### For All You Young Hockey Players Out There, Pay Attention

**Summary**

Dean Winchester knows two things about hockey, two things his dad made sure he knew. One, hockey is a guy’s sport, and two, hockey is family. Hockey meant Sam and Bobby and Benny and Victor and Gabriel and hell, his entire team. So when Victor gets traded, Russian-star-turned-new-teammate Castiel Krushnic becomes a threat. As much as Dean hates him for that, the longer he sticks around, the more he begins to threaten that first rule too. Dean’s been taught his whole life that those who play hockey should not be captivated by deep accented voices and the way a guy handles his stick, so how the hell is he supposed to justify what he’s starting to think about Cas? All Dean wanted at the beginning of the season was to win, and now all he wants to do is figure out how he feels about Cas and how to deal with it without ruining his career and tearing his family apart.

**Notes**

Whew ok, things to say about this fic. I love hockey, and I love Dean and Cas. I wanted to imagine them running around in hockey uniforms. Hence this fic.
The title comes from one of the common phrases used by the Blackhawks TV color commentator Eddie Olczyk. Any time a player does something well on the ice, he directs your attention to the TV with that phrase in the replay. I thought it worked well for Dean’s situation.

I want to thank my alpha/beta/omega/all other -a's Rachel, because she listens to me whine about writing all year long and still talks to me and reads my crap and then fixes it. She's amazing and so many of the things that I do I couldn't without her.

Big, huge, huge hugs to my amazing artist coplins. We finished this out at the last second but she has FULFILLED MY DREAM OF SEEING DEAN AND CAS IN HOCKEY SWEATERS. AND IT IS EVERYTHING I DREAMED. Seriously, the art is so fantastic, go check it out here.

Also enormous thanks to the mods at the DeanCas Big Bang. Without them I would not be tearing my hair out every year, but I also wouldn't be writing.

P.S. I feel as if I should mention that, as a Blackhawks fan, a huge portion of this fic is based off of the interactions I have witnessed among the Blackhawks in various forms that include youtube prank videos, the candid Winter Classic behind the scenes series, the Blackhawks conventions and many other times I've been fortunate enough to see them fooling around as regular people. The team dynamic you'll see here is entirely due to them.
Baseball fucking sucks. And Dean’s not just saying that because he’s a Cubs fan.

“This fucking sucks,” he complains loudly, pulling his baseball hat low over his eyes so he doesn’t have to look at the screen anymore. Not that he’s too invested in baseball, it’s just the only sport on when your career ends suddenly and abruptly towards the end of May. Plus, his high def, seventy-five inch TV screen makes it much harder to ignore the mess that is the Cubs bullpen.

“Hey, you were the one who wanted to watch,” his buddy Victor says from next to him on the couch, and Dean shoots him a dirty look.

“It’s called the Cross Town Classic, Vic. You’re supposed to watch when you live in this damn city.”

Victor shrugs. “I’m from New York.”

“Yeah, and you’re a Sox fan,” Dean makes a face.

“Maybe if you’d scored more we could be playing the Rangers right now instead of watching this sorry excuse for a game.”

From anyone else the comment would sting, but Victor has been his teammate and right winger for so long it doesn’t even register as an insult. Dean punches him, hard, and is surprised to see Victor actually wince. His trainer would be proud.

“Hey,” Victor says, and there’s a tone to his voice so distinct Dean can guess exactly what he’s seen before he even says anything. God damn these small ass decorative pillows Sam made him buy. Dean wanted big pillows in his condo, dammit. “You reading gossip rags, Winchester?”

The magazine is yanked out from the cushion behind Dean (he curses Sam one more time for good measure) and Victor grins in delight at the bright words splashed across the front. “Hunky Hockey Captain Takes Out Busty Blonde,” he reads aloud. “Damn Winchester, you get around.”

“It was bullshit,” Dean mutters. “I just walked her home.”

“Sure you did,” he says, squinting at the blurry picture. “Why does every pap photo of you make you look like you’re posing to be a GQ cover model?”

“Hey, don’t make fun of my dreams,” Dean tells him, snatching the magazine back and throwing it back onto his coffee table. Usually it makes his family room look more elegant, with its gleaming mahogany surface, but today it’s strewn with bowls of popcorn, Cheetos, and Victor’s crossed feet. “You want another beer?”
Victor just grins cheekily at him. “Why do you have that magazine again?”

Dean flips him off and hauls himself off the couch anyway, because he does want a beer. Victor can get his own. He hears a cheer from the TV and lets out a whoop. An unexpected home run has just been hit. “In your face, asshole,” he says cheerfully, and ducks when his small, sissy ass pillow is thrown at him.

“They’re losing five to two,” Victor calls after him.

“Hope you know where the closest 7-11 is, because you can go buy your own shitty Bud Light!” Dean calls back, entering the kitchen. Slightly smaller than the family room, it’s still good quality, mostly because when Dean had said he’d wanted a chef’s kitchen, he’d been taken seriously.

Really though, if his money was going to be used for anything exuberant, the restaurant style stove top was definitely the best he could have done.

He pads in his sock feet to the fridge and pulls out two beers, because he’s not that much of an asshole, and stifles a yelp when he suddenly feels a cold wet something buried in his crotch area. The worst part about coming into the kitchen is that this is where Sam’s stupid dog stays. And for some reason, the damn thing seems to think Dean wants anything to do with it.

“Off,” he says sharply, nudging him away, and the retriever backs off, tail wagging widely and tongue lolling. Sam had saved the thing from Russia last year at the Olympics when he’d heard the government was executing all strays, and then, because he sucks, he gave him to Dean to keep because his apartment doesn’t allow pets.

Dean’s probably lucky he managed to keep Sam from grabbing a hundred more and turning their lives into a Disney movie.

Only problem with this arrangement is, Dean doesn’t like dogs. Sam keeps encouraging him to name the damn thing and take it on walks. Dean refused, but he’s occasionally slipped up and called it Chekov, because saying, “get off the couch you stupid mutt,” got old real fast.

Too bad the season hadn’t gone longer, or he could still have the thing in the kennel.

Couple of problems come with being a hockey player. One – between the months of June and August, your life goes from a fast paced blur of yelling, slamming bodies and swinging sticks to an absolute standstill. There’s nothing to do. If your team’s really bad, you can throw in an April and May of boredom as well.

Two – the only things to do when there’s nothing to do are eat and watch TV. As a professional athlete, neither can be enjoyed on a regular basis. Summer is literally hell.

Three – to add to this wonderful image of boredom and workout regimens, summer is always the season of trade. Contracts are negotiated, general managers go to work, and somewhere on the team, some poor assholes are getting booted. Doesn’t matter if it’s you or anyone else, you’re still losing a teammate.

Dean’s been lucky enough to have belonged to the Chicago Cavalry since he was drafted eight years ago, same team as his younger brother, Sam. He doesn’t have to worry about contract negotiations until next season, and even then it’s not much to worry about.

Dean’s a fucking good hockey player.

There are a couple people on the team this year who can be let go, but he’s not too worried. Making
it to the Western Conference finals is nothing to sneeze at, and with the cap being raised, there’s no reason anybody needs to go. Dean loves his team, they’re more a family than anything else. He’d hate to lose any of them.

Shoving Chekov out of his crotch once again, He grabs the now open beers and brings them back into the family room, flopping down on the couch and holding one of the Buds in Victor’s direction. “Don’t say I never did nothing for you.”

When the bottle isn’t immediately taken, Dean glances over. Victor’s got his phone out now and is frowning down at it, no longer paying attention to the game.

“Hey,” Dean says with concern. “What’s up?”

“Got a phone call,” Victor says, finally taking the bottle from Dean and pocketing his phone.

“Nancy need you home?” Dean frowns. Victor’s one of the only guys on the team who’s married, something Dean’s gotta respect. “She’s alright, right?”

“Not Nancy,” he shakes his head. “It was Edlund.”

“Oh,” Dean says, because their general manager calling is nothing new, or exactly freak out worthy. His eyes go back to the screen and he shakes his head at the easy double play unfolding on the screen. “What’d he need?”

Victor’s next words are ones Dean will remember for the rest of his life, in the defeated sounding voice of a player who’s just discovered he’s more expendable than he thought and has had his entire life altered because of it. “He traded me.”
Crowley’s Ice Rink is a dump.

That’s not an exaggeration. Sure it’s located on the outskirts of the city, which means it’s easy to get to and close to home, but this area of town ain’t exactly Disney World. The white brick of the ugly, square building that houses the rink is dirty and chipped, and the parking lot is full of potholes. Not to mention shady as fuck. He heard a guy got stabbed here over the summer.

Dean continues to scan the parking lot warily as he follows Sam from the Impala and towards the building. Thank god he’s taking the initiative too, because of course Sam is oblivious and has been non-stop chattering about some new book he’s reading. Despite coming out as the tallest and most intimidating player on the team at six-five, Dean’s brother is by far one of the nicest bleeding hearts he’s ever met. If some knife wielding maniac suddenly appeared from behind a car and attacked them, Dean’s sure Sam would offer to fall on the knife himself to save the mugger the trouble. Besides Sam, he’s got the Impala to look out for as well, so his time is spent between scanning the parking lot and looking over his shoulder back at the sleek black car like a paranoid drug dealer looking out for cops.

If somebody touches his Baby, there’s going to be hell to pay. Maybe he’ll hire a bodyguard.

They make it to the front double doors without being attacked, which means Sam gets to remain ignorant of the real world and worse, that Dean has to continue to listen to this conversation. Baby’s out of sight now too, so he doesn’t even have anything nice looking to distract him.

“You should read them Dean,” Sam is saying. “I mean, they’re not really high literature, so it’s kind of your thing, but –“

“Hey!” Dean snaps. “I read tons of fancy books! Vonnegut is my favorite author, dickweed.”

Sam makes an apologetic face, “I know that, Dean,” he says, exasperated at the interruption. “I meant they read more like an episode of Dr. Sexy than they do like War and Peace.”

“Jesus Sam, shut up, would ya? For the last time, I don’t watch Dr. Sexy, it was just on after Shark Tank and I couldn’t find the remote, alright?”

“Yeah, okay,” Sam rolls his eyes. “Anyway, they’re not complicated, but the Supernatural books are ridiculously good at symbolism. And the subtext, you would not believe some of the stuff that’s being implied…”

“Yeah, yeah, Sam, tell me later,” Dean waves his hand at his brother. “It’s hockey time.”

The inside of Crowley’s isn’t much better looking than the outside. Arguably it’s worse, with its small lobby of peeling carpet and shoddy looking benches. Dean feels bad for the families around here who have to deal with this shit when they’re trying to have a good time. At least the rink is decent and well taken care of, and Dean eagerly leads Sam into the large open room that houses it, breathing in the slight smell of must mixed with the kind of cold air tang only a sheet of ice can create.

“Jesus I missed this.”

“You made me go skating with you last week,” Sam points out, obviously annoyed that Dean cut his conversation about his special subtextual books short.
“Sure, Sasquatch, but hockey season means I can stop beating your ass and start applying myself to beating people who are actually good at the sport.”

Sam swings the large duffle bag he’s carrying into Dean and actually manages to make him stumble sideways from the weight of it. Dean’s contemplating retaliation when they’re interrupted by a smooth voice behind them. “Hello, boys.”

In a startling contrast to his ice rink, Dean has never seen Crowley wear anything but a well fitted designer suit. Maybe that’s where all the money to keep this place looking nice goes. To a closet full of suits. Crowley’s personality at least, matches how the rink looks. Crowley’s like the one non-hockey player that he really, really dislikes. Weirdly enough, Mr. Happy-Go-Lucky Sam feels the same way, so at least he can feel justified and not so petty in their mutual hatred.

Come to think of it, lots of guys on the team don’t like Crowley either. For the five hundredth time Dean wonders why the organization makes them practice here.

“Back for another season slapping sticks around like a bunch of Neanderthals?” Crowley continues, raising an eyebrow at them. “Your parents must be so proud.”

Their dad would be. Maybe. Dean never got a chance to ask. “Don’t you have small children to be terrorizing or something?”

“Perhaps I should. It is more enjoyable when my witty banter is returned.”

“Gabriel!” Sam suddenly calls out in relief. Dean glances behind Crowley to see their short goalie walking towards them, chewing on a Twix bar. Gabriel flips Sam off, grinning, and Dean is relieved to see that Crowley is already slinking off. Out of all of them, Gabriel is the only one that can get under Crowley’s skin as much as he gets under their’s.

Gabriel sure as fuck gets under Dean’s skin too, but after not seeing him for a few months, all of that is currently forgotten. This is what Dean loves about preseason, the entire team coming together to reconnect and practice for a month before the real season starts up in October. By December he’ll be back to being annoyed by half the guys on the team, the kind of annoyance that only comes with close living quarters, close relationships, and a huge family you half only tolerate and half can’t imagine living without.

“Hey Winchester times two,” Gabriel greets them, shoving the rest of the Twix into his mouth. “Miss me? Fear for my life as I risked it trekking through foreign country, fighting the good fight?”

“You were in Canada visiting your cousins,” Sam says.

“What can I say, Mounties are tough, scary guys,” Gabriel smirks. “Lemme guess, Thing One and Thing Two buried themselves in women and books respectively over the summer while they waited for hockey season to start again. You two are predictable as hell.”

“Yeah okay Mr. Candy Man,” Dean says, nodding at the wrapper still clenched in his hand. “You know Bobby’s gonna kill you, right? You’re already the shortest guy to ever play hockey, don’t become the slowest too.”

Gabriel snorts and shifts his bag. “Break isn’t over until I set foot on that ice, Winchester. Then we’ll see who’s slow.”

Sam ignores the entire exchange and immediately latches on to Gabriel’s book comment. “Actually, this new series came out this summer and—,”
Dean groans. “Give it a rest, Sam,” he says, pushing him with some effort ahead of them and into the locker room. They’re immediately hit with the smell of sweat and the sound of at least five conversations going on, as teammates who haven’t seen one another in weeks try to catch up before they’re herded onto the ice and put through the grueling process of becoming in shape and ready for another season.

Dean scans the room quickly. Everybody is there. Right away he notices Chuck arguing with Ed and Harry, Kevin looking at pictures of Garth’s vacation to Missouri, Balthazar and Benny having some kind of conversation where each progressively tries to speak louder than the other with every sentence, and Gordon glowering alone in the corner as he laces up his skates. He hears other voices from behind the back bank of lockers and knows they must be the last few to arrive.

The only one missing is Victor.

“This is bullshit,” Dean says, dumping his duffle bag onto the bench and angrily unzipping it.

“What?” Sam says, looking around the locker room like Dean’s problem is gonna present itself in a frilly dress and start doing the can-can.

“Victor, it’s bullshit,” he says angrily, yanking his skates out of the bag.

Sam, who’s heard some variation of this complaint all summer (usually over the few times Dean thought he could get away with being drunk) sighs loudly. “Trades happen, Dean. It’s part of the sport. I’m pretty sure Vic’s gonna be fine in Winnipeg.”

“Don’t care,” Dean says shortly. “He was one of the best damn players we had.”

“Maybe, but he’s also your best friend, so you’re clearly a little too emotionally attached to the situation,” Sam replies.

“I’m not emotionally attached,” he grumbles. “You’re emotionally attached to…to kittens. Or some shit.” He suddenly looks up again and scans the room once more. Besides Victor, there is actually someone else missing. “Who got called in for him?”

Sam shrugs. “Dunno. Gabriel?”

“Yeah, like I know anything about what’s going on with the team,” Gabriel says. “I’m definitely the first one Carver calls up with exciting news.” He’s drawing dicks all over his face mask in sharpie. Jerry, the equipment manager, is gonna be pissed. That’s the third friggin’ mask Gabriel has destroyed in two seasons.

“Jesus Gabriel, how I am going to be able to concentrate on defending you when you’re wearing that?” Sam complains.

“Just start calling me Master Dick now. That’ll get you used to all of the ones I’ll have on display during the game.”

Dean’s been so angry about Victor all summer, he hadn’t really gotten past thinking about him being gone. He’d forgotten that someone new would be joining the team to replace him. Someone Dean wasn’t friends with and hadn’t known as long. The chemistry he and Victor had shared on ice was nice, comfortable. No way was he going to be able to recreate that with the new guy.

He was already starting to hate him, and he didn’t even really exist yet.

It’s not totally unusual for no one to have heard about a replacement by now. Victor had been traded
for future draft picks, so at least Dean could comfort himself with the fact that he was traded because they needed the money, and not because there was someone better out there they wanted. It’s possible Edlund hadn’t even found anyone yet, although he and Carver, the owner of the team, spend so much time together Dean kind of doubts they haven’t been talking about it. Victor was a first line winger, that’s not exactly something you can go without if you want to make playoffs. Which also makes it an important decision – you want to find someone good, someone who will fit with the team and who has the experience to come in and play with a group of guys that have been together for years and have never missed the playoffs.

‘Course, Edlund’s also working on a budget, so sometimes you can only take what you can get. There are actually a few people from other teams Dean wouldn’t mind playing with. If Edlund can get one of them, maybe this won’t be so bad.

“If Edlund gets us a Campbell I might consider forgiving him.”

“You mean one of the future hall of fame, seven million dollars a year salary Campbells?” Sam asks. While Dean is still in his sweats, Sam has already gotten his pants and socks on and is concentrating on lacing his skates up. “Yeah. Sure. As captain of the team, I elect you to let him know.”

“I’m not playing with a Campbell,” Gabriel says, aimlessly coloring in one of the sabres on his helmet with pink sharpie (do they even make those?) He’s made no move to get dressed. “Bunch of dickwads.”

“But they’re good,” Dean insists. “We should at least get a good player out of this shit trade. Hey Benny!” he calls across the room.

Benny abruptly stops his shouting match with Balthazar. “What?”

“We got a replacement for Victor yet?”

Benny shakes his head. “Heard some names thrown around, all rookies I don’t know from Adam.”

Well fuck. Dean’s gonna hate this. Rookies suck.

He says as much, and Sam laughs. “Well that’s open-minded of you. Don’t be a jerk, Dean, you were a rookie once.”

“I was never a rookie,” Dean argues. “Rookies suck. I was always this good.”

“Maybe he’ll be good,” Gabriel suggests.

Well that’s it. Dean is determined to hate him.

Sam must see something in his face, because his own instantly screws into bitchmode and Dean knows he’s about to be delivered the lecture of the century on accepting new people and not being petty just because you’ve lost your best friend and things haven’t gone your way and always be kind and feed stray dogs and blah blah blah blah.

He’s saved by Benny, who’s come over to join their conversation, followed closely by Balthazar. Balthazar sits next to Gabriel and without looking up the goalie hands him an extra sharpie and presents the bottom half of the mask towards him while he continues to work on the top.

“How you been brother?” Benny asks, slapping Dean on the shoulder and throwing one leg over the bench. “Still upset about your buddy?”
“What do you think?” Sam says as he pulls his shoulder pads out of his bag. Dean stifles a grimace at his tone. Weirdly enough, although he doesn’t outright hate him, Sam’s always been slightly hostile towards Benny, and usually the attitude is returned. Since both of them are alternate captains, Dean assumes it comes from some weird alpha male competitiveness neither one of them will ever admit to.

“I think Dean likes to complain,” Benny grins. “We’re all upset about Victor, brother. Don’t dwell too hard on it.”

“Fresh blood is always good, hmm?” Balthazar cuts in. He’s writing ‘PRICK’ in careful lettering across the part of Gabriel’s helmet that covers his chin. “We haven’t had a chance to properly introduce anybody to the team in ages.”

“Didn’t stop us from short-sheeting Garth’s hotel bed all last spring,” Gabriel chuckles.

“Joke’s on you guys!” Garth calls over, “I actually like sleeping with the bed like that!”

“Yes, we’re all aware of how tightly you enjoy your balls being squeezed, Garth,” Balthazar drawls. This prompts a round of catcalls and more insults, which Dean ignores. “You’re all missing the fucking point,” he snaps. “Victor, one of the best guys on the team, a guy that’s been here almost longer than anyone, is gonna get replaced by some naïve kid whose gonna need Chuck to fight his battles.”

“Hey, I could fight if I wanted to!” Chuck protests.

“You know what your problem is?” Sam says. “You don’t like change.”

“I don’t care about change, I care when the change is a bad one.”

“Please,” Sam rolls his eyes. “You were mad for weeks when they replaced that one guy with Don Cheadle in Iron Man.”

Benny guffaws and Dean makes a face. “Obviously that was a goddamned bad change, Sammy.”

“Nah, Deano’s just upset because we’re all part of his big happy family and he loves us all so much and Victor leaving has ruined his fragile little life, and he’s proud to be a duck, damn it all,” Gabriel says, glancing at the look on Dean’s face. “What? I listen to your end of season speeches.”

“I never said anything like that,” Dean says firmly. If he ever admitted to anything that sappy, he was having Sammy put him into rehab for whatever drug he had to be on to say it in the first place.

“Not with your words,” Balthazar sighs dramatically, clutching at his heart. “But we felt it in our souls.”

Gabriel frowns, “Come to think of it, maybe part of that was from Mighty Ducks.”

“It was,” Benny tells him. “Once again y’all manage to be completely unoriginal.”

“Eh,” Gabriel shrugs and leans closer to the mask resting on the bench in order to draw another dick. “Those aren’t very proportionate,” Balthazar muses.

“What real man is?”

“Seriously, you assholes wanna stop acting like five year olds?” Sam says. “If Bobby puts in Andy
to play instead of you because of this, I’m not defending you this time. I’d rather have Gallagher.”

“Please,” Gabriel snorts. “I’m the best damn goalie in the league. Besides, you’ve never defended me, ergo, you are a horrible defender, Sambo. I’d work on that.”

“Besides which, what five year olds are you speaking to that enjoy drawing penises?” Balthazar asks with interest.

Sam flips them both off and Dean sits back in order to enjoy the ensuing laughter, the sound of camaraderie and team and home. No way he’s going to let Victor leaving, or any new rookie, ruin that for him. He’ll have to talk to Bobby when he shows up.

Speaking of, where was the old bastard?

“Anyone seen coach?” he calls out to the locker room.

“Office!” Kevin calls back. “Edlund’s here!”

“That’s good, right?” Chuck asks nervously. “That means they found us a new player.”

Dean feels his stomach sink and makes to stand up, but the locker room door opens before he can, Bobby looking the same as always in his trucker cap and beard. That was one of the best things about Bobby – the league had finally managed to get him into a suit for every game like all the other coaches, but he never took off the cap or cleaned up the beard. Dean could respect that.

