean and Cas continued singing, dancing together with their hands joined and their daughter tucked between them. It would sweep out onto the street as the song swelled, panning up to show the store from above and pulling out slowly into the sky, where some special effects genius would turn the sunset into a black, starlit sky in time for the credits to roll.

But, Cas thought, his life wasn’t a movie. And he was damn glad, because as he rested a hand on Anna’s head and leaned in for another kiss from Dean, no movie could ever compare to what he already had.

“I love you,” he smiled.

“Love you, too,” Dean smiled back.

He’d gotten the best happy ending already.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to everyone who came along on this journey with me. I haven’t enjoyed writing a fanfic like I enjoyed this one for a long time. You guys are the best.

Thanks to Jess for giving me the idea, although I don't think it's quite what you imagined. I hope you enjoyed it anyway.

As you can see, it's now a series, because several people have asked for a prequel time stamp of Dean's time with Alastair. Obviously, it won't be a happy story, but it's important to Dean's character. If you subscribe to the IMToV Series, you'll be notified when that posts.

Anyway, thanks again. I really had fun with this one, and I so enjoyed reading your reviews, especially Fred's. Love you, buddy.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!