It’s possible he’s a little biased, having grown up with the man, but Bobby is a good guy. Dean’s sure he’ll listen to him about this trade business.

There’s a chorus of greetings yelled out to Bobby, Gabriel’s yell of, “Did you lose weight old man? That’s a stunning figure!” loudest of them all. Bobby glares at them and waves his hands. “Alright ya fucking idjits, settle down. I know ya missed me, I don’t need it screamed in my face.”

“Why, did you get hearing aids over the summer?” Gabriel asks innocently.

Bobby scowls at him, the look growing deeper when he notices his defaced mask. “You’re paying for that, Gabriel,” he growls. “And you can expect extra conditioning this week too. Just because you’re an idiot doesn’t mean you can act like one.”

That shuts Gabriel up. Balthazar silently mouths Bobby’s phrase at Sam, who only shrugs in response.

“We done pussyfooting around?” Bobby asks. “Ready to listen?”

“You gonna tell us who’s replacing Victor, coach?” Harry calls out.

“Did we get a Campbell?” Dean asks hopefully.

Bobby chuckles sarcastically. “Dean, we can have a Campbell when you’re willing to take a pay cut.”

Dean grins. “Sure old man. You want that cut in pennies or nickels?”

“Shut up, smart ass,” Bobby massages his forehead. “His name’s Castiel Krushnic.”

The room erupts into conversation. “What is that, Swedish?” Ed asks.
“No dumbass, it’s Eastern European,” Kevin says.

“Russian,” Gordon says darkly from the corner, glaring at them all.

Dean doesn’t really like Gordon. No one likes Gordon, but he’s not a bad defenseman, so he’s tolerated.

“Shut up,” he tells his team loudly, eyes still trained on Bobby.

“Aye, aye, Captain,” Balthazar mutters under his breath, but the room quiets down again.

“He’s from the Kontinental Hockey League,” Bobby continues like he hadn’t been interrupted. “Damn good player. Three seasons under his belt, with seventy-four points last season, and he just keeps getting better.”

“Weren’t you at seventy-eight points last season, Winchester?” Gordon asks. “That’s only four less.”

“Yeah, so?” Dean scowls. “I don’t have the luxury of playing shitty teams all season.” The KHL’s gotta be worse than the NHL. New players come over to America all the time, and Dean’s seen a lot of them returning. Maybe this kid will be the same. Definitely not worth losing Victor. “He ever played in America before, Bobby?”

“No,” Bobby says gruffly. “Never even been here before. Arrived last night. I expect all you idiots to play nice and make him feel welcome, or there’ll be hell to pay, you hear me?”

“Where on earth do you get the idea that we wouldn’t be nice?” Balthazar asks as Gabriel carefully attaches a newly created ‘SUCK MY DICK’ sign to his back.

“If any group of jackasses found a way, it’d be all of you,” Bobby says wearily. “Suit up and on the ice in ten boys. Each minute I’m kept waiting is an extra lap. Dean, keep your goddamned team in line. I’m a professional, not a babysitter for a buncha prom queens.”

“Yeah sure,” Dean dismisses. “Get on the ice and start passing drills, guys. Hey Bobby, can I talk to you for a minute?”

Bobby sighs but allows Dean to move him away from the hustle and bustle of twenty or so men pulling on layer after layer of protective clothing. “What is it Dean?” he asks, although he can tell by the look on his face that Bobby already knows what’s coming.

Dean notes this but barrels on, determined. “About Victor—,”

“I talked to Edlund, Dean,” Bobby interrupts. “Talked to him all summer. Victor was up for a raise if we wanted to renew his contract this season, and you know we don’t got enough money for that and everybody else. Hell, this Krushnic could turn out to be better than Henrickson, and he comes dirt cheap.”

“Yeah right,” Dean snaps. “You really think this kid is gonna be able to handle the NHL, Bobby?”

“He is if he’s got strong teammates who encourage him to play his best,” Bobby growls in warning, jabbing Dean in the chest. “You want to make a run for the cup this year, you’ll play nicey nice. Now get dressed, Winchester, I don’t have all day to chit-chat with you.”

Dean knows the Winchester means Bobby is done talking to him, so he directs his scowl to the ground and stomps back to the bench to begin pulling on his gear.
“I could’ve told you Bobby wasn’t going to take your shit,” Sam tells him.

“Shut up, Sam.”

“Uncle Bobby’s wasn’t open for complaint then?” Balthazar smirks. “That will make for an awkward family dinner.”

“Can it, ya prissy Brit,” Benny stands up. “And I ain’t sucking your dick, even if your sign is askin’ nice. Come on brother. It’s a new season, alright? Just let it go.”

Dean’s never backed down from anything before though, and he sure as hell isn’t going to start now. Sam calls him a stubborn asshole, but fuck that. Dad always said sticking to your guns was an important trait for a man to have, especially when pride was on the line. Victor’s pride was being challenged here, and if he couldn’t defend it Dean was gonna do it for him. That’s how family worked.

Dean was going to make sure this Krushnic guy knew he wasn’t a fix for Victor. Not even close.

Ten minutes later his ire is all but forgotten as he does a lap around the ice, the familiar weight of his pads over his shoulders and his stick in his hand. They’re doing shooting drills, the whole team moving in tandem to keep a steady stream of pucks trained on Gabriel. Every shot Balthazar takes is aimed at Gabriel’s dick, but at least he’s working on his precision. Dean taps the ice and gets a quick feed from Sam, slapping the puck to the top corner of the net and yelling in triumph as it sails past Gabriel’s glove. “Slow!” he crows.

“Bite me, Deano,” Gabriel calls back.

Dean gives him a cheerful wave and glides to the back of the line, frowning slightly at the number printed on the practice jersey in front of him. He’s pretty sure there’s no number 18 on the team.

Suddenly 18 glides forward smoothly, receiving a pass from Garth and sliding it from the front side of his stick to the back so quickly Gabriel lunges the wrong way and 18 practically walks the puck into the net. There’s no cheer of happiness from him as he skates back to the line, and Dean realizes the slide of pucks across the ice has come to a halt as everyone turns to stare. Gabriel has stood up, his mask lifted off of his face.

So. This was the new guy.

Jesus, what a show off.

“Krushnic?” Dean says, and the guy turns to look at him with cool blue – wow, really fucking blue – eyes.

Looking him over, Dean can tell he should be a good player just from the ways he’s built. He’s only about an inch shorter than Dean, with shoulders slightly broader than his waist that suggest he’s used to pushing people around. It’s also obvious from the goal he just scored that he had some serious stick handling skills, and was probably fast on his skates as well.

“Krushnic, right?” Dean repeats again, a tad aggressively. He can see Sam skating closer out of the corner of his eye, hovering, and Dean sends him a mental scowl.

“That is me,” the guy says carefully, and Dean raises an eyebrow. His voice is deep and rough, with a slight hint of an accent, not at all what he expected out of him. Then again, the visor and his helmet is making it hard for Dean to really put together what he looks like, so who knows. For all Dean can tell, this guy is fucking James Earl Jones himself.
“What, so you were just gonna skate out here without introducing yourself?” he asks, squaring his shoulders.

Krushnic shrugs. “You were practicing. I was told to join.”

“So you ruined a perfectly good practice.”

“Not so perfectly good.”

“What?”

Krushnic nods at Sam, “He turns his shoulder in when he shoots, so the puck always goes slightly left of where he wants it,” he nods to Chuck, “his hands are unsteady, he must have many turn overs,” his steady gaze turns back to Dean. “And you, you lift your back foot after your shot, like a ballerina. It will take you off balance. So no, not so perfectly good.”

Dean stares at him. He has to give the guy credit for his balls, given that they’re more likely to get stucked ‘accidentally’ by someone on the team now more than anything else. Dean couldn’t have asked for a better situation if he tried. Krushnic was actually a dick. Cutting him out of the team isn’t even a challenge.

“Right,” he announces, not looking away from Krushnic. “Same drill, but if you miss or Gabriel saves it, you’re out. Don’t let yourself be first.”

“I suppose you want Mr. Krushnic to be first?” Balthazar asks as he skates by, flipping a puck off the ice and into his glove. “How very welcoming of you.”

Dean doesn’t reply. He may be acting childish, but he’s finding it hard to care. He does not lift his foot like a fucking ballerina. And Sam pulls left because he’s never gotten used to being so freakishly huge, not for lack of skill.

So yeah, he’s going to show this guy how to learn to shut up and accept the fact that he’s the outsider here. That he’s got no right to comment on anybody’s playing style. The sooner he gets that lesson out of the way, the sooner he can get this dead weight off his team.

“Dean,” Sam warns quietly under his breath, coming to a stop behind him. “This isn’t going to end well. Are we even going to get any practice done today?”

“You don’t think this is practice, Sammy?” Dean says, not turning to look at him. “Challenge me if you want, Mr. Alternate Captain.”

Sam lets out a loud huff of breath but doesn’t try to stop the drill.

Dean watches as first Ed falls out, then Harry, then Chuck…Sam does well until he goes for a shot to the bottom left, and ends up sending the puck just past the wrong side of the post. Dean doesn’t look at Krushnic when this happens. He’s going to have to work with Sam to get that fixed.

To his frustration, Krushnic scores each time, no matter how hard he wills Gabriel to just save the damn puck already. If he didn’t know better, he’d say Gabriel was missing on purpose, but Gabriel actually does have a lot of pride in his goaltending, and Dean can’t see him throwing that on the off chance that Dean would be pissed about it.

Eventually it’s just him and Krushnic left, trading multiple shots back and forth that Gabriel can’t seem to stop. Dean’s waiting for Ash to start gathering up pucks so they can go through a round of shots again when Krushnic suddenly speaks up. “Perhaps if you weighted your skate it would train
“Your body not to lift your foot,” he suggests.

“I don’t lift my foot,” Dean growls, tapping his stick on the ice impatiently for a puck.

“Woah, chill Cap!” Ash calls, finally sending him a pass.

Dean skates it in, intending to go for Gabriel’s glove side, low. All he has to do is shoot, and pointedly not lift his foot, and that will show Castiel Krushnic how fucking ridiculous his accusation is. Lift the stick, don’t lift the foot. Swing...

Fuck. Fuck fuck fuck.

He fucking does lift his foot.

Gabriel lifts his mask, a look of abject surprise on his face as he drops Dean’s caught shot from his gloved hand. “Uh,” he says, probably for the first time in his entire life lost for words. “Guess the new kid wins.”

“Yes,” Krushnic says. “You all need some improvement, but you will work. We will make a good team.” He skates closer, almost coming blade to blade with Dean. “Do not try to intimidate me, Winchester. I don’t like it.” His head tilts slightly as he talks, like Dean is some specimen he’s only slightly interested in learning more about. Dean wishes he’d take his helmet off so he could see his whole face. And so that he could punch it.

“I must go speak to the coach now,” Krushnic nods. “Please continue practice. I will return.”

The entire team watches dumbly as he skates off the ice, except for Gabriel, who shouts sarcastically, “Thanks for the permission!”

“Well,” Chuck says nervously when he’d disappeared. “He was kind of cool and mysterious, right? Like Zorro.”

Balthazar smacks him upside the back of his head with his gloved hand. “Piss off, Shirley.”

“What a dick.” Dean slams his pint glass down with a loud clunk, burying his head in his hands. “What a fucking dick.”

“He wasn’t that bad,” Sam argues. “I mean, he was kind of stuck up, I guess, but he is new here. Maybe he’s nervous.”

“Kind of stuck up?” Dean asks incredulously. “If he thought he was any better than us we’d be worshiping him as one of the goddamned hockey gods.”

“Yeah, well you being a dick right back to him probably isn’t helping,” he says. “He’s a good player Dean. Leave him alone.”

“He deserves to have me act dickish towards him,” Dean grumbles, gesturing for another beer. As much as he hates to admit it, Sam is right. Krushnic is good. He’d returned with Bobby twenty

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“He deserves to have me act dickish towards him,” Dean grumbles, gesturing for another beer. As much as he hates to admit it, Sam is right. Krushnic is good. He’d returned with Bobby twenty
minutes after humiliating them all, and coach had taken over practice, putting them through stick handling and passing drills. Krushnic had barely slipped up and had complimented the playing style of everybody he worked with well.

 Doesn’t matter how good at hockey you are though, if you don’t click with the rest of the team, it’s not gonna work, and Dean can’t see Krushnic allowing anybody to click with him. He hadn’t spoken the rest of practice.

 Dean can’t wait until they start contact practices. Driving Krushnic into the fucking boards should knock him down a peg or two.

 “You two hear about what Ash learned?” Benny asked, throwing himself into the bar stool on the other side of Dean. “About Krushnic, I mean.”

 “No?” Dean raises his eyebrow in question, but Ash, who’s over at the pool table with some of the rest of the team, must be listening.

 “Yeah, dude,” he says, “he won some kind of crazy award from the Russian government for excellence in sports or something.”

 “I heard he was the youngest player to ever be drafted on a Russian team,” Kevin, who’s pretty young himself, speaks up.

 “ESPN says he’s never played a season where he didn’t reach sixty points,” Chuck says, the awe clear in his voice. “They think he’ll be up for rookie of the year.”

 “What are you, a bunch of fawning girls?” Dean demands. “Cut it out, Krushnic’s an asshole. I don’t care if he invented the slap shot, I don’t wanna hear another word about him.”

 “But he’s so dreamy,” Gabriel sighs.

 “When the hell did you see his face?”

 “You mean you didn’t stick around to watch him undress?” Balthazar asks.

 “Dude,” Sam laughs. “You two are weird.”

 “As long as we all understand the no homo implications of this conversation,” Gabriel says, face completely serious. Both he and Balthazar stare at Sam until Balthazar snorts, Gabriel’s face breaks into a grin, and they both surge together in a fake display of making out.

 “There’s something wrong goin’ on in those two’s heads,” Benny says, shaking his own and turning back to the bar with Dean. “I saw Krushnic too, without having to watch him strip. Kid’s alright. Still got all his teeth.”

 “So do I, and you don’t see me bragging,” Dean says darkly.

 Benny laughs. “Apologies, brother, I forgot People dubbed you the Hunky Hockey Captain. I’ll remember next time I address you, promise.”

 So Dean hadn’t stuck around to ogle at the new guy. At the end of practice he’d skated calmly off the ice (“More like stormed off,” the snide Sam voice that lives in his head says), handed all his gear off to Jerry, the equipment manager, and had gone off to his car to wait for Sam so they could finally get to the bar.
Besides the ice, the Roadhouse is one of the only other places Dean feels truly at home. He’d been coming here since he was a kid, not because he’d been drinking that long, but because Bobby knows the owner, Ellen. Dean and Sam had been palling around with her daughter Jo since she was still in pigtails, and the bar had been his favorite place to grab a beer since he was sixteen and sneaking it out of the tap. When he’d joined the Cavalry, the whole team had eventually followed him here, making it their favorite place in the city to go after practice or a game.

Luckily none of their fans had figured it out yet. Dean wouldn’t exactly put the Roadhouse on the same level as a shitty roadside bar, but it was a little rundown, in a sketchier part of the city, and catered to the type of men who could give a fuck if some of the biggest athletes in the city were getting drunk and shooting pool around them. Not exactly the type of place you’d find someone begging for an autograph and a picture.

“Here ya go, hotshot,” Jo says, sliding another beer in front of him. “Thanks for gracing us with your presence. A week is too long.”

“You’re welcome,” Dean smirks at her. “Didn’t miss me too much, did you?”

“I think I missed seeing your ugly mug on the TV more.”

“Hey, it looks better than it did before he got beat up a couple of times,” Sam objects. “Michael Goodson rearranging his face with a stick really did him a favor.”

Dean subconsciously rubs a hand over the bridge of his nose, which has a scar from the whack in the face he received last season and the stitches he’d needed afterwards. “Yeah, thanks for sticking up for me, bitch,” Dean teases. “ Couldn’t even drop the gloves and fight for your own brother…”

“I remember that game,” Jo grins delightedly. “You were bleeding all over the ice.”

“He was also skating around going, ‘by dose, by dose!’” Sam says evilly.

Dean makes an obscene gesture at him. “Cram it with walnuts, Sam,” he turns to Jo, nodding at her bruised cheek. “Looks like you got hit too. What, you breaking rules and not wearing the full faced mask like you ladies are supposed to?”

Jo, much to her mother’s disappointment, had followed the Winchesters, and more importantly, her father’s footsteps into the world of hockey. She played for a women’s league that often supplied players for the national team, which Jo was hoping to make for the Olympics in 2018.

Jo scowled. “Those masks are fucking dumb. Why do we all have to skate around with cages over our faces while you idiots don’t have to use protection at all? You’re the hotheaded assholes who are always punching each other.”

“Gotta keep your pretty faces protected, right?” Benny asks, and Jo leans over the bar and punches him in the shoulder.

“Joanna Beth! Off the bar!” Ellen appears as if by magic and Jo makes a face before she straightens herself up again. Benny raises his beer bottle to Ellen. “Thank you, ma’am.”

“Benny, for the last time, if you call me ma’am again, I’ll bring you out back and let the seagulls have you,” Ellen rolls her eyes. “There’s more trash and birds behind this bar then there are over by the Lake.” She eyes all three of them up, her examination lasting so long Dean begins to shift uncomfortably. Ellen’s always been something close to a mother-figure for him and Sam, and her look is making him just as paranoid as it did when he was a kid. Even though he knows he hasn’t done anything wrong.
“What?” he asks defensively, immediately cursing his tone of voice.

Ellen raises an eyebrow at him. “Heard you boys got a new teammate today.”

“Oh, really?” Jo says. “How attractive?”

“How the hell should I know?” Dean asks.

“I dunno, you tell me, Dr. Sexy.”

“What the fuck is that supposed to mean?” He’s gonna kill Sam later. If he threw him out back
Ellen’s seagulls would probably eat him, no one would ever know.

“Cool it,” Ellen says, instantly shutting both of them up. “Now I heard he’s from Russia. I sure as
hell hope you’re being nice to the poor boy, he’s probably scared out of his damn mind, being here.”

“No way,” Dean says firmly. “Guy’s an asshole.”

“Dean Winchester.”

Jo laughs. “Wow, how surprising, Dean doesn’t like the new guy.”

“Are we talking about Dean and his patent dislike for all things new and exciting again?” Gabriel
complains, squeezing in between Sam and Dean at the bar. “Way to be twenty-seven going on sixty,
Grandpa Winchester.” Catching Jo’s eye, he winks. “Fetch me a beer, sweetheart?”

“Only if you fetch gonorrhea first,” she says sweetly, heading away from the bar and to the back.

“Ha, joke’s on her, I’ve got that one,” Gabriel slaps the bar and looks hopefully at Ellen, but she only
treats him with an exasperated look before answering the call of some customers at the opposite end
of the bar.

“Tough crowd. What was the point of my mother teaching me manners?” he asks, grabbing Sam’s
beer bottle and taking a long swig.

“It’s alright, I don’t think they stuck,” Benny assures him.

Dean tunes out their banter and stares into his beer bottle. He wonders what Victor is up to right
now. It’s the same time in Winnipeg as it is here in Chicago, but Canada’s a foreign country. What
do you do for fun in Canada? Moose tipping, probably. And shots of molasses. He goes to Canada
several times a year, and he doesn’t think he’s been anywhere besides the stadiums and a couple of
restaurants.

Which is kind of weird actually. What the hell is he doing when he’s there?

Actually, he’s probably doing Canadian women. Never mind.

Dean frowns down at the wood grain of the table. When’s the last time he had sex, anyway? A
month? Two? He’s been stressing so much about Victor and the upcoming season that he hasn’t
really thought about it. He needs to get out to a bar soon. Like a real bar, in the city, one with
attractive women that should take him no time to pick up.

Jesus, this Victor thing is screwing him up in every aspect of his life. First his hockey (he refuses to
believe that lifting his foot thing isn’t a brand new habit born of stress), then the sex and now
Krushnic…
Speaking of Krushnic, why the hell is Bobby dragging him through the door?

“Oh hell,” he mutters, standing up quickly and grabbing his beer. He ignores Gabriel’s cry of indignation as he bumps into him and waves away Sam’s questioning look, heading over to the pool table where Ash is kicking everybody’s ass. “Come on Ash, quit humiliating Tran and rack ‘em up.”

“Hey fearless leader,” Ash grins lazily. “You got any moola to put on this game?”

Dean rolls his eyes and pulls out a twenty. “Aren’t you tired of losing to me, Ash?”

“Nah, s’long as I can keep beating the little people,” Ash says, grabbing the bill and setting it on the edge of the pool table.

Dean sets his beer on a table and begins gathering all of the balls up, squeezing them between his arms so they form a triangle and moving it to the center of the table. Most of the team is gathered around the table, drinking and talking and not really paying much attention, so Dean grabs a cue and hunches over, aiming up his shot before hitting the cue ball with a solid thwack.

“Hello, Dean.”

Dean stiffens and straightens up, not wanting to turn around. Talking to Krushnic is really the last thing he wants to do right now, but ignoring him with Bobby somewhere in the bar to hear about it isn’t going to end well for him either.

“Yeah,” he says, turning around to face him.

The first thing Dean notices is that Krushnic doesn’t look nearly as capable of playing hockey as he did earlier. In just his street clothes, he’s almost small, with muscles more like a runner has than ones born of slamming head on into other bodies. Dean’s not sure what the average size of a hockey player in Russia is, but he knows right now the second other teams get a hold of his stats, they’re going to be slamming into him at every possible turn, and he’s going to have a hell of a time staying upright.

Second thing he notices is that for some reason he’d thought Krushnic would be the type to dress up, but instead he’s in ratty jeans and a T-shirt with Cyrillic printed on it, which suits him because…

Bed head. Like you wouldn’t believe. Women can’t stop running their hands through it and I can’t even remember the last night I didn’t have sex kind of bed head. It’s short and dark, brown verging on black, and paired with the square jaw and sharply cut features. Dean’s pretty sure that type of messy hair probably actually did come from a couple of fawning women who’d used any excuse to touch it.

He’d forgotten about the accent too. And the eyes. They’re even bluer without his visor shadowing them, the kind of ridiculous blue you only find in a clear sky.

As if Dean needed any more reason to hate him, now there’d be competition for groupies too.

Someone clears their throat and Dean realizes he’s been staring at Krushnic without listening to whatever it is he had to say. Krushnic doesn’t seem put off by it though, since he’s just staring right back, his gaze boring into him.

“What’d he say?” he asks Ash.

Ash shrugs. “He wants to play.”
Dean’s face breaks into a grin. So the elimination drill was a crap shoot but this, this he can’t lose. He’s been hustling pool in this bar since he was thirteen, no way was some guy from Russia better.

“Yeah, alright,” he says, gathering the balls back up in his arms and tightening them again. “You break.”

“Hey, Cavs, gather ‘round, the newbie and Cap are gonna shoot some pool!” Ash announces to the bar at large. Dean rolls his eyes when Gabriel bounds over, Sam and Benny close on his heels. Everybody else already around the pool table turns their attention to Krushnic, who’s studying the pool cue in his hands with a curious expression on his face.

“Aw no,” Dean chuckles quietly to Sam. “I’m gonna slaughter him.”

“Probably useless to ask you to take an easy on the guy, huh?”

“Damn straight,” Dean says. “I’m not pulling any punches just because you got bit by the goody two shoes bug. I beat him, he shuts up, and then everything can go back to normal.”

“Beating this guy into submission isn’t going to bring Victor back Dean,” Sam says quietly.

“No,” he grunts. “But it’ll make me feel better.”

Sam’s never purposely an asshole to anybody in his life. He doesn’t understand how cathartic it is, especially when the guy deserves it.

Suddenly Krushnic is standing in front of him, and Dean automatically smirks. “My turn already?”

“I believe so,” Krushnic says. “I got rid of all the colored balls.”

“What?” Dean pushes him aside. The only balls left on the table are the stripes. Even the eight ball has been sunk. He rounds on Ash. “What?”

“Fucking incredible,” Ash says, almost reverently.

“He just put them all in,” Kevin says quietly, eyes wide.

“Zoned in like a bloody missile,” Balthazar adds.

“The billiards tables in my country are much bigger,” Krushnic says. “I did not realize you use significantly less strength and aim here.”

Dean really can’t believe this is happening. “Dumb fucking luck,” he says.

“Maybe,” Krushnic shrugs, handing his pool cue to Dean. “Or perhaps I am just better than you.” With that he offers Sam a weird quirk of his lips Dean thinks is supposed to be a smile (why the FUCK is he smiling at Sam?) and heads back to the bar where Bobby is chatting with Ellen.

“Dude’s a badass,” Ash declares.

Dean thrusts the pool cue at Sam. “I fucking hate him.”
“And in NHL news, the Chicago Cavalry have procured KHL player Castiel Krushnic, likely to fill the void created by left winger Victor Henrickson, who was traded to Winnipeg early last summer. For more on that, we go to ESPN correspondent Luke Wallace. Luke?”

“Thanks Tracey. We all know a position was left open on the Cavalry when Henrickson was traded in June for two draft picks, a position that has the possibility of being filled by Krushnic. Krushnic went forty two, twenty six, thirteen with his Russian team last year, earning a total of thirty four goals and forty assists. But while it seems he matches Henrickson in skill, there’s still the question of chemistry. Cavalry Captain Dean Winchester, who was in the running for the Selke Trophy last year, spent a large amount of his ice time with Henrickson – will the chemistry be the same? That remains to be seen. The season starts October 9, check your local listings.”

Dean swears and presses the off button on the remote much harder than he intended, tossing it aside. He’d gotten to Crowley’s early to have his own skating time, and instead he ended up watching early morning sports talk and listening to reporters rave about Krushnic and how good he was for the team.

The media was never right about anything. Dean remembers a time last year when they were convinced Kevin had a secret girlfriend because he was caught sneaking out of a gated community. Later Dean had learned he’d climbed the fence in order to feed a bunch of stray cats.

So yeah, reporters were dumb, especially when it came to the weird shit this team got up to.

The locker room door opens behind him, and Dean turns around, expecting it to be Sam bitching about Dean not picking him up and not telling him he wasn’t going to pick him up (Sam has a car, Dean only drives him to get a little more time in the Impala, so he really has no right to complain). But instead of Sam, it’s Krushnic again, dressed, if possible, even more messily than the night before, in grey sweats and a black tank top.

He blinks, and a look almost like surprise crosses his face. Dean takes the time to congratulate himself on getting the robot to show an emotion before he speaks up. “You following me around or something? Because I gotta say, that’s creepy man. If you want an autograph, just ask.”

“I’m not following you,” Krushnic says shortly. “I did not think anyone would be here.”

“So Bobby’s done babysitting you?”

“Coach Singer thought I would like to see where the team…hangs out,” Krushnic says, his accent more pronounced on what Dean guesses is an unfamiliar phrase for him. “However I do not require anyone to sit on me.”

“The lie every man likes to tell himself,” Dean nods. Krushnic’s brow furrows and Dean sighs. His wit goes so unappreciated around here. “Anyway, I guess if I have you alone it’s a good time to lay down a few ground rules.”

“I understand the rules of hockey,”
“Buddy, I don’t care if the rules you understand are hockey, football, or fucking figure skating,” Dean says. “You’re going to listen to my rules, and lemme tell you right now, these are going to be the most important ones you ever hear. Got it?”

“I believe so,” he says stiffly. “What are these rules?”

“One,” Dean holds up a finger, “this is my team. You have no right to come in here and tell them what you think they’re bad at. Two,” he holds up another finger, “I don’t care if the sun shines out of your ass, you can stop fucking acting like it. You’re not better than anyone else here, and you’re gonna realize that when games start and your sunshiney ass becomes a permanent bench warmer. And three,” he holds up his last finger. “I’m the captain on this team. The guys here look up to me. Pull another stunt like you did last night, and there’ll be hell to pay.” Dean drops his hand and shakes his head. “You’re not a teammate, Krushnic. You’re a body to fill empty space until we find someone better.”

Krushnic’s eyes had narrowed throughout Dean’s (impressive actually, he’s pretty proud of it) little speech, and by the time he’s finished, they’re practically slits. “I see,” he says finally. “That is an impressive list.”

“Yeah thanks, just something I came up with,” Dean snorts, turning to his locker and digging out his tape. Fetching his stick from the rack on the wall, he sits on the bench to begin wrapping it. “Guess I don’t have to ask you if you understand.”

“This is true, I understand,” Krushnic agrees. “May I give you some of my own rules in return?”

Dean glances at him suspiciously but shrugs, because nothing Krushnic says matters, and pretending to listen to him is easier than sitting here in awkward silence with his otherworldly blue eyes trained on him until he’s finally dressed to get on the ice. “Sure, go crazy.”

Krushnic tilts his head. “You are all mostly American on this team, correct?”

Dean nods hesitantly, because yeah actually, the Cavalry have more Americans on the team than any other in the league, but why should that matter? “So?”

“Americans are not very good at hockey.” Krushnic replies smugly. “And since Russia is the best at it in the world, I will give you rule number one – I am the only person who should be telling your team what they’re bad at, since no one else is good enough to know.”

Pretty sure the Canadians have ‘the best in the world at hockey’ thing clinched, man,” Dean interrupts, but Krushnic ignores him.

“Rule number two,” he growls emphatically, “I am the best at hockey. This is not an exaggeration. I will not be ‘bench warming’ as you call it.” He glares accusingly at Dean, the look on his face almost impressive in its intimidation. Dean knows a couple of guys who would pay big money to be able to give a look like that. “Three, you are not a good person. I do not like you. I do not think you should be captain. Do not think you can intimidate me, boy, because if you get in my way, I will not hesitate to rectify the problem.”

Through his absolute rage, Dean can’t help but feel a tiny bit of admiration. Because that was…it was bad ass. Guy has balls of steel. He’s disgusted with himself for it, but he’s a little impressed. And a little something else he can’t put a name to. Standing up abruptly, he points the stick at Castiel.

Except he pointed it too soon, and he hasn’t thought of anything to say yet, because his brain is still stuck on the flinty look in Krushnic’s eye and the certainty in that fucking rough voice and god
dammit brain, of all the times to obsess over something so fucking stupid.

So instead he mutters shortly, “asshole,” (idiot, his brain proclaims; you’re an idiot) and storms out of the locker room, almost bowling over Crowley in the process, which, in retrospect, probably would have improved his mood slightly if he’d managed it.

Crowley raises an eyebrow at him and brushes a hand over the spotless shoulder of his suit jacket. “I hope you cleaned up after your little wank fest with Krushnic.”

“Stuff it up your ass, Crowley,” Dean snaps without breaking stride.

“Let’s remember our rules about consent, Dean.”

Dean flips him off and continues onto the ice in his gym shoes, which is a dumb idea, but apparently twenty-five years in skates is good for something, because he’s able to make it to the penalty box on the other side of the rink, dumping his duffle bag and angrily ripping out his pair of practice skates.

He doesn’t have any of his other gear out here, only the stick he’d been wrapping and a puck he finds stuffed at the bottom of the duffle, but he doesn’t fucking care. When his skates are on, he heads out onto the ice in his jeans and Henley, handling the puck back and forth in tight, angry movements.

Fucking Castiel Krushnic.

Thwak. He slams the puck at the net so hard the rebound comes bouncing back. Gathering it, he skates around the back of the net and back to center ice.

Thinks he can come in here and play God.

Thwak.

Like he’s some goddamn replacement for Victor, or better than him.

Thwak.

Thinks because he’s got blue eyes and a fucking deep voice he’s suddenly in charge.

Thwak.

Why

Does

He

Keep

Thinking

About

His

Stupid

Fucking
Eyes?

He slams the puck as hard as he can to the other end of the ice, the handle of his stick splitting off with a loud crack and sending the end of it spinning off to the side, while the puck hits the glass so hard that the boards wobble.

“WINCHESTER!”

Dean winces in the way only a disappointed yell from a parent can create, avoiding Bobby’s disapproving glare as he slowly skates around the ice to pick up the other end of his stick and then his puck.

Fuck, he really liked that stick.

“This was my favorite stick,” he tells Bobby morosely when he meets him on the edge of the ice, hoping to elicit some sympathy, any sympathy.

“Then turn it into an ass scratcher,” Bobby snaps sharply. “Just what the hell do you think you were doing, boy? Or were you even thinking at all?”

Clearly the stick thing wasn’t going to work then.

“I was pissed off, okay?” he says angrily, tossing the puck to the recycled rubber carpeted ground. “That fucking Krushnic is a real dickhole, Bobby.”

“Coach Singer,” Bobby demands. Shit, he’s more pissed off than Dean thought. “And I could give a rat’s ass if he’s Satan’s dickhole himself, he’s your teammate, and you’re the captain, for fuck’s sake! Get your head out of your ass and treat him right Dean, or you’re gonna find that pretty ‘C’ on your chest gone real quick.”

“Are you fucking kidding me?” Dean laughs incredulously. “Are you seriously threatening my captaincy? He’s a fucking tool Bobby, not even the pope would play nice with him.”

“Figure it out Winchester,” Bobby says darkly. “You wanna be a leader, you can damn well act like one.” Bobby leaves for the office without another word, probably to call Carver and bitch about what a bunch of complete idiots he’s supposed to coach. Same thing he does every season. Except this one feels different.

Dean looks down at the broken pieces of his stick, the fucking two hundred dollar stick, and tosses it into a nearby trashcan.

Practice starts in an hour.

“Fuck me.”
September, usually Dean’s third favorite month, has become his least favorite. Every day, he drags himself to practice, and every day he’s forced to tolerate Krushnic’s presence. Hockey used to be everything to him, and now he can barely get excited about it. He hates Krushnic even more for it.

What’s worse is nobody seems to care as much as Dean. Krushnic continues to arrogantly show them all up and to directly point out every single flaw he sees, but it’s like they’ve all become used to it. That or they all lost their hearing. Bobby’s constant glaring and the reminder of his threat is the only thing that keeps Dean from speaking up, so he’s taken the opposite route and has avoided talking to Krushnic at all.

Even Sam was being a jerk about it, telling Dean to just get over it and start focusing on the season. Not only was this Dean’s line, but he was always particularly pissed off when Sam played the high and mighty card, and he makes a silent vow to never pretend to listen to Sam bitch about anything again.

He knows he’s lying to himself though, because he’s a good fucking brother and knows what solidarity means. Take notes, Sam.

He’d finally gotten a hold of Victor about half way through the month, and even he’s not sure if he was just relieved to finally hear from his friend or relieved because finally someone was going to be on his fucking side.

He thought.

“Yeah man, I’m doing great,” Victor answered when Dean asked. “Guys here are nice, the coach isn’t too much of a hard ass…besides the accents and the poutine, it’s almost like America here. ‘Cept man do these folks love their hockey.”

“Hey, Chicago loves hockey.”

“Sure, Dean, but they love it here, if you get my drift,” Victor laughed. “It’s the sport, you get what I’m saying?”

“Yeah, yeah, alright Mr. Cultural,” Dean said. “So I don’t have to come up there and kick anyone’s ass for not playing with you at recess?”

“Please, most of the guys here would kick your scrawny ass, Winchester, which you’ll see when we have our game in a few months.”

“Hey, I thought Canadians were supposed to be nice?” Dean protested.

“I’m a work in progress,” Victor told him. “So how’s the new kid? What’s his name? Kruchev?”

“Krushnic. But the Soviet dictator might have been a better option,” Dean muttered. “Guy’s a total asshole, Vic. Thinks he’s better than everybody else an’ makes no effort to become part of the team other than to show up at practice, and here’s Bobby threatening to take away my captaincy if I don’t start holding his hand and skipping to practice every day.”

Victor whistled. “So lemme guess, you’re ignoring the problem.”

Dean grunted but wouldn’t admit it, because Victor doesn’t need to think he knows everything about
Then he’d sighed. “Alright Winchester, here’s the deal. There comes a time in our lives when no one holds our hand anymore, and then we got to grow the fuck up. Maybe Krushnic can be a little maturity session for you. Treat him like a teammate and maybe he’ll become one, alright? Problem solved.”

“Did you miss the part about him being an asshole?” Dean said. “I don’t want him as a teammate.”

“You gotta stop obsessing about my fine ass, Winchester. You’re a smart guy, alright. You got every tool in your power to make this situation turn out exactly the way you want it to. Teach him manners and get ready, because we got two weeks to opening day.”

The rest of the conversation had been about schedules, how Nancy was doing, and how much the St. Louis team sucked, but even that hadn’t made Dean feel any better. He thought for sure out of anyone Victor would agree treating Castiel as coldly as possible was the way to go, but apparently not.

Well, everybody could take their moral high ground and shove it up their ass. Dean wasn’t going to pretend to like somebody when he didn’t.

Whatever. September was sucking the worst it had since Dean was forced to attend school, and Dean was handling it in the most manly and stoic way possible, because he was an adult, damn it.

“Why are you pouting?” Sam asks.

“I’m not. Shut up,” Dean tells him, closing the door of the Impala and shouldering his duffle bag.

“Yes you are,” Sam frowns. “You’ve barely talked all week, and you keep making excuses to get out of going to the Roadhouse with the rest of the team.” Dawning recognition crosses his face. “This is about Castiel, isn’t it?”

“Castiel?” Dean asks, the word foreign in his mouth. “You mean Krushnic?”

“His name’s Castiel,” Sam sniffs. “You know, like how I’m Sam and you’re Dean.”

“Yeah alright, thanks Professor Professorton. I think the class gets it,” Dean says, shooting a look at a man staring at them from across the parking lot. The man looks away and Dean continues his quick stride into Crowley’s. “Hurry up, Sam, I’m not in the mood to beat up any creepy parking lot guys for you today.”

“You’re so pessimistic,” Sam huffs, like it personally offends him. Probably does, optimism practically pours out of his ears.

“More like realistic,” Dean tells him. “People suck, Sammy, now come on, get inside.”

“This is why you don’t have a lot of friends,” Sam muttered.

“Don’t be bitter, Sam, it doesn’t go with your hair.”

Sam glares at him and huffs off into the rink ahead of Dean, and since he has giraffe legs he actually managed to get a couple of seconds ahead. When Dean pushed open the door to the rink just behind him, he almost smacks into his brother, who’s abruptly stopped. “What the fuck, Sam?” Dean complains, ducking around him.
He sees what Sam’s problem is right away. Most teams in the NHL have a group of women called ‘Ice Girls’ that come out during breaks and shovel up all the loose ice, mainly for the purpose of giving sad lonely guys at the game something to jerk off to when they get home. Dean gets a mini sexist rant from Sam every time they come out during a game, and yeah, so maybe he agrees it’s a dumb idea. Whatever. Once he got past the fact that every single one of them is hot as hell, he’d figured out most of them were really cool girls. It’s probably selfish of him, but he hopes they stick around.

A lot of times the girls will show up at Crowley’s before the team practices to skate together, which Dean both likes and hates. If he gets out there early enough sometimes they’ll let him join in (a couple of them are damn good hockey players) but the downside is the distraction it creates for every idiot on his team.

Currently Gabriel, Balthazar, and Ash are sitting on the bleachers, leaning forward and watching the women on the ice intently.

Dean sighs heavily. “Come on,” he tells Sam, heading towards them.

Sam follows silently, glowering, the biggest idiot of them all. Dean rolls his eyes and dumps his bag, climbing up the bleachers and cuffing Gabriel in the back of the head before sitting beside him.

“Don’t you perverts have anything better to do?”

“No, I don’t believe so,” Balthazar says, glancing at him. “Do you see Lisa? Excellent form, that one.”

“So I guess that means you’ve got the playbook memorized.” Dean pushes, ignoring him.

“Chill, dude.”

“I’m with mullet head,” Gabriel says. “Shut up, Deano, we’re enjoying the view.”

“You guys are horrible,” Sam says suddenly. “How would you like it if you were objectified like this? They’re just people, you’d think they could skate without you guys drooling all over it.”

“I’m not sure about you, Sam, but I am certainly objectified by many of my female fans, and I enjoy it immensely,” Balthazar grins.

“Amateur,” Gabriel snorts. “I get objectified by the guys too.”

“I’m just appreciating their fine, dudette forms.” Ash shrugs. “Don’t get your panties in a twist, Sam Man, we know how to treat ladies right.”

Dean glances at his brother, who still looks vaguely pissed off. Even though Sam really is into this social justice stuff (seriously, kid should’ve been a lawyer), Dean know he’s only this royally pissed because of his giant girly feelings for one specific person.

“Hey Sam!” Jess waves as she skates by, grinning at him. Sam practically falls off of the bleachers trying to wave back, causing Gabriel to roar with laughter.

“Smooth, bro,” Ash says.

“I hear sometimes women will say yes when you ask them out, if you wanna try it,” Gabriel suggests.

“Shut up,” Sam mutters.
His little brother won’t admit it, but it’s pretty obvious he’s got a huge hard on for Jess. Dean sees it. Sam is a giant nerd, and Jess is only an Ice Girl to put herself through veterinarian school, so that kind of makes her a nerd too. It’s fairly clear to Dean that Jess likes Sam just as much as he likes her, but he’ll never do anything about it, because Sam’s interaction with the opposite sex never made it past middle school.

Balthazar reaches past Dean and nudges Sam. “Here they come. Now’s your chance, big boy.”

Sam shrugs him off and Dean is forced to suffer the most awkward thing he’s ever witnessed as Sam moves his hands first to his lap, then to the bench beside him, then to his knee.

“Dude, what the fuck are you doing?”

Sam doesn’t get a chance to answer as most of the girls are now off the ice, and Jess and Lisa are heading towards them, both laughing. Lisa is one of Dean’s favorites. She has a mean fucking slap shot.

“Hey!” Lisa says when they reach the bleachers. “You guys ready for the season?”

“Depends, are you actually going to do a decent job of cleaning up my net area this year?” Gabriel asks.

“Asshole,” Dean says, pushing him off the side of the bleachers. Gabriel lands with a loud “oomph,” scowling at Balthazar and Ash, who are both grinning down at him.

Lisa smiles prettily at him in thanks. “Guess I don’t have to ask how weight training is going.”

“Nah, we haven’t even started weight training yet. Gabriel’s just that weak,” Dean replies, giving her a smile in return. “You looked good out there though, Lise. You been practicing?”

“Actually, I’ve been teaching Jess,” she says, gesturing at her friend. “She wanted to learn this summer.”

“Oh yeah?” Dean asks, nudging Sam. “She a good teacher, Jess?”

“Of course!” Jess says brightly. “I never knew hockey was so much fun.”

“I’ve taught her all I can teach her though, I’m afraid,” Lisa sighs mock sadly. “She’ll need a professional to go any further.”

Lisa looks at Sam. Dean looks at Sam. Balthazar, Gabriel and Ash start softly chanting, “Do it, do it, do it,” in the background.

Sam’s brain is having some kind of meltdown. Dean can actually see it happening. His brother, who usually won’t shut up, has nothing to say. And he still doesn’t seem to know where to put his hands. Dean would feel sorry for him, if this weren’t so fucking hilarious. Never again can Sam give him crap about his relationship with women – this is just way too good as ammo.

“Sammy,” Dean says loudly. “Got anything you wanna add to the conversation?”

Sam visibly hesitates. “Uh, I’m, ah, a good teacher,” he says lamely. “So I can. You know. Help, if you want.”

“Wow, thank you!” Jess says, grabbing his hand. “My phone’s in my bag, come with me and I can get your number.”
Dean shakes his head as he watches Sam being dragged away. Poor Sammy. Kid never really had a chance to meet many girls. Hockey had been their entire lives, and when they weren’t at practice or games, they’d been with what their Dad liked to call ‘perfection practices.’ Sam had been to college on a hockey scholarship, just like Dean, but whereas Dean had been sure to get as much sex as he could out of the star hockey player thing, Sam probably hadn’t even noticed girls existed. Stakes had been high for his little brother, with Dean already drafted and Dad anxiously waiting for Sam to get into the NHL, pushing him to his limits right up until the day he’d died.

Obviously there must be women all over the country who for some reason think Sam is the more attractive one, but fans are different then the real deal.

Dean feels for his brother, he really does.

Not enough to not laugh about it though.

“Like a deer in headlights,” Gabriel’s saying.

“Well that’s it, you know,” Balthazar shakes his head sadly. “After today we’ll have to give Sam his big boy pants.”

“I think it’s cute,” Lisa defends. “Every girl likes a sensitive guy.” She glances at Dean, who in turn makes a face.

“Sure, Sammy does all that emotion stuff. If I’d have known it was gonna get him a girlfriend, I’d have made him cry and kicked his ass out on the sidewalk sooner.”

“Sounds familiar. Isn’t that how you get a ride home every night, Gabriel?”

“Only when I cry real pretty,” Gabriel says. “Sometimes showing leg helps too.”

“You guys are jerks,” Lisa shakes her head in disapproval at them, waving goodbye as some of the other girls call out to her on their way out the door. “Hey. Who’s that?”

Dean doesn’t even turn around to look. He knows who it has to be, because his life is just fucking peachy like that.

“Yo, Krushnic!” Ash calls out. “Be polite and come say hi to the lady!”

“Krushnic?”

“New player,” Dean tells her shortly. For two weeks he’s been able to avoid a situation involving direct interaction with Krushnic, and now Ash is calling him over just like any other teammate. Maybe he should just walk away and claim he needed to piss if anybody asks.

Too late.

“Hello,” Krushnic says, eyes running over all of them and coming to a rest on Lisa. He slowly holds out his hand. “I’m Castiel.”

“Cas-teeel?” she questions, shaking. “Wow, pretty name. I’m Lisa, resident Ice Girl.”

“I’m afraid I don’t know what that is.”

“Personal strippers,” Gabriel chimes in. Balthazar and Ash start giggling.

“How ‘bout you idiots stop your schoolgirl routine and go get dressed?” Dean says, patience finally
snapping. If he has to sit here, he’s not dealing with this. Luckily they leave without too much fuss, Gabriel grumbling about how he put the dick in dictator.

“I shovel up the loose ice during breaks so the Zamboni doesn’t have to be brought out every five minutes,” Lisa smiles at Krushnic.

“That sounds very boring,” he says, looking slightly confused.

She laughs. “Maybe, but I love my job.”

“Not everyone’s got the luxury of being Russia’s golden boy.” Dean doesn’t look at him, keeping his eye on Sam over by the benches. It looks like he and Jess are wrapping up, and as soon as he gets his ass back over here Dean is getting out of this conversation.

“Believe me, I am far from any golden boy to the Russian people,” Krushnic frowns, staring intently at Dean. Dean can feel his creepy gaze boring into the side of his head, and finally he gives in and turns to glare back, because he fucking hates false modesty.

Krushnic doesn’t look away when Dean glares, so Dean just continues. What the hell does he care? He’s not the weirdo, Krushnic is. Why does he like staring so much? It’s creepy, is what it is.

“Um, Dean?” Lisa says.

Dean resentfully rips his gaze away, loathe to be the one essentially performing the equivalent of blinking first. Sam is standing next to Lisa, looking at him and Krushnic with his brow furrowed. It’s never good when Sam’s brow is furrowed.

“Did you ask her out?”

Sam flushes bright red, mutters shut up, and stomps off towards the dressing room. Dean gives Lisa an apologetic quick goodbye before heading after Sam, completely ignoring Krushnic.

Dean teases his baby bro about his inability to ask out a girl until Sam gets mad enough to slam his locker, prompting Bobby to stomp out of the office and yell at them all to quit being idjits. Then he announces the practice for the day is a contact practice, and Dean’s so damn excited he’s out on the ice before anyone else.

Contact practices mean you can hit people. As hard as you fucking want. And you get hit in return. Dean swears, the biggest rush is when someone like Benny slams into him and he doesn’t fall, or when he gets back up quickly with every muscle in his body screaming to race as fast as he can after the puck anyway.

Plus, this is his first chance to absolutely crush Krushnic.

The day is looking up.

The go through blocking drills, and Dean takes turns slamming his teammates into the boards and being slammed into them himself. Finally Bobby announces they’re ready for a small practice game drill, and Dean can barely contain his whoop of approval when Krushnic is put on the opposing team.

Dean’s position is center, and Krushnic is right wing, so they’re almost never guarding each other. Dean doesn’t mind because he knows he’ll have a chance to hit Krushnic as soon as he’s going after a puck, but the opportunity never comes. In fact, Dean barely feels like he’s touching the puck at all. He’s tapping his stick on the ice for all it’s fucking worth, but every time it even looks like Benny
and Sam might want to give it to him, suddenly they’re heading to the other end of the ice. Dean gets so frustrated he stops obsessing over slamming into Krushnic and starts hustling, avoiding Balthazar’s attempt to hit him in an effort to get to the puck that’s slid alone to the center of the ice.

Suddenly Krushnic is in front of him, and Dean is so surprised he unintentionally slams into him and falls over in the process. By the time he’s gotten up, Krushnic’s already at the other end of the ice and taking a shot on Gabriel.

“Shit,” Dean swears softly, skating slowly back to the center of the ice to join Balthazar so Bobby can drop the puck for the face off. He wins it, takes it forward two feet before it’s swept away from him.

Krushnic has it again.

From that point on, it becomes pretty clear why Dean can’t touch the puck to save his life. Anytime it even looks like it might come in his direction, Krushnic is there to take it away. Dean thinks he’s managed to touch it three times the entire practice, and it’s beginning to slowly drive him insane.

Sam catches him muttering darkly to himself and nudges Dean’s skate with his stick. “Just hit him if it’s bothering you so much,” he says as he goes by.

So that’s great, everybody’s noticed Dean’s ineptitude. Fucking great. It’s not like Dean hasn’t been trying to hit him, but Krushnic always pulls up at the last second, and Dean has to come to an abrupt stop or risk slamming himself into the boards like some drug-fueled bruiser whose only coherent thought is, ‘Hulk SMASH.’

So he suffers in silence, and his patience slowly slips as his frustration levels continue rising, until he’s practically chewed a hole through his mouth guard.

Bobby calls him to center ice for another drop, and as he skates by Krushnic, the asshole finally meets his eye.

And he fucking smirks.

Dean grits his teeth as anger courses hot through his veins. He knows what he’s doing. He’s doing it on purpose.

Dean’s going to kill him.

The last straw comes when Benny finally stops laughing like the shit he is and takes pity on Dean, letting him come close enough to skate behind him so he can leave the puck and Dean can pick it up. Sam’s got Krushnic tied up in the corner, finally putting his giant abnormal body to some sort of use. The puck’s just waiting for him with no opposition in sight, and Dean feels some of his irritation drain with the anticipation of sweeping it smoothly down the ice with his stick and easily dumping it in the back of the net.

A loud yell from Ash pulls his attention away, just for a second, and in that second, Krushnic sticks the puck away from Dean and skates off. Sam is on his ass by the boards, rubbing his elbow as Ash stands over him and encourages him to get up.

Dean sees red.

As he takes off down the ice after Krushnic, the only thought in his mind is to slam him into the boards so hard he goes bouncing off of them like a rubber ball. If Sam is seriously hurt, he’s going to do it again, and again, and again, until Krushnic doesn’t even remember his own fucking name.
Krushnic is caught up on the boards in the corner, perfectly positioned, and all noise stops as Dean’s mind goes blank, his gaze trained solely on Krushnic and the area of his upper chest that Dean is going to drive his shoulder into, coming slightly from below so it lifts him up and slams him full body into the glass behind him…

Searing pain shoots through his left shoulder, and sound comes flooding back into his brain just in time for him to hear the loud smack of his own body against the boards.

He gets up too fast to really register that his shoulder hurts like a bitch, too intent on finding Castiel and kicking the living crap out of him. He’s cheating somehow, the fucking bastard, because there’s no way he could have avoided that hit, there’s no way he could have knocked Sam over, and there’s no way he’s been able to steal the puck from Dean every single time he gotten a hold of it. No. Fucking. Way.

Dean spins until he finds Krushnic, doesn’t even register the look on his face before he’s violently shaking his gloves off and raising his fists. Whatever emotion Krushnic had been displaying before instantly vanishes, and he stares flatly at Dean. His gloves don’t come off.

“Fight me, you stupid son of a bitch.”

“No fighting!” Bobby yells, but Dean doesn’t acknowledge him and doesn’t care. He can’t see anything but Krushnic through the haze of red and a curious tinge of blue, blue, blue. Nobody grabs him to pull him away, so Dean guesses despite Bobby’s warning there’s going to be no interference, and he diverts all his energy back to glaring at Krushnic with his fists raised.

“I’m not going to fight you, Dean.”

“It’s Winchester,” Dean spits, growing impatient. “Fight me!”

His vision is beginning to clear a little, and he can see the entire team gathered around, watching. He might be embarrassed if this wasn’t exactly how every one of them solved their problems on the rink. If anyone should be embarrassed, it should be Krushnic. There’s nothing worse than a coward.

Dean thinks the hell with it and takes a swing, hoping to force Krushnic to retaliate, but he ducks smoothly out of the way, radiating calm, and that’s when Dean really and truly loses it. Yelling out in frustration, he shoves at Krushnic’s shoulder, shouting angrily, “What, you some kind of fuckin’ fairy?”

The next thing he knows he’s been slammed back into the boards, a hard body pressed against him and an elbow to his throat. Krushnic has got him in an iron tight grip, his face so close the visor of his helmet keeps bumping Dean’s. His face is set in that stony, intimidating look again, although this time Dean actually feels the emotion behind it, radiating off of Krushnic in waves, boring into Dean by way of blue eyes now so bright with fire he can’t believe he’s not being burned. For once he’s smart enough to keep his mouth shut, struggling to swallow against the hard press of Krushnic’s forearm.

“Do not,” Krushnic says slowly, heat and malice dripping from every word. “Test me.”

Dean doesn’t say anything, and Krushnic actually presses in tighter, his arm shoving right up to Dean’s windpipe and the entire length of his body pressed close to Dean’s. Dean shifts. Castiel follows the shift, which allows Dean to bring his hand up and clasp the naked skin between Krushnic’s glove and the sleeve of his jersey. He feels a brief flash of more warmth, of strained muscle and smooth skin in the brief nano-second before Krushnic startles at the touch, and Dean manages to push him away.
“Yeah, fine,” he says shortly, and he tells himself the hoarseness in his voice is because of all the shouting, because of the adrenaline crash. Not because Krushnic just crushed it into submission.

Bobby’s right there, more disappointment on his face than Dean thinks his heart can stand. “Get out of here, Dean,” he says quietly. “Go home. Put some ice on that shoulder.”

Dean would feel better if he had yelled.

He can feel his shoulder now, throbbing with anger from where he’d decided to aggressively introduce it to solid glass, so he doesn’t make a fuss. Avoiding his teammate’s eyes, he says, “C’mon, Sam.”

“I…Dean, I have to stay.” Dean looks up, and Sam has those damn imploring puppy dog eyes trained on him. “I need to finish practice. And…and Castiel said he’d help me with my shot.”

Dean stares at his little brother, the kid he’d practically raised from birth, and all he sees is the deepest form of betrayal possible, because Sam’s not coming with him, and nothing else matters.

“Yeah. Yeah, alright,” he mumbles. “See you later.”

Probably not. He wasn’t planning on being sober later.

He ends up at The Roadhouse because, even though there’s a risk the team might show up here, it’s the only place he’s guaranteed not to be bothered by fans. He should have at least another hour before anybody he recognizes makes it here from Crowley’s anyway, so he might as well get as drunk as he can in the meantime, then stumble home and sleep all weekend.

Friday night means the bar is slightly more crowded than usual, so Dean’s actually got to wait a few minutes after sitting down for Jo to spot him and bring over a beer.

“You look like you’re in a good mood.”

“The best,” Dean grunts, taking the beer from her. He hopes that’s the end of the conversation. He wants to be in and out of here as quickly as possible, which means he’ll accept Jo’s beer, but after that it’s going to be nothing but Jack.

Jo can usually tell when Dean’s in a shitty mood, but she’s either feeling chatty or that little sister instinct is just urging her to do her best to piss him off, because instead of heading off to serve someone else she leans over the bar, resting her chin in her hand. “Where are the guys?”

“Practice?”

She frowns at him. “Why aren’t you there?”

“I was. ‘M not now.”

“Well geez, you are grumpy,” she says, swirling her finger through the condensation that has dripped from Dean’s beer to the bar. Dean waits for her to continue, but when she doesn’t, he shrugs internally and drinks down half his beer in one go.

When Jo continues to not say something, he begins to grow suspicious. Jo’s not annoyingly chatty like some women he’s known, but she’s never passed up the opportunity to be nosy or pushy, and ignoring a situation in which she could be both is more than a little strange to him. For a second, he’s able to pull his head away from his own problems. “What’s up with you?”

“Oh-kaaaaay,” Dean sounds out slowly, throwing back the rest of his beer. “Whiskey?”

Jo pours him a finger without complaining about his manners. He’s entered the Twilight Zone.

“Actually,” she says suddenly, “Mom hired a new server today.”

“So?” Dean asks, throwing back the whiskey. Jo immediately pours another and then just sets the bottle down next to his glass. Smart.

Jo shrugs and leans against the bar again. “I don’t know.”

Dean knows Jo is acting weird, way outside the range of having an off day. If he were a good friend, a good person even, he’d try to figure it out, but Dean’s a fuck up who can’t even figure out his own problems, and he’s never understood how he’s kept the friends he does have, so he grabs the whiskey bottle and fills his glass again.

“Any special reason you’re trying to drink yourself under the table, or is it just for funsies?”

Dean raises the glass in mock salute. “Always a class act, ain’t ya Jo?”

He notices with some satisfaction the familiar spark in her eye. She snatches the bottle away and straightens up. “You either quit being a dick and open up to your bartender like you’re fucking supposed to, Dean Winchester, or you can go ruin your life somewhere else. What’s it gonna be?”

Dean makes a half-hearted noise of protest, but he actually really wants to bitch. Just as long as Jo actually allows him to get drunk. “You’re not going to tell Bobby, are you?”

Jo considers this. “If you promise not to get irresponsibly drunk during the actual season, I will let you do it now.”

Dean shakes his head and continues, “Because I swear Jo, if you even mention it to Bobby…”

“I won’t! Sheesh.” She sets the bottle back down.

“Sam either,” Dean adds, because he’d get just as much, if not more, grief out of Sam than he would out of Bobby.

He doesn’t care what kind of biology psychology bull crap that kid has picked up. Just because Dad had been somewhat of an alcoholic doesn’t mean he’s predisposed to be one too, or whatever. He likes alcohol a normal amount. Which is to say it burns like hell, but hey, at least if you keep going soon the burn becomes your only problem.

“Fine, I won’t mention it to Sam either,” Jo rolls her eyes. “Which I’m guessing means that you’re getting out of here before he and the team show up, which then of course means that your grumpy face has something to do with them.”

“Regular fuckin’ Sherlock Holmes,” Dean drawls. “And I don’t have a grumpy face, whatever the hell that means.”

“Yeah you do,” she argues. “You get these little lines here, between your eyes, and your mouth gets all pouty and somehow it makes your cheekbones, like, ten times more cut.” Jo leans forward to poke one of his cheekbones and he slaps her hand away.

“Oh明明, Jo.”
Jo sighs, heavy and dramatic. “So what is it? A girl finally say no to Dean Winchester?”

Dean snorts. He’s never had that problem, at least. Can’t even really imagine it. Man is that the sign of a blessed athlete if he’s ever heard one. Life sucks for everybody. “It’s Krushnic.”

“Dude, are we still bitching about him?”

He raises an eyebrow at her over the rim of his glass and makes a point of drinking before setting it back down. “Since when the hell have I complained to you about Krushnic? I stopped telling you things after you went running to Sam about that thing with Rhonda Hurley.”

Jo cackles. “Dude, she told me about that. Not my fault.”

“Don’t care, I can’t walk past a Victoria’s Secret without Sam glancing at me every five seconds now,” Dean grumbles. “But I know for sure I haven’t been in here bitching about Krushnic.”

“Well yeah, not like, you specifically,” Jo’s eyeing the area with the pool tables, where Dean saw Ellen hanging around when he walked in. She picks up a dishcloth and starts rubbing at the spotless wood of the bar in front of her. “But some of the other guys won’t stop bitching about how you won’t stop bitching, and Jesus, there’s only so much I can handle. I swear, male hockey teams have the worst simultaneous periods ever.”

Dean points at her. “Gross,” he says candidly. His lips are starting to feel pleasantly numb, which means he’s on the road to being as drunk as he wants.

“But true,” she smirks. “So what the hell is your deal with Krushnic? He was dreamy looking. Plus no one else on the team seems to care much about him.”

“S’cause they’re not thinking ahead,” he says. “Krushnic’s new. Maybe he’ll hate the team, or the NHL, or whatever, and he’ll fuck off ‘ta somewhere else. And then what are all of ‘em gonna do?” It was true, any number of things could happen to Krushnic. Yeah the guy’s an asshole, and that’s reason enough for Dean to be irritated by the whole thing, but he was temporary. He had to be. He wasn’t a replacement for Victor, and rookies themselves were temporary. Dean can’t even count how many he’s seen hurt or moved down to the AHL or just unable to handle it. So fuck Krushnic, and fuck the rest of the team for not realizing the same thing. He sure as hell wasn’t going to be their shoulder to cry on.

“Huh,” Jo huffs. “You think maybe you’re just projecting your hurt feelings over Victor leaving?”

“My feelings aren’t hurt,” Dean says in disgust. “That’s life, Jo. It’s what happens. It would just suck if the team got ruined over it.”

“Whatever you say, Dean,” Jo tells him. “I gotta go serve some other people before Mom gets over here and tears me a new one. Holler if you finish that whole bottle and feel like poisoning yourself more.”

“Cheers,” he replies sarcastically.

The next half hour is the fastest Dean’s gotten drunk since his first night away from his dad in college. John Winchester, while having no problem with alcohol himself, would have killed either Sam or Dean if he found them drinking during hockey season. Dean’s not sure what he was trying to prove by taking fifteen shots the first time he had opportunity to.

He’d seen what alcohol did to John, and if he were smart he’d stay away from it. But Dean never claimed to be smart, and he figured it couldn’t be too bad for him. He wasn’t dead yet. And it did
have its benefits.

Not that he can remember any of them right now, he thinks as he drains his glass. Is this the fourth or the fifth? He’s not sure. He’s not even able to organize in his brain what got him here, only that it has something to do with Krushnic and Sam and he’s pissed about it. Or at least he should be. He can’t really get up the energy for it right now.

The bar is getting too loud for him, so he spins his stool, and when the room stops spinning too he focuses on the pool table closest to him. Buncha college kids that walked into the first place that looked like it had alcohol and darts, probably. Not a fucking problem among them.

Although he continues to let his eyes wander the room (as much as he can without turning his head – doing that makes him a little fuzzy) he keeps getting drawn back to the college kids and the fantastic ass that keeps getting shoved in his direction.

He can’t see who it belongs to, either because his vision has gone blurry or because of the way they’re bent over the pool table, but damn this chick has to be hot. Has to be, no way would God punish everybody by not matching a face to that fantastic ass.

It’s round and tight, the jeans she’s wearing displaying it perfectly. He can practically feel his hands cupping it, squeezing it, sliding his hands into the back pockets of the pants and curving his hands around it like it was made for him. She’s got stronger legs (athlete, he thinks distantly) and he can imagine them wrapping around his waist as he fucks her into the wall, cupping that ass.

The bottle is almost gone, and he can barely form a coherent thought anymore other than he wants to touch that ass. He needs to get up and go hit on her, he really does, but his legs aren’t listening to him. He’s beginning to get frustrated when the perfect ass straightens up, and the head turns, and Dean catches a glimpse of strong stubbled jaw and a flat, muscular chest.

“Fuck,” he manages to mumble to himself. At least he’s pretty sure he said fuck. Whatever. He’s officially reached the drunk off his ass threshold. Time to go home.

Dean hasn’t had a truly bad hangover in years, so waking up with a furious headache and what feels like the need to throw up everything he ever tries to eat for the rest of his life is much more unpleasant than it might have been if he was used to this. He supposes he deserves it, since he had gone out last night for the explicit purpose of not remembering it.

It worked. Kind of. Too much of last night still manages to flash back to him.

So he’d managed to shove some Advil down his throat and collapsed onto the couch, barefoot and in his rattiest jeans. The dog jumps onto the couch and drapes over his lap, which normally Dean would at least put a little effort into objecting before giving in, but right now he’s too exhausted to even try. So instead Chekov gets to shed all over him. Whatever. At least his fur is warm when Dean buries his fingers into it and strokes.

The TV is on, but the sound is too low to hear or bother his head. Now that getting trashed has failed to solve all his problems for him, he should probably figure out what to do next. Grovel to Bobby,
maybe. Give him a bottle of Johnnie Walker so when Rufus finally gets back from vacation to begin assistant coaching again they’ll have enough alcohol to be able to hold a conversation with one another. That should be enough of an apology.

There’s a niggling feeling in the back of his brain telling him he’s fucked up big this time, but he ignores it. It’s not something he’s really up to acknowledging right now.

Besides, most of this is still Krushnic’s fault.

He hears his front door open, then the unmistakable sound of Sam’s huge, clomping feet. Luckily the dog jumps off of Dean and takes off to greet Sam before Dean is forced to nudge him off himself. Maybe today he can convince Sam to take the damn thing.

“Who’s a good boy?” Sam coos out of sight in the entranceway for another good few minutes before his giant frame appears in the opening to the family room. He looks slightly sheepish, with a greasy white paper bag held high in his hands and Chekov dancing excitedly around his feet.

“Hey, I uh, brought lunch.”

Dean knows this is only the first step to Sam’s apology, and that he’s going to want to talk too, but the food is distracting him from being too pissed about that. “Is that Portillo’s?”

Sam cracks a grin. “Yeah. I got you an Italian beef with peppers.”

He bets there are onion rings in there. Sam’s bribing him. “God bless Chicago,” he says anyway, making grabby hands at Sam.

Sam immediately hands the food over, and his eagerness to get rid of it becomes clear when he squats to the floor and lets Chekov attack his face with his tongue. “Didya miss me?” Sam asks. “I bet you did.”

“You gonna take that thing today?” Dean asks, pulling all of the food out of the bag (Sam got himself a salad, which Dean is tempted not to unpack so he doesn’t have to look at it).

“You know I can’t,” Sam says morosely. “Have you finally picked a name?”

“I’m not naming the thing, Sam. It’s your dog.”

“Pretty sure you feeding him and walking him and letting him live with you means he’s yours,” Sam retorts, giving Chekov a pat again.

Dean shrugs. “Alright, I’ll just keep calling it dog.”

Sam shoots him a disgusted look. “You’re such a jerk. He doesn’t deserve you,” he tells Chekov.

Dean rolls his eyes. His brother gets way too sentimental, not like him.

Though if Sam were scratching behind Chekov’s ears instead of his back, that tail would be wagging a lot faster.

“Um, Dean?”

Dean whirls around as much as one can whirl on a couch. There’s a dark haired girl there, barefoot and hair mussed. Pretty dark eyes. He has vague memories of approaching the group of college students last night, of getting a cab ride home with a lap full of giggling girl before tumbling into bed. He swears softly to himself around his mouthful of sandwich.
“Woah, sorry,” Sam says, glancing at Dean. “I didn’t realize anyone was here. I’m Sam.”

“I’m Sarah,” she replies, and Dean is glad that the name at least sounds familiar. “I was just leaving,” she shifts awkwardly, looking at Dean, but Dean can’t even begin to guess what she wants, and his mouth is still full of beef, so he nods and tries to swallow it down as quickly as possible (no doubt looking incredibly attractive in the process).

“Yeah, uh, thanks Sarah, it was really nice meetin’ you.”


Sam, the awkward idiot, actually twists around to watch her leave, calling, “bye!” as the door shuts behind her. He then turns wide-eyed to his brother. “Seriously, Dean?”

“What?” Dean frowns, rummaging around for his onion rings. “Nothing wrong with a little sex, Sammy.”

“You could have told me she was here, at least.”

To be honest Dean hadn’t remembered himself, which means last night hit him much harder than he originally thought. Now that he tries to think about it, he’s not really sure how he got from his bedroom to the kitchen this morning. He’s not going to admit that to Sam though, because it’s going to mean lectures and protests about not being such an insensitive idiot. “Doesn’t matter, she’s gone now. But hey,” he grins suddenly around his onion ring. “Gave her something even better than an autograph, right?”

“Gross,” Sam says, finally coming to sit down next to him and grabbing his salad. Dean’s not sure if he means the food in his mouth or the statement, but honestly with Sam it could be both. Chekov jumps back up on the couch, coming to settle next to Dean instead of Sam, and he stifles the urge to gloat about something that doesn’t matter. “You were drunk last night, weren’t you.” Sam phrases it like a question, but all Dean hears is accusation.

“So what?” he asks, automatically defensive. “It’s not a crime.”

Sam heaves a giant sigh and sets his salad down, turning to face Dean on the couch. “Look, man, I know you were upset yesterday and I didn’t really do anything to help—,”

“Damn straight,” Dean interrupts. “You actually made it worse. Who picks the asshole teammate over their own brother?”

Sam makes a pained face. “Dean, I know Krushnic can be rude and kind of…abrupt, but you were a real dick yesterday. You’re lucky he didn’t punch you for what you said to him. You better than anyone should know how touchy guys we know get about stuff like that.”

Yeah, Dean does know. He’d never deny that he was good looking, because he knows he is, but some guys have commented on it before. Especially when he was younger. Calling him pretty and fairy and light on his skates. They learned real quickly how full of bullshit they were after Dean had delivered a solid punch, but yeah. He gets it.

“Which is dumb,” Sam is continuing, “Because there’s nothing wrong with being gay, but you know a lot of the guys think there is something wrong with it. But y’know, nobody likes being accused of being something they aren’t, and it was derogatory…”

“Sam, shut up,” Dean says. “I wanted him to fight me. Maybe if the asshole had just punched me things would have ended better last night.”
“Not all things can be solved by fights, Dean,” Sam says, looking disapproving. “Besides, Krushnic doesn’t fight.”

“What?”

“He told me last night. He’s never fought during a game.”

“What kind of hockey player doesn’t fucking fight?” Dean asks disbelievingly. The idea is unimaginable to him, least of all because when a team knows some guy on the ice isn’t going to stand up for himself they tend to fuck with him more.

Sam shrugs. “He doesn’t.”

“Yeah, and you’re just great BFF’s now,” Dean says bitterly. “What, did he take you out for drinks and dancing after you perfected your slap shot together?”

“You need to chill,” Sam says firmly. Dean takes a big open-mouthed bite of his sandwich in retaliation, and Sam makes a face. “Seriously, Dean, he’s not that bad. If you’d talk to him a little you’d see. I think most of it is cultural, you know, he doesn’t talk as much because this isn’t his first language and he’s more, I dunno, to the point.”

Dean snorts. “Yeah, I have talked to him, Sam. Those are also all qualities jackasses tend to have.”

“Have you tried to have a non-antagonizing conversation with him?” Sam shakes his head. “You know what, never mind, I already know the answer to that one. You couldn’t even if you tried.”

Dean gives him a fake offended look. “You saying you don’t think I could be the bigger person?” he asks, shoving the rest of the sandwich in his mouth. His cheeks bulge with the effort, but he’s not spitting it back out now.

“No,” his brother answers, looking slightly amused. “I don’t think you could be.”

Dean shoots him a look and grabs the remote, turning the volume up on the TV. What a load of crap. He could totally be a better person than Krushnic. Sam was gonna eat his friggin’ words.

Dean ended up at the bar again that night, because he was an adult and he could get drunk if he wanted to. Maybe round two was all he needed to feel shitty enough physically so the mental stuff could finally take a goddamned break.

He catches sight of Benny and Chuck towards the end of the bar where Ellen has TV’s hanging, so he heads to a less populated area around the other side. He’s not really up to facing anybody from the team yet, isn’t really sure how he’s gonna do it Monday, but the longer he can hold it off, the better.

Turns out his avoidance costs him though, because he barely manages to sit down before he hears the familiar tone of excited and questioning, the, “Hey, aren’t you Dean Winchester?”

The guy is maybe early to mid-twenties, brown hair poking out of his backwards baseball cap and a wide-eyed look on his face that Dean would’ve found funny if he wasn’t so used to it by now. In the
darkness of the bar, he can’t tell what color his eyes are. “Yeah man, that’s me.”

“Holy shit,” the guy says. “Holy shit. Really? This is insane.”

Dean sees Jo approaching over the guy’s shoulder, and as soon as her eye catches his she simply
grabs a beer and sets it in front of him before moving away again. “Not that insane,” Dean says,
grabbing his beer. He’s used to this, used to people talking to him like they know him, but in a
superficial way, not in the way that creates good conversation. He hopes this kid loses interest soon,
or says what he wants and then leaves Dean alone.


“Think so,” Dean nods and shrugs. “We’re looking as good as last year, anyway. Better.”

He thinks maybe this is the end and that he’s going to be left alone, but the guy only hesitates briefly
before launching into a tirade about the playoffs last year, and how Dean’s team could have won if
they’d stepped up their offense and Benny hadn’t gotten hurt and if Los Angeles wasn’t full of dirty
cheaters who liked hitting better than they liked actually touching the puck.

Surprisingly Dean finds himself getting into it. Hockey is what he loves, and anybody he can talk to
about it makes a good conversation in his book, even if the guy is a complete stranger. Several times
during the conversation he sees Jo walk by, staring at him, but she always passes quickly, like she
has something to say but isn’t going to interrupt.

The conversation ends with the guy heading off back to the dartboards and his friends happily, an
autographed napkin clutched in his fist and huge grin on his face. Dean gets to turn back to his beer
feeling a little better about himself. It’s a win-win.

“Finally.” Jo collapses into the now vacated stool next to him, spinning it around slightly with her
weight.

“Shouldn’t you be working?” Dean raises an eyebrow and finally gets to take a sip of his beer.
Weird, he’d forgotten he even had it.

“Break,” she says.

“Aww, and ‘course you wanted to spend it with me. Didn’t know you’d gotten so soft, Joanna
Beth.”

“Jack ass,” she scowls. “And here I was thinking I could talk to you about something.”

“Never a good assumption to make, Jo,” Dean says, studying her seriously for the first time. She
doesn’t look like anything is seriously wrong, but maybe this has something to do with how weird
and out of it she was yesterday night. Dean’s not sure he wants to hear it. He’s not too good on the
emotional support front. But Jo’s like a little sister to him, and he owes it to her to at least listen, if she
has something to say.

“Well duh, I know that,” Jo rolls her eyes and reaches over the bar, using some skillful maneuvering
to retrieve a beer for herself from below the counter. “It’s not anything…you know. Never mind, it’s
not a big deal.”

Dean casually raises his beer bottle to his lips. “Didn’t have you pegged for a coward.”

“Hey, fuck you!” Jo snaps, slapping her hand on the table a little. She takes a long pull of beer,
wiping the back of her hand across her lips when she’s finished and leaning back to stare at Dean.
“C’mon, Jo,” he prompts. “You already got the hormones going, might as well get me while I’m feeling all warm and fuzzy.”

“You ever think maybe you like guys?” she asks bluntly.

He nearly spits out his beer. “What the fuck, Jo?”

“Jesus, sorry, I forgot to say no homo,” Jo rolls her eyes. “All better now? We can approach this topic like grownups?”

Dean’s not listening, his brain racing through every scenario Jo could have caught sight of that would make her ask a fucking question like this. He’s not picking up on anything. Pretty much all his friends are guys, but that’s the fucking key word here, isn’t it? *Friends*. Feeling safer now, he continues, “Why are you asking me?”

“I’ve just been thinking about it lately,” she shrugs. “You know, sexuality, or whatever, and then I saw you flirting with that guy—,”

This time Dean does spit out his beer. “When the fuck was I flirting?”

Jo frowns in a way that is scarily like Ellen and grabs a napkin to wipe up the beer Dean has just gotten all over the counter. “Like, two seconds ago. Baseball cap dude. You were leaning all close and staring at his lips.”

“We were talking about hockey,” Dean says disbelievingly. Is this what the world’s come to? Can he not make friends anymore without somebody accusing him on hitting on other men? Maybe he had been staring at the guy’s lips, but what the fuck else is he supposed to look at? He’s pretty sure he’d diverted an equal amount of attention between lips and eyes.

In fact, he’s totally sure. Jo is full of shit.

“I’ve never thought that about any guy. Ever,” he tells Jo firmly.

“Fine, fine,” she concedes. Easily, Dean is pretty sure, which is a relief for him. It means that Jo probably didn’t seriously think he was into guys. “Not you, specifically being into a guy then, but have you had those moments? When you like looking at a guy, or something.”

His brain, the fucking traitor, immediately flashes to a pair of blue eyes, and then suddenly and vividly remembers the ass from last night that he was certain the alcohol had erased. “Maybe,” he says stiffly. “That doesn’t mean I’m attracted to them.”

“Doesn’t it?” Jo asks softly, staring at the bar and not looking at him.

Dean’s brain switches immediately from ass – no pang of disappointment there, see he’s fine – to *shitfuckdamnshitfuck*. “Not that there’s anything wrong with being gay,” he sputters. Fuck. This is why he doesn’t talk, he ruins everything. “It’s fine, I got no problem with it, I’m just, you know, not,” he finishes awkwardly, shoving the neck of the beer bottle practically down his throat to get himself to shut up.

“Good thing this isn’t about you then, or your threatened masculinity,” Jo shoots back, and he’s gratified to see a spark back in her eye.

“Uh, look Jo, maybe I’m not the best person to talk to about this.”

“Yeah, you look like you’ve got your own shit to deal with,” she says, side-eyeing him.
Dean’s about to vehemently defend himself again when he realizes she must mean Krushnic. Yeah. Krushnic. It’s fine, Dean, she doesn’t think you’re gay. And you don’t think you’re gay, either. Right? So. Perfect. It’s all good.

He drains the rest of his beer and decides he’s had enough of this conversation, which is a shame because it means he’ll have to go home and drink alone, never a fun prospect. It’s now pretty clear that Jo is trying to talk herself through something, but he won’t be able to help because he sucks, and because it’s causing his head to go to some really weird places. “I’ve gotta go, Jo. I’ll see you next week, alright?”

She looks up in surprise, like she hadn’t been paying attention to him. “Okay,” she agrees, squinting at him. “Are you alright?”

“Yeah, I’m fine,” he says, patting her shoulder.

“Are you sure?” She’s still squinting.

“Yeah,” he shoots her his best shit-eating grin. She doesn’t look impressed. “You got Sam’s number, right? He’ll be able to help, I’m pretty sure. I…I wish I could help with this, alright? But you know you got me around for emergencies.”

“I know I do,” Jo nods. “You let me know if you need any help too, okay?”

“Sure,” he says over his shoulder. He’s already out the door. No more alcohol for him tonight, looks like he’s fucked his head up enough for the weekend.

He supposes the best thing about not getting drunk last night is that he’s not hungover when the dog wakes him up at six in the morning.

“Geroff, Chekov,” he grumbles. The dog doesn’t stop licking his face. Ten minutes later he finds himself outside in the chilled early morning air, in shorts of all goddamned things, jogging with Chekov racing along ahead of him.

Dean hates running. Hates it. He knows it needs to be done though, and Chekov definitely succeeds at getting him to do it. And since it’s good for him, it’s just more evidence that Sam only gave him this dog to torture him. Sam’s super into all of this health shit, even during the off-season.

Dean makes it back to his high-rise apartment building only wheezing a little, but hating Sam a lot. He mutters threats to his absent brother as he feeds Chekov his treat, letting the dog thoroughly coat his hand in slobber before petting his head. Nobody else is in the lobby this early in the morning on a Sunday, because nobody else in here has had a psycho-fitness dog forced onto them by their brother, so he wraps Chekov’s leash loosely around a table leg so he can go look at his mail. “Sit,” he tells the dog firmly, and Chekov promptly does, panting eagerly at Dean.

Damn, he’s an awesome owner.

Three minutes later, when he hears the lobby door open and excited barking, he decides maybe he
spoke too soon.

Chekov’s jumping all over a guy who’s trying his best to catch his leash, and Dean really can’t believe his friggen’ luck, because Krushic is standing in the lobby of his apartment, playing with his dog.

“Chekov,” he calls, and he swears the dog shoots him a dismissive look before going right back to jumping all over Krushnic. Dean groans internally and heads over. Krushnic has managed to make the dog sit and is running nimble fingers through his fur, murmuring in what Dean can only guess is Russian.

“This is your dog?” he asks when Dean reaches them.

“Yeah,” Dean says gruffly. “Sorry, he’s a bit of a little shit.” He crouches down beside Krushnic and his knees are immediately attacked by wiggling puppy, though Chekov is really getting too big to be called a puppy now.

“What did you call him?”

“Chekov,” Dean replies, suddenly wondering how he’s crouched onto the floor having a civil conversation with a man he really doesn’t like. “You know, after the navigator on the Enterprise.”

“Yes, I know.” Dean glances at him and sees Krushnic is grinning broadly. He almost falls over, actually dropping to one of his knees. The smile completely transforms his face, crinkling his nose and making his eyes even impossibly brighter. “I like this name. I have never seen the movies, but Chekov is one of my favorites.”

Dean stands up abruptly. Quit palling around, he warns himself. “What are you doing here, anyway?”

Krushnic looks up at him and stands slowly, meeting his gaze. “I live here. You do too, I’m guessing.”

“Yeah, I do,” he says, scratching behind Chekov’s ears when he jumped up on his legs again. The universe has to be conspiring against him. Dean’s never gotten this lucky with a chick he was into, yet here Krushnic is, turning up wherever Dean happens to be when Dean definitely doesn’t want him here. He’s about to tell Krushnic he’ll see him around and then do his best never to run into him again, when he remembers what Sam had said last night.

If he has a regular conversation with the guy, just to prove that he can, maybe Sam will shut up and he can go back to hating him in peace.

At least he likes Star Trek. Or the idea of it, since the weirdo apparently hasn’t seen it. Dean can focus on that. “Yeah, I’m on the seventh floor. Hey, you want some coffee?”

Krushnic scrutinizes him suspiciously, which weirdly makes Dean respect him a little more. At least he’s not gullible. Inviting him up for coffee two days after he tried to beat him up is kind of weird, but that’s Sam’s fault. This is only a one time deal. The more on guard Krushnic stays, the faster he can get through this and prove Sam wrong.

“C’mon man, it’s just coffee.”

Krushnic doesn’t relax, exactly, but Dean can definitely see that he’s loosening, even if he’s not sure how. Maybe something with the purse of his lips? Anyway, he finally nods, so Dean gathers up his dog and his mail and heads to the elevator, hoping he’ll follow.
Dean’s pretty proud of his apartment. He and Sammy didn’t have much of a home growing up, traveling on the road with dad, first when he was playing and then when they started becoming more serious about hockey, so this is really the first place he’s had. The kitchen’s restaurant quality, the entertainment system top of the line, and his walls are covered with hockey memorabilia, movie posters, and some of classic cars. He loves the place, and he always feels kind of vindicated when guests seem to like it too.

Chekov runs straight for the kitchen and his water bowl the second Dean unclips his leash, and Dean follows, leaving Krushnic to admire his family room. The clock on the coffee machine says it’s only eight in the morning, and he seriously considers just going to bed for the rest of the day as he puts the pot on.

He leans against the counter to wait, jolting out of the semi-sleep he’d managed to drift into when the coffee machine buzzes and his TV turns on at the same time. What the hell is Krushnic doing? He grabs two mugs and fills them before heading back out of the family room, Chekov at his heels.

Krushnic is crouched in front of the entertainment center, eyes riveted to the TV screen right in front of him. He recognizes the figure on screen immediately as Dr. Sexy, straight down to the signature cowboy boots. “Uh, hey. Krushnic?”

“Apologies,” Krushnic looks up, and again Dean is struck by the clear blue of his eyes. He was gonna have to get over unique eyes they were, falling over on the ice because Krushnic decides to look at him would do hell for his season. “I am often told one of my hobbies is curiosity.”

Dean hands over one of the mugs and says, before he can stop himself, “I fix cars sometimes.”

Krushnic glances at Dean’s hands, wrapped around his mug, and says, “Ah,” like he’s just understood something. Dean has no idea what that can be. He sips at his coffee self-consciously.

“What is this show?” Krushnic asks.

“Dr. Sexy,” Dean replies, and realizes for the second time that he’s said something without meaning to. “I think. It’s a hospital, soap opera type thing.”

Krushnic purses his lips at the screen, coffee still untouched in his hand. “I didn’t want a TV before, but I think I’ll have to get one. You have many shows I’ve never heard of that look very interesting. That man has already kissed three women since I turned it on.”

“Well, you know, good looking guy,” Dean says casually. That’s the most Krushnic has ever said at one time, and Dean’s beginning to realize that smoky voice isn’t just something he puts on for greetings and threats. Makes it hard to pay attention. It’s at this point Krushnic seems to notice he’s still crouching and he rises abruptly, bringing him within three inches of Dean. “Woah, dude, personal space.”

Krushnic frowns and takes a minute step back. Dean stares at him, waiting for him to move more, but he just returns his stare steadily. Weird. Dean suddenly feels like he’s not in charge of this conversation anymore, and he doesn’t like it.

“You have a nice apartment,” Krushnic declares, like he’s passing a law or something. “Even if it is lonely.” Dean opens his mouth to protest, because even if it’s true, Jesus, rude, but Krushnic’s already moving on. “Is that our team?”

The photo closest to the TV was taken two years ago, when they’d come out first in the season but hadn’t managed to win the Stanley Cup. All of them are standing around the President’s Trophy, smiling broadly. Has family, still intact. “It’s my team,” Dean snaps. “You weren’t here yet.”
Krushnic manages to keep his face emotionless, despite the small furrow in his brow, so Dean has no idea how he took that. “It’s my team as well, Dean. That cannot be wished away.”

“Why the hell do you keep calling me Dean? I use your last name.”

“Yes,” Krushnic frowns in thought. “I thought you couldn’t pronounce it and were too afraid to ask. You may call me Castiel.”

“I don’t want to call you Castiel,” Dean tells him, taking a large step back. “I don’t want you around my family.”

“Around Sam?”

“And the team,” Dean emphasizes. “They’re all my family, and I don’t want you hurting them.”

Krushnic just looks even more confused. “Teammates are not a family. They are part of your job.”


“Enjoyment comes second to work,” Krushnic says, his eyes hard now. “I think I understand. Your team is not successful because you feel too sentimental for one another.”

Dean wants to laugh, because that couldn’t be further from the truth. He wouldn’t know how to act sentimental if he tried. He could be defensive, he could be loyal, sometimes he could admit when someone other than Sam was important to him, but he’d never managed sentimentality. And the team was hardly unsuccessful.

“Whatever,” he says, not in the mood to argue. Sam wins, there’s no way he can have a conversation with the guy. “Just don’t hurt them, alright? They don’t need you to be their friend when we’re not even sure if you’re staying yet. You’re a dick, so there’s never a chance of us being buddies, but if you can manage to stay distant I think I can suppress the urge to kill you.”

“That’s fair,” Krushnic agrees. “What do I get in return?”

Dean blinks, because what? “What?”

Krushnic tilts his head. “What am I getting in return? So I am also able to ‘suppress the urge to kill you’.” He actually makes air quotes around his words, and Dean is so baffled by where this has gone – and by the fact that a move like that made by anybody else would be lame but for some reason he can’t get his brain to apply that word to it – that he can’t think of anything to say for several moments.

“I do not know anybody here,” Krushnic says finally. “I don’t care if you like me, but if you would allow me to talk to you occasionally in order to practice my English, I would be grateful.”

“Fine,” Dean says shortly. He can do that. Krushnic didn’t say they had to be nice talks, or even that Dean had to talk at all.

“Thank you for the coffee.” That’s the last thing Krushnic says to him, but he stays a good five minutes afterward to finish the mug, watching Dr. Sexy silently and occasionally glancing at Dean. If he’s waiting for him to break first, he’s going to be disappointed. Dean doesn’t open his mouth once, just grabs a Sports Illustrated and pretends he’s not watching Dr. Sexy too.

When the door finally closes behind Krushnic, Dean throws the magazine down and scrubs his
hands over his face. Not only is Krushnic an asshole, he’s got no social skills either. And now he’s Dean’s neighbor. Fucking great.

Next week is press week, when they start letting reporters into practice to watch and conduct interviews. The week after that is opening day.

For the first time ever in his life, Dean feels like he’s not ready for this.
It’s unheard of but, press week goes flawlessly. Gabriel doesn’t slip in any innuendos (at least none Bobby catches), Balthazar doesn’t hit on any of the reporters, Chuck manages to keep the stammer at a minimum and Dean didn’t repeat his embarrassing Freudian slip of last year (the reporter kept rubbing his hand up and down the mic, he can’t be blamed).

Krushnic, unsurprisingly, was the star of the show, charming everybody with his accent and what one reporter called, “his refreshingly deadpan humor.” After the reading the article, Dean had joked that that was just the effect of the stick shoved all the way up his ass. Sam wasn’t amused.

In all seriousness, it didn’t look like Krushnic enjoyed having to talk to the reporters at all. Dean would sympathize, because except for a few they’re only there to dumpster dive for any possible gossip. But it’s Krushnic, so he manages not to feel too bad.

Amazingly enough, nobody had leaked the awesome relationship he and Krushnic currently had going, so Dean’s only current source of pain was that the media was essentially losing their shit over their possible chemistry, of which he knew there was none.

Sorry to disappoint, people. It happens often. He’ll be here all week.

What with Bobby glaring at him all week, Sam’s judging bitch face and reporters descending on Crowley’s en masse, he hadn’t really had the chance to rag on Krushnic again. ‘Course they have that deal going, luckily something Krushnic hasn’t tried to cash in on yet (really, the first time Krushnic asks him to “talk” Dean is gonna do his best to induce a coma), but like he told him, that didn’t mean Dean has changed his mind about how he felt about him.

In fact, all this pent up aggression he had over not being able to yell made it worse. Every practice, Krushnic would do something, like not send him a pass or let him get hit or fucking even stare at him for too long, and Dean’s stomach would jump and he’d end up punching a pillow when he got home. It’s happened so often now the damn dog thinks it’s a game.

At least the season is finally here. If anything can distract Dean, hockey can. The media isn’t going to let up anytime soon, but at least he’ll be able to pay less and less attention to them.

Their first week is on the road, traveling the California circuit from LA to Anaheim to San Jose. Sam thinks its because LA beat them in the Western Conference finals last year. Dean’s pretty sure it’s because everybody on LA is a massive dick and the NHL, like a high school girl, loves to create drama.

Dean’s pretty excited about the chance to beat their asses on their own home ice on opening day. What he’s not so psyched about is the plane.

It’s not as bad as it could be. The team has its own plane, so they don’t have to fly commercial, and it’s where some of their greatest bonding happens. They get to drink booze because Bobby can’t make the three hour trip without it, and most of the time they end up playing card games. If Dean ever made it to heaven, what happens on that plane is all he really needs.

Thing is, Dean hates flying.

“I thought you’d be over this by now,” Sam sighs. “We fly about a thousand times a year.”

“Just shut up Sam,” Dean says. Keeping his eyes closed is kind of a moot point, but he does it
anyway. “How about you get over your stupid clown problems, alright? Then we’ll talk.”

“I don’t see clowns a thousand times a year, Dean!”

“Well then I better fix that, huh?”

“Is he still doing that whole closed eyes thing?” he hears Gabriel ask from his left. He did not realize how much he wouldn’t like having Gabriel where he couldn’t see him.

“Yeah,” Sam sighs heavily, like Dean is the biggest burden in the world. Dean resists the urge to try and trip him.

“Sam,” Krushnic says, and now Dean really does groan out loud. “Why is your brother wearing a tie around his eyes?”

“Because he’s a giant pussy,” Gabriel replies.

“He doesn’t resemble a cat.”

“You know the team doctor, Frank?” Sam says. “He suggested it. Dean freaks out about planes, so he thought maybe this would trick his mind or something.”

“Yeah, I really don’t need him throwing up all over my magazines again.”

“You mean your porn?”

“That is quality airplane reading material, Sambo.”

“How the fuck am I supposed to pretend I’m not getting on a plane when you two keep talking about it?” Dean snaps. He reaches up and rips the tie off, because this whole thing is stupid. Sam’s managed to lead him up the steps to the plane, so without thinking too hard about it he steps through the door, leaving Gabriel, Krushnic and Sam to follow.

Everybody else is already boarded, though Ash is the first to spot him. “Three cheers for the captain!” he yells, and everybody begins to clap and cheer. Dean flips the middle finger at all of them and slumps into one of the cushy seats near the front that’s situated around a table.

The window shade is already up, thank God. He tries not to think about take off.

“You see the news this morning Winchester?” Gordon smirks, tossing a paper into his lap before slinking to the back of the plane again.

Dean picks it up and immediately swears. “TROUBLE IN THE LOCKER ROOM?” the headline screams. Colorful pictures of both him and Krushnic are splashed all over the page, and he doesn’t need to read it to know what it says. “What the fuck?”

“What?” Sam asks, sitting down in the seat across from him. Dean wordlessly hands over the paper, which is more a gossip rag than anything else, and Gabriel, who’s decided to join their little circle as well, leans over it. To his annoyance, Krushnic sits down beside Dean. He reserves the right to make a scene.

“Who told them this?” Sam asks, looking up.

Gabriel snorts. “Who’s the one person on the team that would even talk to the media without being asked to?”
“Gordon’s the one who gave it to me,” Dean muttered. “He’d be the one to tell them something like this and then shove it in my face.”

“Why would he do that?” Krushnic asks suddenly. He’s staring at the rag in Sam’s hands, which he must have managed to read upside down, or at least get the gist of. Actually kind of impressive. Dean can barely read English upside down, and it’s the only language he speaks.

Gabriel grins widely. “Ah, Gordon hates our little Deano, doesn’t he?”

Krushnic looks like he can’t fathom this, which strikes Dean as particularly funny when he’s the only other person on the team with any real dislike for him. “Why?”

“I made him look like an ass,” Dean replies, digging into his pocket for his iPod. Sometimes if he plugs some earbuds in and turns Metallica all the way up, he can trick himself into thinking he’s in the Impala. “Not like it was hard to do.”

Sam’s grinning just as widely as Gabriel now, and they both look like a couple of idiots, sitting across from Dean. “So get this. Bobby called us in for a meeting, like two or three years ago, right? And he had Dean and Benny stand in front of him, and then the rest of the team were behind them, and he said they were both fantastic players and we’d all said they’d make good captains, but he didn’t want it to look like he was favoring Dean or whatever, so he was gonna flip a coin. And he flipped it, and Benny called tails, and it landed in front of Gordon but it was you know, behind Dean and Benny. So Gordon’s always hated Dean, we’re not really sure why, but he goes, ‘it’s tails,’ and Dean turns around and looks, and gives this stupid shit eating grin and says, ‘pretty sure that’s a head, Gordon.’ Benny agreed with him, so Dean got captain and Gordon looked like an idiot.”

“Like I said, not a hard thing to make him look like.”

Krushnic is frowning. “You were chosen to be captain by a coin toss?”

“Oh yeah, we love our coin tosses around here,” Gabriel says seriously. “That’s probably how you got put on the team, Mr. Dark and Russian.”

“For real,” Sam hastens to add at the look on Krushnic’s face.

“None of you take anything seriously,” he replies in response, although Dean thinks he looks more confused by that than angry.

“Listen up, boys!” Rufus barks from the front of the plane, and it’s a credit to him that even Andy manages to stop shouting the lyrics to ‘Pinball Wizard’ to listen. “Pilot says we’re ready to take off. Now we get three hours of being shoved into this tiny space together, so I can tell you right now, if any of you piss me or Bobby off, we’re shipping your ass to Detroit.” The team boos and Rufus waves his hand. “Yeah, yeah. None of you bug us, we don’t want to hear it.” He sits back down next to Bobby and the plane immediately explodes into noise again.

Dean shoves his headphones in and turns the iPod all the way up before gripping the arms of his seat. He sees Sam saying something to him and shakes his head. “Not now, Sammy,” he answers tightly, and the music is so loud he can’t even hear his own words.

The music doesn’t work. At all. He feels the lurch in his stomach when the plane launches itself into the air, and he squeezes his eyes shut in an attempt to block it out more. That doesn’t work either. He can feel every movement, every slight dip and turn on its side as the plane climbs higher and higher, and soon he’s drenched in a light sweat, his stomach rolling and his fingers aching from how hard he’s gripping to the seat.
He’s not sure how long he’s frozen in that position, absolutely hating his life, when he feels something heavy land on his shoulder. Opening his eyes immediately, the first thing he notices is that Gabriel and Sam are gone, probably moved to the back of the plane where the guys like to sit on the floor and play poker. Dean has no idea how they can stomach it. The second thing he notices is that the thing on his shoulder is Krushnic’s head.

Fucking embarrassing as hell. The guy’s asleep on him. Dean would push him off, except he doesn’t want to bring attention to it, to Krushnic or anybody else. He’d get shit until the end of time, and Dean doesn’t need this ending up in a gossip mag if Gordon catches wind of it either. He’s also not really eager to hear the kind of taunts the rest of the guys will come up with, or to see whatever look Sam chooses to give him.

So instead he’s stuck in his chair while Krushnic rests on his shoulder, fuming. His watch tells him they’ve been flying for two hours already (two hours of the worst hell Dean has ever gone through) with an hour to go. If Krushnic stays in this position the entire time, Dean’s gonna be real pissed.

He does it though, and what makes it worse is that Dean’s iPod runs out of battery about half an hour in. Krushnic stays on his shoulder the entire time, the occasional annoying tickle of hair brushing Dean’s cheek, and Dean’s reaching the point where he’s seriously considering not just pushing him, but pushing him hard enough to land him on the floor, when the Pilot announces that they’ll be landing soon and need to return to their seats.

Dean shrugs his shoulder so hard Krushnic bolts up violently, startling Sam and Gabriel, who are just returning. “Look out for Spazmo Joe,” Gabriel jokes, slumping into his seat.

Castiel blinks confusedly, his hair completely fucked from where it’d been shoved into Dean’s neck. Dean tries not to look at him, but he can’t help noticing that even blurred with sleep, his eyes are still ridiculous.

“Good flight?” Sam asks with concern. “I was hoping you’d fallen asleep, you didn’t say anything when I told you we were leaving.”

“S’fine,” Dean grunts, fingers tightening around the seat once again as feels the plane start to descend. He can almost imagine what the nose dive looks like. What kind of sane person enjoys this?

Sam takes the hint and doesn’t talk to him until they’re safely on the ground. Krushnic never says anything at all, and Dean prays he has no idea where he was resting his head the entire time. “Dude,” Sam says when they’re finally of the plane and on the tarmac, grabbing their luggage. “Why do you keep glaring at Krushnic?”

“What? I’m not.”

“Yeah you are,” Sam rolls his eyes. “Did something happen on the plane?”

Dean’s not sure why he tells him, but he does, easily. “Asshole was asleep on my shoulder the entire time. I was fucking trapped there, Sammy. All I had to do was be pissed off.”

Sam stares at him for a moment, looking thoughtful. Finally he shrugs. “At least you were pissed instead of afraid.”

Dean grabs his bag and leaves quickly to join Balthazar, falling into a conversation about some girl who will not stop calling him. Fuck Sam and his feelings bull crap anyway.

Of course he can’t avoid Sam once they make it to the hotel. He and his brother have been rooming together for as long as they’ve been playing hockey, so Dean grabs the room keys from the front
desk and hands one off to Sam. The team is planning on going to dinner, which means they need to wash up and change into suits before heading out.

“Dibs,” Dean calls as soon as the door to their room is open. He throws his duffle bag in Sam’s direction and makes it into the bathroom before Sam’s girly long hair can clog the drain.

He washes quickly, scrubbing off the sweat and travel grime that comes with every single flight he’s ever been on. The warm water feels good on his skin, and he’d stay in there much longer if Sam weren’t waiting and there wasn’t the very real fear of Bobby bursting in here and telling them to get their buck naked asses into gear.

He’s drying off, scrubbing a towel through his hair, when he suddenly wonders who Krushnic is rooming with. Victor was usually with Benny, but he knows Benny had been talking about having to listen to Andy snoring all night.

He’s actually running through every possibility when he realizes and stops himself. Why the fuck does he care, anyway?

Sam’s face down on his bed when Dean emerges from the bathroom, legs dangling off the end and snoring softly. Dean snaps the towel at the back of his head, causing him to jolt up with a yelp.

“Shower’s free, bitch.”

Sam slams the bathroom door when he closes it, which makes Dean grin. He’s the best roommate. Even if Bobby hadn’t told them the restaurant dress code was business casual, Dean probably would have ended up putting on a suit. We he was younger, nobody, especially his dad, had ever told him hockey players would spend half their time in suits. Out to dinner, traveling, press events, during games you weren’t suited up to play in – he owned about five ties, which was five ties more than he had ever expected to own.

Dean’d never admit it, but he kind of liked them. He looks damn good in a tie.

Five minutes later, Sam’s dressed and ready to go. “You look like a giraffe,” Dean tells him.

“I haven’t had time to go buy a new suit,” Sam replies mournfully, tugging on his cuffs. His brother looks every inch the twenty-three year old, with his pants barely reaching his ankles and his cuffs barely to his wrists. If Dean didn’t know any better, he’d think the kid was looking for his first job straight out of college.

Dean leaves Sam alone, because this is way too easy a target and he’s sure Gabriel and Balthazar are going to pick up where he left off as soon as they see Sam.

Sure enough, Gabriel begins heckling Sam immediately and keeps it up all the way to the restaurant. The place is some rich-people steakhouse called The Palm, easy to walk to from the hotel and close enough to the stadium they’re playing in tomorrow night that Dean is able to catch a glimpse of it. Bobby snaps at them all to act civilized because this is a fancy joint, godammit, and Benny makes some crack in his Southern drawl about wishing he’d known Bobby was taking them someplace fancy, because he’d have brought more singles.

It’s actually not the worst restaurant Dean has ever seen. Bobby’s forced them into places with actual crystal before, places where waiters sneered when you asked about burgers. Then Dean would complain about rich people and Sam would smugly point out that they were rich people, which ended up pissing Dean off the rest of the night because he’s nothing like a rich asshole. But The
Palm is all low lighting and paneled wooden walls and old pictures. There’s even a bar, although the hostess leads them far away from that to a private room in back where a large round table is set and waiting for them.

Dean sits, not even paying attention, and then, somehow, Krushnic is sitting next to him again.

There’s no way he’s not doing this on purpose.

“Sure you don’t want to sit somewhere else?” Dean asks roughly. He’s still feeling uncomfortable with the whole shoulder thing earlier, and that, added to him not actually knowing if Krushnic knows he was shoved up on Dean’s neck for the entire plane ride, is making him testy.

He thinks he’s got a pretty good read on Krushnic though, and guy’s not a good liar. So when he scowls at Dean and says, “Why?” before sitting down anyway, Dean’s pretty sure he has no idea. Thank God for small favors.

After seeing the guys in suits so many times, Dean’s got this theory that you can tell a lot about them by how they wear them. Chuck’s shirt is always buttoned to the very top, the knot of his tie tightened to his Adam’s apple, because the dude’s jumpy as fuck and he wears it like some kind of armor. Gabriel’s always wearing some horrible garish tie because he’s an idiot, and Balthazar wears European designer suits no one can pronounce the name of because he’s a prick. Sam…nah, still too easy a target.

Krushnic’s in a suit pretty similar to Dean’s, if a little less form-fitting. Only interesting thing is that his tie is backwards. Dean’s got no idea what that says about him.

Bobby and Rufus, as per usual along with the rest of the management team, have gone off to their own table, and left them at what Rufus calls the kiddie seats.

So Krushnic on one side, Gordon for some fucking reason on the other, and anyone else Dean would actually want to talk to too far away for him to actually hold a conversation with. Great.

“Is this a regular occurrence?” Krushnic asks.

“Dinner?” Dean says, watching the waiter who’s just appeared circle the table. He’s got bread baskets, and Dean could really use something to shove in his mouth right about now. Any excuse to be left alone. “Yeah, kinda. Happens every night here in America.”

Krushnic scowls heavily at him. “I meant eating out.”

“That too,” Dean shrugs. “We’re really into team time around here. You not hang out with your old teammates?”

“My teammates were for playing hockey with.”

The waiter finally puts the bread basket down, and Dean grabs a roll, ripping a chuck of it off and shoving it into his mouth. “Sounds like you guys were best buddies.”

Krushnic is staring at him in a kind of horrified fascination, which Dean puts down to the outstanding amount of food he just fit into his mouth. He’s not even trying to show off, really, he’s just that talented. “Not really. It is very different here.”

“Could be better,” Dean replies in a garbled voice. “When you get sent to a team that actually wants you, and if you lighten up a bit, you can have all the friends you want.”
Dean almost thinks that was too harsh, but Krushnic seems unbothered, proving he really is heartless. “Even if you don’t want me, you do need me,” he points out, taking a careful sip of water.

Dean’s saved from having to endure any further conversation by the arrival of the waiter. He’s forced to order a filet mignon with a straight face (hey, Dean loves good food – he’s damn good at making it; he just doesn’t need to look like a snob about it) but his spirits are considerably lifted when Gabriel completely butchers the word ‘parmigiana’ and Balthazar rips him a new asshole for it. Even Krushnic grins a little, which Dean figures is the equivalent to all the uproarious laughter going on around him.

Then the waiter leaves, and Krushnic’s back to talking again. For a guy who claims not to know a whole lot of English, he sure as fucking hell seems to like using it.

“Where is Chekov?” he asks curiously.

“Not hiding in my hotel room, so don’t try to find it,” Dean answers. “Lisa watches him when we’ve got long road trips.”

“Lisa is the…ice girl. With the dark hair.”

“Sure, dark hair,” Dean gives him a sarcastic smile. “Dark eyes, flexible. You want some more descriptive words?”

“No thank you,” Krushnic says stiffly, and he turns away from Dean, which he should take as his saving grace, but apparently his mouth is programmed to complain to people he doesn’t even want to talk to.

“Chekov is Sam’s dog anyway, so the thing’s lucky. If Lisa didn’t take him it’d be all Sammy’s problem.”

Krushnic frowns. “If he’s Sam’s, why do you take care of him?”

“Because Sam’s apartment doesn’t let him have a dog.”

“Then he’s your dog,” Krushnic replies matter-of-factly.

Dean snorts. “Dunno why people keep saying that.”

“Probably because it is true.”

Dean’s best friend the waiter is back with their salads, and Dean waits until he finishes serving them out before wordlessly passing his plate over to Gordon. He knows without watching it that it makes its way around the table to Sam.

Krushnic follows this whole process with his eyes, then looks down at his own plate. “I don’t like tomatoes,” he says quietly.

Dean glances over and spears the two cherry tomatoes with his fork, popping them into his mouth. “Don’t be a baby,” he mutters quietly in return. It wasn’t being nice in any way. He just happens to like tomatoes, and he gave his up to Sam.

“Fancy seeing you here, Winchester.”

Suddenly the constant chatter that’s been circling the table all but stops. Dean twists in his chair to level a hard glare at the source of all this. Zachariah Adler is a defenseman on the Scorpions, the
team they’re playing tomorrow. Dean hates just about everybody on the team, but Zach’s one of the worst. Kind of like Gabriel, he doesn’t know when to shut up.

“Pretty crazy, finding us in the city we’re playing a game in tomorrow, huh?” Dean raises an eyebrow. “What, you call every restaurant around here until someone took pity and told ya where we were?”

“Please,” Zachariah sneers. “I have better things to do with my time. I’m here with Michael.”

“Oh, how nice for you, Zachy,” Gabriel speaks up. “It’s your special night when the captain actually speaks to you, isn’t it? Don’t let us interrupt the ass kissing.”

“Just because Michael doesn’t roll around with all of the benchwarmers and fourth liners like Winchester here doesn’t mean I need to find time with him. I’m one of Michael’s favorites.”

“That’s not making sense to me,” Gabriel says, squinting. “If that’s true, why is your asshole so tight?”

Balthazar gives a delighted bark of laughter as Zach’s face darkens considerably. “I see your team has acquired another…impressive player.” His lip curls. “I suppose that’s good news for you, Winchester. You must get tired of having to wait for game day to get slammed into a wall. I suppose this one does after hours?”

Dean’s standing before he realizes it, hearing another chair slam to the ground too. His best guess is Benny, but only because he’ll be the one to stop Dean from doing something stupid. “Maybe if you spent as much time building muscle as you do running your mouth you wouldn’t feel so insecure about your size, Zach.”

“Please,” Zachariah says softly. “Me, insecure? You’re barely worth the effort it took your whore mother to get fucked and stuck with you. Remember that when we humiliate you tomorrow, and maybe you won’t feel as bad about not having her shoulder above ground for you to cry on.”

Dean calls him a very loud, very inappropriate name, and of course that’s when Bobby decides it’s time to intervene. “You say prayers with that mouth, boy?” he snaps loudly. “And you get the hell outta here, Adler, these are private rooms.”

Adler gives the slimest smile Dean has ever seen and slinks back to whatever garbage filled hole he climbed out of. Dean drops back into his chair, still pissed out of his mind.

“Cheers to the loveliest team in the NHL,” Balthazar calls, and at the least it gets the team talking again.

“He was from the Scorpions?” Krushnic asks. Dean resists the urge to snap at him, because he’s still so angry it would be biting to the point of possibly damaging how they played the game tomorrow. He’s not sure how much of that conversation Krushnic understood, or if he’d realized what Zachariah had implied about him – he’d never stood up, or gotten angry in any way that Dean can see.

Dean catches Benny’s eye from across the table, lifting an eyebrow slightly. Dean nods in return. He’s okay.

“Yeah, he’s from the other team.”

Krushnic says something in Russian that sounds pretty fucking cool. “What was that?”
“I called him..” Krushnic pauses and gestures at Dean’s head. “What is the word, it’s white and comes out of your hair?”

Dean feels his eyebrows jump incredulously. “Dandruff?”

“Yes,” Krushnic’s lips twitch slightly. “He is ass dandruff. No matter, we will beat them tomorrow and then he will know.”

Dean’s shaking. He’s shaking and he seriously cannot stop. Ass dandruff? Fucking ass dandruff? A strangled bark of laughter escapes his throat and Krushnic looks startled.

“Hey, you choking, Cap?” Ash calls. Dean manages to shake his head and Ash shrugs, turning back to Ed and Harry.

He manages to stop just as the food is arriving, but almost starts all over again because Krushnic has this fucking ridiculous bemused look on his face as his steak is set down in front of him, like he’s never seen one before.

Jesus, there’s something wrong with him.

“Are you alright?” Krushnic questions.

“Yeah,” Dean chuckles, grabbing his glass of water. “Fuck. You’re fucking weird, man.”

The soccer ball comes flying at Dean from Garth’s direction, and Dean easily catches it on his thigh before slamming the ball into Sam’s side next to him. Sam yelps as the ball hits the floor, and Gabriel elbows him out of the circle they’ve created in the empty hallway of the stadium. “Get outta here, Sammy-boy. Can’t even keep a rally going.”

“Dean launched the ball at me!” Sam protests, but he steps out of the circle anyway to join Kevin.

Two touch isn’t a game you’d think hockey players would enjoy, but just about every team he knows gets up early so they can play during team meetings. It’s a great way to get the energy up and the competitive blood flowing, kicking around a soccer ball that you can only touch twice. If you’re the last one to touch the ball before it hits the ground, you’re out. Dean’s seen a rally go for ages, but other times, like he just did with Sam, a guy’ll launch the ball at you just to see you burn. You learn pretty quickly who not to stand next to.

Someone must have grabbed Krushnic and brought him down too, but he’d opted out of the game. He’s sitting on a railing along the wall, headphones in his ear as he watches them play intently. Dean can’t tell if he’s one of those boring players that needs to imagine the game before he can play, or if he’s actually interested in two touch and just doesn’t know how the game works yet.

“Dean!” Benny yells. Dean’s knee jerks up automatically in response, miraculously connecting with the ball that was kicked his way and sending it straight up into the rafters.

Shit. First game of the season and they’ve already lost ball one.

“S’fine,” Benny says, leveling a steady look at Gordon. “Coach wanted us to gather for a meetin’ now anyway.”

Even when a game isn’t starting until seven at night, it’s really an all day thing. There are meetings where Bobby talks and they all lay around on the locker room floor, there’s warm up where they practice in the lines Bobby’s decided on for the night, then there’s changing into their uniforms, possibly saying a few words to the press, and quick warm-ups again with the stadium filled and fans screaming and cheering all around you. By the time Dean’s on the ice, hand over his heart as he looks up at the flag and listens to the National Anthem, that game of two touch seems like it was a million years ago. Doesn’t mean anything now. It’s game time.

The sound of the crowd, coupled with the announcers and the music, is deafening. Dean loves the unique soundtrack stadiums bring, can always feel the excitement and tension build in his blood, but as soon as the first whistle blows, it all whites out. All he can hear is his team, the slide of the puck on the ice and the scrape of his skates. Hockey is the only thing he’s good at, what he was put on this earth for, and damn it, that means he’s good at it.

Dean meets Michael at the center of the ice for faceoff, making sure not to spend too much time looking at the guy. Michael’s got this weird charismatic way about him that can distract you if you’re not careful. It’s no coincidence that Dean’s faceoff stats are worse when playing the Scorpions than against any other team.

“Don’t miss, Dean,” he hears Michael murmur. Before he has time to respond, the puck is dropped and they’re off.

Dean wins the puck, hitting it backwards to get picked up by Sam. Sam manages to take it all the way into the Scorpions' zone before losing it, and Dean barely has enough to think smooth move, Ex-lax before he’s racing to the other end of the ice and receiving the puck from Gabriel, who’d just made a save.

“Dean!” he hears, and he’s sending the puck down the ice like it’s instinctual, before he even really registers that it’s Benny sitting nice and pretty behind the defender, ready to take the puck into the zone. He’s there just in time to see Benny launch it over the left shoulder of their goalie Cain and into the net before he’s slamming into his friend, yelling as Krushnic comes slamming into them from the other side.

“Fucking first goal of the season!” Benny yells. “That’s ten dollars you owe me, Winchester!”

Dean bumps his visor against Benny’s, grinning. “Ten dollars my ass, Lafitte! Your grandmother could have made that shot!”

“Good job,” Krushnic calls, as typically unexcited in tone as usual, but somehow Dean can tell he’s ecstatic. They skate to the edge of the ice and climb over the boards to let Balthazar and the second line on. Three minutes into the game and they’re already up one to nothing.

Sam shoulders his way in to sit next to Dean, leaning over to talk to him as Dean watches the goal replay on the screen above the ice. “Did you see Lucifer?” he says loudly.

“What’d he do?”

“He’s messing with me.” For the first time Dean notices that Sam is holding his left arm at an awkward angle, stick in his right hand. It pisses him off, but not enough to take him down from the
They keep that one goal lead the rest of the period, the only real excitement coming in the final minute when Gabriel saves yet another shot made by Zachariah. He must have said something antagonizing as usual, because within seconds Zachariah is in his face. Dean immediately steps in the middle of them to protect his goalie, yelling threats right back into Zachariah’s face, and quickly finds himself in headlock, which is about the furthest thing from okay Dean can think of. “Fuck off,” he growls, managing to elbow whoever has him in the stomach just as the refs appear. They drag Michael off of him, because of course it’s Michael, who would never miss the chance to shove his hard on in Dean’s face. The ref pushes him off the ice too, and the period finishes off relatively quickly.

Over the intermission while guys are pulling off skates and adjusting pads, Bobby gives them the pros and cons of the period, talking for a long time about taking the puck somewhere other than up the center of the ice because the Scorpions are starting to figure out how to shut that down. Dean’s busy digging the straps that keep his socks up back out and up to a reasonable height, and out of the corner of his eye he can see Balthazar fucking around with his chin strap and clearly not listening to a word Bobby is saying. So it’s not really a surprise to him when eight minutes into the second period, Balthazar takes the puck straight down the center of the ice, promptly gets slammed onto his back by Lucifer and doesn’t make it back in time to watch him score.

Dean can hear Bobby and Rufus screaming for a call from behind him on the bench, but it doesn’t make a difference. The game is tied, one-one.

“Bobby said not to go up the ice, asshole,” Dean says when Balthazar makes it to the bench. Balthazar gives him a withering look.

“Well I’ve learned my lesson, haven’t I? Don’t want to get knocked on my ass again.”

Dean bumps his glove onto Balthazar’s knee in solidarity and goes back to watching the game. True, it was punishment enough.

They don’t completely lose momentum once they’re tied. Krushnic keeps putting the puck on net, Ash has a couple of chances, and Dean makes a shot to low glove side he swears Cain had to have used some devil magic to stop from going in. He’s positive they’ll have the next goal though, until Sam fouls.

He’s battling for the puck in the corner with Zach and an even bigger asshole named Alastair when he loses track of the damn thing at his feet. Seconds later, there’s a huge crash that means something has hit the boards, instantly followed by a whistle.

“Number two! Boarding!” Dean hears the ref call, and Dean’s heart sinks. Lucifer is scraping himself off the ice and Sam is skating to the penalty box looking like a kicked puppy. This was all his fault. He’d told Sam to fight back, which never works well for him purely because the refs judge any little thing he pulls by how fucking big he is. It’s height discrimination, is what it is.

“It wasn’t boarding, ref,” Dean says, skating over to him. “It’s not the kid’s fault that he’s built like a yeti.”

The ref just shrugs. “Looked like boarding to me.”

Dean swears and hits his stick on the ground. Sam’s foul means they’re down a man for two minutes until he’s let out of his little time out box. In another minute and forty-four seconds, the Scorpions have gained both a goal and the lead.
Fuck. This is his fucking fault.

There are two minutes left in the second period when Alastair manages to get the puck around Chuck and within shooting distance. He lob a shot that Gabriel catches under his pad easily, and Dean expecting the whistle, heads towards the dot. Instead, three Scorpions players rush Gabriel and begin hacking away it him with their sticks, forcing Benny and Dean to shoulder their way in with their sticks as well. Somehow the puck spurts out into the back of the net, and the stadium erupts into cheers as the goal horn goes off.

“He had the puck!” Dean shouts loudly over the absolute din of the crowd.

Gabriel has managed to pick himself up and rips his helmet off, shoving Zachariah, the closest Scorpions player to him. “I made the save, dingus!” he snarls. Zachariah shoves back and Dean finds himself in the middle of two fighting idiots once again, allowing himself to get manhandled by the ref as he goes for Dean’s shoulders instead of the two people actually fighting.

“Cool it, Gabriel!” he yells over the ref’s helmet, and Gabriel finally steps back, breathing heavily.

“Good dog,” Zachariah taunts, eyes glinting maliciously, and Dean untangles himself from the ref, pushing at Gabriel’s shoulder to get him away from Zach and back into the net.

They leave the ice down by two. Bobby had a lot more to yell about this intermission, and Dean makes damn sure everybody in that locker room is fucking listening.

Despite the heightened tensions created from the end of the second period, both teams come out into the third period relatively calm. Dean assumes their coach, Dick (no really, that’s his name) has warned them against earning any suspensions on opening night, and the Cavs aren’t usually instigators. The score remains the same for so long that Dean begins to get frustrated and starts making stupid moves out of desperation and boredom. “Breathe, Dean,” Krushnic tells him once as he skates by, but that only serves to frustrate him more.

Once in a blue moon, stupid moves pay off.

Dean makes a horrible pass from behind their own net to the center of the ice, ready and waiting for a Scorpion to meet it there and take a shot off of the greatest set-up ever created by an opposing team member. Dean is expecting it, everybody on the ice is expecting it…hell, Dean swears he can feel the stadium take a collective breath of anticipation. But suddenly Krushnic is there, exploding to the other end of the ice in such an unexpected move that none of the Scorpions defenders can get back to challenge him, and he fakes around Cain with a sweet little spin move that allows him to practically walk the puck into the back of the net.

Krushnic pumps his fist at the crowd and before Dean realizes it he’s in his face, grinning widely and cupping the back of Krushnic’s helmet in his glove to hold it against his own. “Krushnic you beautiful bastard!” he yells over the noise of the crowd, and Krushnic can only grin before Sam comes flying over to them from the other side of the ice and wraps them both in a hug.

There are five minutes left in regulation. They could tie this up. Hell, they could win it.

Dean grins as he clammers over the boards. They were gonna win. He could feel it.

Bobby pulls Gabriel with two minutes left in the game so they can have an extra player on the ice, and they spend precious seconds getting the puck from Sam to Benny, so Benny can set them up on the Scorpions side of the ice.

Sam and Chuck stay closer to the center in order to protect the now empty net but close enough so
that they can be a part of the play. Balthazar takes his place in front of the net to screen the goalie from seeing anything, and Dean takes up his spot on the right side of the ice, Krushnic on the left.

The Scorpions are doing a great job of killing any shot that want to make, as first Alastair and then Michael push in front of Dean, forcing him to pass the puck back to Sam each time. It feels more like a game of keep away than anything else, and Dean hates keep away.

Their break comes when the puck gets from Sam to Krushnic so quickly Michael doesn’t have time to come back and guard Dean before he’s able to cut to the center of the ice, wide open to take a shot if he gets the puck.

And Dean fucking wants that shot. He wants it so badly he can feel it in his gut, because he knows that shot will go in.

“Krushnic!” he yells loudly, trying to get his attention. Krushnic’s not paying attention, struggling to keep the puck away from Lucifer, so Dean yells louder, hitting his stick on the ice, “KRUSHNIC! HERE!” He sees Krushnic spin around Lucifer the same way he’d spun around Cain, and out of the corner of his eye he sees Michael barreling back towards him. “CAS, PASS THE DAMN PUCK.”

Krushnic looks up. And shoots.

Cain catches it in his glove, holding it.

The buzzer sounds. Game over.

Fuck, this was all his fault.

“What the hell?” Dean demands angrily, skating up to Krushnic. “Why the fuck didn’t you pass it?”

“I had the better shot.”

Dean has just climbed into the box, making him about an inch or two taller than Krushnic than he usually is when he turns around and snarls. “You’re fucking kidding me.”

Krushnic sends him a dark scowl. “I’m not.”

Dean storms away from him in disgust and into the locker room, ripping his gear off and shoving it into his locker, where the equipment guys will pick it up later. He listens to Bobby tell them what they did wrong, tell them what they liked, and then Dean’s expected to talk. But he can’t. All he can do is sit on the bench with his elbow on his knees, staring at the ground.

“He always does that when he thinks the game depended on him,” he hears Sam quietly, and he has to be answering a question from Krushnic, because Krushnic’s the only one who doesn’t know, and for some reason that drives Dean fucking insane, because Sam’s penalty was his fault, his inability to get the puck for a shot was his fault, this was all his fault.

“That’s because it fucking was,” he snaps darkly, standing up. “Maybe if some people had fucking acted like a teammate we could have avoided this whole damn mess!”

“He!” Bobby barks. “Take a fucking walk!”

Dean doesn’t need to be told twice.
Dean has decided he loves Los Angeles. This is like the best place ever. He didn’t even have to leave the hotel to find a decent bar scene, there’s one fucking right here. Greatest thing about it is, he wasn’t even paying attention to the crowd, focusing more on getting drunk, and all on their own two girls just sat down next to him and started talking to him.

Not that Dean could blame them. He didn’t always have to open his mouth for people to recognize how awesome he is.

“You’re Dean Winchester, aren’t you?” The dark haired girl on his left smiles confidently at him, leaning close. Dean thinks her name begins with a T, Theresa, maybe, or Tessa. He’s not too sure. After he ordered that first whiskey, drinks just keep appearing in front of him. They’ve gotten progressively more colorful, which would bother him if they didn’t taste so good and if Tessa (Theresa? He’s gonna go with Tessa) wasn’t currently running a hand up his leg.

“The one n’ only,” he’s not totally confident in his ability to be coherent, but he knows he said something, because the blonde on his other side giggles. Damn, he’s funnier than he thought.

“We saw you on TV earlier!” the blonde pouts. “It sucks that you lost.”

He nods vaguely, not registering what she’d said. Man, she’s incredible, small and petite with legs that won’t quit. Normally he’d have her upstairs and in his bed right now, but there’s a niggling feeling in the back of his brain that won’t go away, making him fidget.

Tessa, on the other hand, is taller, more angles, dark hair and dark eyes and plush lips. He knows he’s staring too long when she deliberately licks her lips, and he startles. They’re a pale, pale pink, pretty and not chapped at all, exactly the type of lips you want to see on a girl, want pressed to your neck or wrapped around your cock. He’s not as excited about that as he should be. His head feels clouded. Dean blinks and the glass that had just been in front of him is replaced with one full of something a sickening electric blue.

Are these drinks free? What the hell is happening here?

Who’s giving him Krushnic drinks?

Dean frowns. That’s not right. He lifts the drink to his lips and all the blue rushes at him. He goes cross eyed watching it, eyes going blurry. Damn Krushnic. Thinking about him makes Dean mad all over again. If he had the energy to be mad. He doesn’t. He puts the empty glass down and licks his lips. Cas – Krushnic, whatever. Everything was less complicated before he got here. Dean’s not sure he knows what’s going on anymore.

No one’s ever pissed him off like this before, kind of different than the way Michael or Gordon piss him off. Like he wants something out of Krushnic he’s not getting. Like they could be buds if he wasn’t such an asshole.

Maybe you’re the asshole.

Shut up, Sam.
What the fuck is he even thinking about?

“Dean,” Tessa purrs in his ear, “You had more than twenty goals last year, didn’t you?”

“Oh,” Dean’s having trouble pulling his attention away from his glass. All the blue is gone. “Think so,” he mumbles.

Tessa’s hand, which has been wandering dangerously close to his hardening dick, pulls back suddenly, and he stifles a whimper of disappointment. But she stands up and grabs his hand, pulling him up as well and gesturing to the blonde.

“How about you show us your room?” she suggests coyly, pulling him across the bar. Dean can only stumble along behind her, hardly believing that he’s somehow scored a threesome he hadn’t even tried for.

Tessa and the blonde are giggling about something, all Dean can hear are their higher voices as the lobby blurs by him in a mess of colors and lights until suddenly, he’s pressed up against a mirror, staring at himself. Tessa is between his arms and the blonde is pressed in behind him. It takes him a moment to get over the confusion of staring at himself, until the floor starts moving, and he trips a little, and there’s skin, so he begins kissing.

Hands start fumbling with his pants, and he reaches his own down to creep up Tessa’s skirt, clutching roughly just below her ass to lift her higher, bringing his lips to hers. Tessa is moaning, and as more hands move to his fly he realizes feverishly that both of them are going for it, and the blonde girl is nuzzling and biting his neck at the same time.

Dean uses his other hand to slide up Tessa’s shirt, cupping her breast through the fabric of her lacy bra before pushing it to the side with more force than probably necessary – his fingers caress her nipple, pinching and rubbing as she moans into his mouth; her thigh is shoved between his legs now as her hands pull at his hair, her own head thrown back in ecstasy, and he relishes in the friction he feels when her thigh presses between his legs, rubbing his dick in time with her movements.

The blonde is sucking on his earlobe now, whispering all the filthy things she’s going to do to him when they get up to his room, and Dean didn’t think it was possible but he feels himself get even harder while rubbing his cock against Tessa’s leg, the blonde still pawing at the front of his pants wherever Tessa’s thigh can’t reach.

Dean licks into her mouth, tearing his hand away from her nipple to move his way back down to the front of her panties, stroking his fingers against the fabric before pushing it to the side to feel how wet she is for him. Her legs part, and his hand cups her, his fingers brushing against her clit as the blonde tries to unzip his fly so she can reach inside and stroke him.

Faintly, he hears something ding, but he ignores it in favor of cupping his hand against Tessa’s heat as she bucks her hips into the movement – until she stops.

The blonde’s hands pull back from the front of his pants, and Dean feels for the loss to his dick, he really does, buddy. He pulls his mouth away from Tessa’s, keeping his hand where it is despite her thighs clenching together now, to crane his neck to look behind him to see why her friend stopped.

Krushnic’s standing there, staring into the elevator.

Don’t do it, asshole.

Krushnic catches his gaze, holds it, and steps inside. The doors close behind him and he tilts his head at the scene before him.
“Hello, Dean.”

“Who’s that?” the blonde asks, eyes squinting in dissatisfied confusion.

“Castiel Krushnic,” Tessa says quietly, shifting. Dean’s hand is pushed against Tessa with more force now, and her eyes widen at the return of the pressure, her legs widening slightly again.

Is he doing this? Is he about to finger a chick in front of Krushnic?

Heh. Maybe if he does he’ll be able to prove he can score. Haha.

Tessa smiles warmly at him and he realizes he’s grinning stupidly. God damn it.

“Fuck off, Krushnic,” he says out loud more to prevent himself from saying anything else. His brain is no longer connected to his mouth. Actually, his brain isn’t doing too well on its own at this point anyway.

“Castiel.”

“What?” Dean turns almost fully this time, and Tessa gives a slight yelp, yanking her skirt back down and over Dean’s hand.

Krushnic’s gaze flicks from Dean’s hand up the front of her skirt to Dean’s eyes, and Dean suddenly feels like he’s being pinned to the spot with the force of his gaze. “It’s Castiel. Or you may use Cas. You did earlier.”

“What’s he talking about?” the blonde asks.

Dean doesn’t know. His brain is a turmoil, trying to dredge up the memory of when he could have possibly slipped up, when he would have ever called Krushnic by his first name, much less given him a nickname. Dean considers nicknames sacred. He’s given one to everyone on the team at some point or another, there’s no way…

Oh. Shit. He remembers, faintly. Pass the damn puck, Cas.

That doesn’t count, his brain works frantically to reason through the alcohol and the hot press of Tessa against his hand. It doesn’t count, because it was a hockey game, heat of the moment type thing. He’s not Cas, he’s Krushnic.

“Didn’t mean to,” he shakes his head violently, almost pukes and presses his forehead to the mirrored wall next to Tessa’s face. She turns and begins kissing his neck. “Fuck off, Krushnic.”

It’s tense until the blonde decides this is her cue to press back up against Dean. He relaxes when he can no longer feel that gaze burning into his back, dissecting his fucking soul or whatever it was Krushnic is trying to do, and seconds later the door dings again, and Dean knows he’s gone.

After that it’s mostly a blur, a mess of feelings Dean no longer has the capacity to comprehend. He and the girls trip their way down the hall to his room, and he manages to get his card out, remembers to get the privacy sign on the doorknob, or at least outside the door, telling Sammy to stay away. Tessa pushes him onto the bed and both of the girl’s climb on top of him, one kissing his neck as the other pulls of his pants, and there’s a mess of rolling, and groping, and gasps.

Dean licks into wet heat, into mouths, tongues, nipples, and buries his face in hot necks and creamy thighs until he can’t tell what’s going on anymore, if he’s even on the bed still, all he knows is pleasure is building, he’s panting and someone’s mouth is on his dick and his mouth is so dry, he’s
so thirsty, that fucking blue drink like fucking…fucking Cas.

He comes.

The next thing he remembers is crouching over the toilet, bright, shocking blue spilling out of his mouth and into the bowl, burning his throat, familiar hands lift him when he’s finished, all but carry him to his bed.

“They get home?” he manages to slur out.

“Yeah, Dean,” he hears Sam say, and Dean feels like they’re speaking to each other from opposite ends of a tunnel.

“They’re fine.”

Dean feels a pillow under his cheek and burrows his face gratefully into it. The draft is chilly, but he barely shivers before a warm blanket is pulled over him.

“Love you, Sammy,” he mumbles into the pillow.

“Go to sleep, Dean.”

Sam’s words are the last thing he hears that night and the first thing he thinks of in the morning, even through the horrible pounding fogginess that is attempting to turn his brain to mush. It’s one of the only specifics he held onto from his awesome decision to binge drink – the rest is just soft skin, a blue drink that creates a feeling of nausea if he focuses on it too long, and the vague feeling that someone is upset with him.

He doesn’t need that feeling hanging around to know he fucked up though. At least it serves its purpose in making him feel shittier than usual.

He takes a shower, his headache making him unable to take the pounding of the water on the porcelain floor for more than a few minutes before he’s stumbling out. He’s dressed and considering whether he should order Sam breakfast or just grow a pair and go find the kid when the door pushes open and he walks in.

“Here,” he says, tossing a bottle of aspirin at Dean. Dean catches it gratefully and swallows two dry, keeping a wary eye on Sam, who seems unconcerned as he sits down on his own bed to face Dean.

He hates this, hates feeling like a chastised kid, like Sam’s disappointed in him, when he’s the one who’s supposed to be looking after Sammy. He runs his knuckles over his mouth self-consciously, trying to decide how to do this, how to express the extent of his fucked-upness to Sam without sounding whiny.

But Sam speaks up first, because Sam is the real adult here, the responsible one at twenty-three, and Dean isn’t fooling anybody. “So, what happened last night?”

And Dean, with a sickening ball of guilt coiled in his stomach, answers, because he’s a coward. “I don’t want to talk about it, Sammy.”

Sam’s not gonna take shit, Dean can tell right away. His brow furrows and his nose scrunches up the way it used to when dad would tell him hockey players didn’t need to learn math, and he could take the less advanced class and be thankful for the extra practice time having easy homework got him. “Doesn’t really matter, Dean, since it has to be talked about sooner or later. Bobby’s really pissed at you. You’re supposed to set an example for the team.”
Dean realizes that they’re not even talking about his little sexcapade last night yet – no, they’re talking about his fuck up yesterday, how he lost the game for everybody and then managed to let Krushnic get under his skin again, managed to act exactly like some coked up brat of a celebrity instead of the leader he’s supposed to be.

He’s pretty disgusted with himself. The knot of guilt in his stomach grows.

“I know,” he says thickly. “I fucked up, Sam. You gotta make me say it?”

Sam scrubs a hand over his face, looking tired. Dean wonders if he was able to sleep in their room last night, or if he was so disgusted by Dean that he shacked up with one of the other guys. “You reminded me of dad.”

Now Dean doesn’t feel like he might be sick, he actually physically might be sick. He manages not to double over with the sharp pain that just shot through his stomach, but whatever look is on his face makes Sam’s eyes widen, and he shifts as if to move towards he before stopping himself. “You did,” he continues, more firmly. “We lost a game and you…you blew up on everybody and went off to drink and have sex.”

Dean folds his arms over his stomach and says tightly, “I lost the game.”

“What?” Sam sounds baffled, but Dean won’t look at him.

“That goal they scored on your penalty, that was my fault,” he says roughly. “And I couldn’t get a shot off at the end of the game.”

“Dean,” Sam says in disbelief. “Lucifer was pissing me off. I’m pretty sure I decided all by myself to slam his fucking face into the wall, and it was definitely my fault for doing it incorrectly. As for you missing a shot or whatever bullcrap that is, I thought that’s why you were so pissed with Krushnic the other day?”

Dean raises his eyes to Sam’s and squints. “I’m always pissed at Krushnic.”

Sam’s lips twitch. “No kidding.” Then for some reason he adds, “He was the one who told me what was going on last night.”

Nothing has been resolved, not really, but Sam’s almost smile immediately puts Dean’s stomach at ease, clears his head a little. “Yeah,” he manages to chuckle, and it almost sounds real. “He caught me in the elevator with my hand up some chick’s skirt.”

He snorts. “That makes sense.”

“What does?”

“Dunno, he just seemed weird when he told me about it. I didn’t get any details.”

Dean tries to picture Krushnic being weirder than usual and completely fails. “They got a good buffet down there Sammy?” he asks, changing the subject.

Sam brings him downstairs and Dean piles his plate high with greasy food, the way you’re supposed to when you’ve decided to poison your body with alcohol. Counter it with poisonous carbs and fats. Nice. They meet up with the rest of the team, and Dean's goddamned lucky he’s got a family that wants to do feelings even less than he does.

“I’m gonna be a better captain,” he manages to start before Benny calls him a sissy, Gabriel asks him
if he’s gonna cry, and Andy throws a piece of bacon at him.

Bobby nods at him over his cup of (likely) spiked coffee. Doesn’t mean he’s forgiven really, or that Bobby is just gonna forget what happened, but it means he’s out of the shithole for now.

It’s clear that whatever problem he has with Krushnic has the potential to really screw everything up, and he vows silently to himself that he was just going to go back to ignoring him. Fuck his promise to listen to the guy talk.

Of course, Sam would probably tell him to resolve the issue, or some shit, but Dean’s got a gut feeling that that’s just not going to work. They’re not meant to be teammates or friends, or anything that requires Dean to talk to him, knowing that Krushnic has seen him horny as fuck.

Or something.

Road trips are always a week, week and a half, max, but they always feel like years and years to Dean. It’s a straight up stretch of hotels, buses and planes, dumping them off at their third city in as many days at three in the morning and hauling them out the second a game ends. Sometimes Dean doesn’t even know where he is until he sees the logo of the team emblazed into stadium ice. It’s why teams usually have a better home record than they do an away one – this is not where they belong, and on top of that, they’ve just come from several other cities they don’t belong to either.

They beat Anaheim, Dean has no idea how. It’s a dirty win, one they didn’t deserve, and he knows Bobby and Rufus aren’t happy about it. In the back of his mind, he isn’t either, but it’s hard to ignore the rush of elation a win gives you. Dean barely interacts with Krushnic their entire time in the city, and although nothing impairs their play like that fuck up in Los Angeles, Dean feels a little dead whenever he’s on the ice with him. There’s no spark.

It’s the same deal in San Jose, another game they win. Dean should be happy that their record’s fixed, that the first game disaster didn’t fuck up their season, and now they have more wins than losses. But his play is still lackluster at best. He hasn’t scored yet, a strange feeling for him, and his only assists came from that first game and his passes to Krushnic and Benny.

This isn’t working. They aren’t working.

Bobby has noticed, as he spends more and more time working on Dean, Krushnic and Benny’s line. The team notices, grows quiet when Dean and Krushnic have to be anywhere near each other, like whatever is affecting them is contagious, and if they’re not careful they’ll catch it too, and nobody will be able to play with anyone else. The media has noticed, the analysts, and instead of getting excited over Dean and Krushnic’s supposed chemistry, they’re calling for Bobby to change the line up instead. Dean doesn’t know why he doesn’t. Stubbornness, he guesses, a trait he also carries around and has probably been inherited from Bobby, or his father, or both.

Even if they’re winning, there’s something broken in his team, in his family, and Dean doesn’t know how to fix it.

Krushnic keeps staring at him too, which makes Dean fuckin’ uncomfortable, so he stares back. His eyes are getting tired.

The worst of it all is when Sam finally comes to speak to him, on the bus to the San Jose airport so they can get back to Chicago, play some home games. Dean usually loves home games, the National Anthem and the cheers and the greatest fans in the entire league. But now he’s afraid that whatever is following them on the road is going to follow them home too. Just one more thing Dean Winchester ruins for himself and everyone else.
“You need to fix things with Castiel,” Sam says as soon as he sits down next to Dean. Dean’s not surprised at all. He’s been waiting for this talk. He’d wondered who was gonna make it to him first, Sam or Benny.

As much as he’d rather have exchanged a couple of grunts with Benny and called It a day, he’s kind of glad Sam won. It’s easier to talk with someone who knows what you’re not saying.

“That’s Castiel now, huh?” he asks, raising an eyebrow. “You two exchange friendship bracelets or somethin’?”

Sam gets all petulant, the precursor to full on bitch mode. “Fine, we’ll pretend you didn’t give him a nickname.”

“Cas is faster to say on ice!” Dean protests. He’s found himself doing it several times during games now, partly because it is actually faster and partly because it’s the only thing that gets Krushnic to respond now. He’d consider training himself out of it, but that would prove that he actually cared. Which he doesn’t, because it doesn’t mean squat.

“What’s the deal, anyway?” Sam asks. “I thought you guys were doing pretty well. I mean, you haven’t blown up on him in front of the whole team again.”

Dean shrugs and glances out the window. “I don’t do much of anything with Krushnic.”

“Dean,” Sam says, tone warning. “You know that’s not conducive to good relationships on the ice.”

God, he sounds so much like John in that moment that Dean doesn’t know what to do, doesn’t want to turn from the window and look at him again. He takes a moment, until he’s sure it’s Sam, before he looks. Yup, same dumb, shaggy hair.

“I get that, Sam. But interacting with the guy isn’t really conducive of a good on ice relationship either, is it?”

Sam furrows his brow. “So, what’s the deal with you two?” he repeats.

Dean frowns and looks out the window again. He doesn’t want to answer this question, doesn’t even want to think about it. He’s met people he hates. He hates Zachariah, with his smarmy face. He hates Michael, with his suggestive, disparaging comments and the creepy, nagging feeling that he wants something out of Dean. He hates Gordon, who does everything in his power to make Dean look like a bigger idiot than he already is and has made it clear he wants no part in their family, that he is, in fact, a little disgusted by it.

It’s easy to ignore all of them, to not give them the time of day, to trade cutting remarks if they cross him and to try and prove them wrong on the ice; no he’s not useless, no he’s not worthless.

He was pretty sure he hated Krushnic, for replacing Victor and being a general asshole. He’d decided to hate Krushnic.

Except he doesn’t. At least not in the same way he hates Gordon and Michael and Zach. He can’t ignore the fuck, finds himself thinking about him sometimes on a completely random tangent. Krushnic hasn’t confronted him but he’s always staring at Dean, and it weirds him out in a way that isn’t really bad. Instead of feeling like he has to prove he’s not worthless, Dean always feels like Krushnic already expects him not to be, and Dean’s just constantly disappointing him, nothing new there. Except if he hated Krushnic, he shouldn’t care.

He does, a little, and he’s pissed that his hockey is no longer speaking for him, like it has his entire
“Nothing,” Dean tells Sam firmly. “It’s just been a while. I’m rusty, Sammy, it even happens to the greats,” he sends him a smirk, leaning back in his chair like yeah, that’s the problem, and Dean couldn’t care less.

“Nah,” Sam shakes his head. “There’s some weird energy going on.” He sighs. “Look Dean, I don’t care if you’re like, struggling because you actually like the guy and you’re too stubborn to admit it after making such a show of hating him, or what, but figure it out, because we kind of need you.”

“What?” Dean squawks, bolting upright. “Are you kidding me? That’s…that’s dumb, Sam. No. Absolutely not.”

Sam looks smug. Like he’s figured something out. He hasn’t. Jesus. Dean spends the rest of the bus ride trying to get him to admit he’s wrong, but his baby brother just sits there with that look on his face, and finally, Dean is forced to give up.

At least Sam’s stupidity distracts him on the hell ride that is the plane back to Chicago.

God damn it.
Crashing the Net

Week long road trips. They’re hell. Everybody knows it, and the one who knows it best of all is the asshole who makes up the schedule. Maybe that’s why they usually get a two day break after a long road trip, instead of just one. That, or he likes giving them a break only to send them on an even longer road trip a week later. Dean doesn’t know the guy. Still an asshole though.

Extra off days means no practice, which means family time for most of the team. Real family, because none of the other guys on the team have to make one up for themselves, as far as Dean knows. They all have wives, moms and dads, siblings. It’s really just him and Sammy who have no one to go to, because it’s them and Bobby anyway.

Huh. Well, and Krushnic now too, he supposes.

Kind of sucks he’ll have to spend his day off alone, unless he likes that kind of thing. He might.

Well fuck. Way to go, Winchester, you’ve screwed yourself out of a good night’s sleep.

The plane from San Jose had landed at O’Hare at about two in the morning, and by four Dean was dragging his ass through the door of his apartment, ignoring how his taxi reached the apartment the same time as Krushnic’s, and how stupid it was that he’d decided he couldn’t ride in the same one as the guy even though they were going to the same place.

He could just imagine Sam’s face if he’d have seen that. Think of the environment, Dean!

Not like Dean got any sleep on the plane, so yeah, he’s fucking tired, and would like to go to sleep please, except his brain has latched on to this idea of Krushnic hanging around in his apartment alone tomorrow while Benny catches up with Andrea and Andy visits with his brother and Garth goes back down to the farm…and it won’t fucking let go of it.

He sits up and scrubs a hand over his bleary eyes. Picking up his phone from the bedside table and looking at it, he sighs. Five in the morning now.

The phone in his hand buzzes violently and he almost throws it at the wall, it startles him so much. At least he avoided that particular embarrassment. Raising the thing to his ear, he answers gruffly. “Yeah?”

“Cut the tone,” Bobby’s wonderful and loving voice returns shortly. “Call up the guys. Mandatory practice tomorrow.”

“What?” Dean raises his eyebrows at his darkened room. Where there is no one here to appreciate his expressions. Great, he’s going insane. Stop talking to yourself. He kicks the sheets off, and Chekov whines. Shit, when did the dog follow him in here? “You can’t do that. It’s their day off.”

“Whine all ya want about it, princess. You and the boys don’t deserve the day off.”

Deep down Dean knows that’s true, but he’s sure as hell gonna be indignant about it anyway. “What the hell is that supposed to mean?”

“Means you’re stinkin’ stadiums to high heaven, and I don’t need that happening on our own turf,” Bobby growls. Clearly Bobby is as unwilling to take shit early in the morning as he is at reasonable hours. “Call the team. I want you all in the parking lot of Crowley’s in four hours, or you knuckleheads won’t be seeing another day off until Christmas.” On that note, he hangs up.
Charming.

Dean loves waking up his teammates and telling them they have the equivalent of work on a Saturday. Really, it’s his favorite thing to do. The amount of swears flung at him over the phone make it that much better.

Towards the end of the calls he learns to hang up as soon he repeats Bobby’s instructions (Gabriel is probably still jabbering away at the dial tone). It still takes him about an hour, a quarter of that time dedicated to Sam and repeating, “I don’t know why,” until he finally just presses the end call button, leaving Sam to ask the universe his pointless questions.

Krushnic’s the last person he calls. Most difficult last, right?

“How the hell is his voice even deeper? He must have been asleep, like Dean wishes he was.

“Hey, Dean. So Bobby –,”

“No,” Krushnic interrupts. “This is Castiel.”

Dean stares down at his bed in disbelief, paused in the act of pulling his jeans over one leg, phone held to his ear with the other. Even the dog pauses his circling, looking up hopefully at Dean. He’s gotta be kidding right? “Uh. Yeah. I know that.”

“Excellent,” Krushnic replies. “I was concerned you’d suffered a concussion, since you’re Dean. It doesn’t make sense for you to be calling me at six in the morning to ask for yourself.”

Dean catches it now, listening carefully, the hint of snark turning the usually rough edges of his words up in a slight lilt. Bastard. He catches his lip actually tilting up into a smile and quickly schools his face. Chekov does not look impressed with him. “Funny. Hate ruining your beauty sleep, especially when you need it so badly, but Bobby wants us at Crowley’s nine sharp. Extra practice.”

“If nothing else, we can at least be thankful Bobby tasked the person least in need of such sleep with calling everybody,” Krushnic replies briskly before hanging up.

Dean’s left standing baffled again, jeans now pooled around the one foot he’d managed to get a leg through. Was that an attempt at a joke? He’d call it flirting if it were literally anyone else in the world. Jesus Christ, this is why people are meant to sleep through this time of day, it’s too fucking weird.

Chekov barks at him and he snaps out of it. Tossing the phone on the bed, he finishes getting dressed. Five cups of coffee and two bowls of cereal later, he feels almost awake, but it’ll have to do, since if he sticks around any longer, he’s not gonna make it in time. He’s not really too eager to test Bobby right now.

There’s a fucking school bus in the parking lot.

Bobby’s more than capable of shutting them all up with a look, but if he doesn’t have a good explanation for this school bus, Dean’s not sure he’s gonna make it out of here alive.

“Is that a school bus?” Sam asks, and for the second time in the morning Dean almost jumps. He’d picked Sam up, and Sam, the bastard, had promptly fallen asleep, so Dean had forgotten he was even here.

“Sure as hell looks like it,” Dean mutters, pulling the Impala into her usual parking place. Most of the
team is already gathered around the front of the bus, luckily still looking too confused to have moved on to any rioting yet.

“Bobby finally shipping our asses off to daycare?” Gabriel calls as soon as he sees Dean.

“If anybody needs it, it’d be you.”

“Hey, I know how to share,” Gabriel grins. “I’m providing you with wit and beauty just by being here, because I’m generous like that.”

“I thought your balls were named Fred and George,” Balthazar says.

“They’re called nutsacks, you dink, and their names are Thelma and Louise.”

“You got any idea what’s going on here, Chief?” Benny joins them with his travel mug of coffee, glancing back at the bus. “The boys are getting restless.”

“I got no idea,” Dean shakes his head and looks at the mug jealously. “Bobby just told me to get you all here at nine.”

“Maybe it’s a team building exercise,” Sam suggests suddenly. “Like a mystery. Figure out what the bus is for.”

Dean stares at his brother. “Dude, your shroom dealer is amazing.”

“How long is this gonna take?” Kevin speaks up. “I had to cancel lunch with my mom, and if I don’t at least make it to dinner she’s gonna be pissed.”

“Dude, I want to have dinner with Mama Tran,” Ash says, looking put out.

“No way. She still won’t shut up about how you went to MIT.”

“Hey little dude, Columbia’s a good school.”

“Both of you shut up. No nerding until noon,” Dean tells them. He’s beginning to get a headache. Where the hell is Bobby?

“What falls under the category of nerdy?”

“Not now, Sam.”

“I just want to make sure I don’t break your rule,” Sam says innocently.

“Every time you open your goddamned mouth you’re nerding, happy?” Dean snaps, craning his neck to look around the parking lot. He doesn’t see a trucker hat anywhere. “Do you see Bobby?”

“No,” Benny replies. Sam doesn’t answer.

Dean looks back at his brother, who has his mouth screwed tightly shut. “For chrissakes, you can talk!”

“You said I was nerding.”

“I swear on Jesus’ masturbation sock, Sam…”

“Hello, Dean.”
Dean turns around to face Krushnic, allowing Sam to say, unchallenged, “Jesus didn’t have a masturbation sock, Dean, he was married to God.”

“Genesis, chapter two, verse eight,” Benny mutters into his coffee. “And upon Mary did God proclaim, ‘let there be incest.’”

“It would be the book of John,” Krushnic corrects, “Dean, why is there a bus here?”

“I’m hoping it’s to pick all you geeks up for Geek Camp.”

Krushnic hesitantly frowns. “Will that help improve my hockey?”

“Jesus.”

“Dean’s being an asshole, ignore him,” Sam insists.

“Ah,” Krushnic nods. “I forgot. You did say he is always an asshole.”

“Gee, thanks baby bro,” Dean says dispassionately. He’s spotted the crappy junker of a pick-up truck that Bobby calls a car, and he’s hoping he can get to him before everybody else can start pitching in their two cents. Gabriel and Balthazar in particular are likely to piss Bobby off, and Dean doesn’t want this punishment to be worse than it’s already meant to be.

He ignores whatever Sam and Krushnic are talking about now (properties of an asshole? Mating habits of a llama? Who cares) and heads over to Bobby, only feeling slightly guilty about leaving Benny there all on his own. Guy had coffee, he’d live.

“What the hell are we doing here, Bobby?” he asks, skipping the pleasantries. They won’t get him anywhere anyway.

“I’m not stupid,” Bobby says in response, his eyes completely shaded from the angle of the early morning sun on his cap. “I see when something on this team ain’t workin’ that no amount of drills is gonna fix.”

“Yeah…” Dean says hesitantly, feeling apprehensive. What the hell was he talking about? Were they all gonna vote someone off the island, send them away in the school bus? It’s not gonna happen, but Dean shudders to think of the closest hockey team to here. Jesus, you’d end up in Detroit. What a shithole.

“So,” and now Bobby looks uncomfortable, “You gotta bond.”

Dean lets out a surprised bark of laughter, looking at Bobby disbelievingly. “We gotta what?”

“Bond,” he says, and god this is hilarious, Dean can actually see him getting angry over having to repeat the word.

“What, like with emotions and crap? Bobby, this team’s been a solid family for about six years now, we’ve managed to avoid all that and still come out of it liking each other okay.”

“That’s a load of horseshit and you know it, Winchester. Krushnic is part of the team now and ain’t nobody okay with him because their captain is being a jackass.” Bobby glares at him. “Now you’re gonna get on that bus, and you’re gonna be thankful I’m fixing the problem for you idiots instead of lettin’ ya go on with that awkward-as-hell play all of you have been calling hockey.”

Dean’s pissed, and he knows he’s pissed because Bobby is right. Team’s getting punished because
of him again.

He doesn’t really think this is gonna work, because Bobby’s idea of bonding time is probably fishing or some other shit where no one has to talk to anyone if they don’t want to. Sucks that this is happening on their day off too. But it can’t hurt to try, and then at least Dean can say they attempted to fix the problem when Edlund’s looking to start trades again in the spring. Labeling anybody, even Krushnic, with something like, ‘doesn’t get along well with teammates’ is a major dickhole thing to do, and it can spell the end of your NHL career.

“Fine,” he sighs. “Where’s the bus taking us?”

“Thanks so much for takin’ one for the team, your highness,” Bobby says sarcastically. “You’re goin’ to Six Flags.”

Great. Dean hates Six Flags. “Where are you going?” he says as Bobby climbs back into the truck. Dean hadn’t noticed he’d never even closed the door.

Bobby snorts out a laugh and starts the engine. “You think I’m going to Six Flags with you?”

The guys are more excited than Dean thought they would be about skipping out on family time to go to some kid’s amusement park. After they get over the initial shock of it all (because clearly, this is bullshit, but whatever) they throw their bags back into their cars and happily board the bus.

Dean gets on last to make sure nobody skips out, which means the only spot left on the bus is up front near the eighty year old bus driver, next to Ed.

Of course Sam’s sitting in the back by Krushnic, the little traitor.

Ed Zeddmore’s not a teammate Dean talks to a whole lot, mostly because Ed and Harry come together as a package deal and it can be hard to get a word in. They’re the third line defensemen and have even been called the dream team by some announcers – it’s not unusual for line mates to create strong bonds with one another, but Dean supposes it does become a problem when he can’t remember talking to Ed without Harry around.

Maybe Bobby was onto something here after all.

“Hey Ed,” he greets, sprawling on the seat beside him. “No Harry?”

“Harry didn’t want to sit next to me,” Ed replies in a perturbed voice, and shit, Dean walked right into this.

“Well uh,” Dean shifts awkwardly and sighs. “Why the fuck not?”

Ed scowls deeply. “Harry got a new girlfriend and he didn’t want to hang out as much anymore. That’s a dumb reason, right? A lame girlfriend? So I’ve been telling him I need him to help me work on my defensive blocks to get him to hang out with me more. He found out I was lying to keep him away from Julie and now he’s being a pissbaby about it.”

“Uhhhhh,” Dean slowly digests this information. As ridiculous as it is, he can’t help blaming himself again. It’s his job to keep the team together, and here he is so obsessed with his own problems that he doesn’t realize even Ed and Harry, probably the weirdest codependent couple of guys on the team, are having issues.

“You should let him have a girlfriend, man,” Dean finally settles on. “‘S’you know, the normal thing to do.” Harry’s kind of weird too. Who knows the next time he’ll have a chance with a girl, even as a
hockey player.

Ed rolls his eyes. “I don’t care that he has a girlfriend, I care that he likes her more than me. I’ve been here longer!”

“No way is he gonna be able to explain this without them. “You and Henry are a team, right? But everybody on this bus is your team, and the Cavs don’t mess with you two and tell you you can’t spend time together. Harry’s just adding another team, man, he’s not replacing you or shit like that.”

“Maybe,” Ed sniffs and turns to look out the window.

Dean mentally shrugs and leans back in the seat. You can’t help everybody.

Ed hits him what feels like ten seconds later, except Dean figures out pretty quickly he fell asleep. Not surprising, since he’s been up since five. He sees the gates of Six Flags out the window, Bugs Bunny grinning in welcome, and fights the urge to close his eyes again. The bus moves slowly through the long line of cars moving through the gate.

“I want to go sit next to Harry,” Ed says, knocking him again, and Dean groggily and obligingly moves his legs. Ed stands up in the aisle, turning a little towards him. “Thanks, I guess,” he says before taking off for the back of the bus.

“Just another day’s work for your friendly neighborhood Spiderman,” Dean mutters. He closes his eyes again, but it’s useless now; they’re pulling into a parking space and the bus driver is telling them to get the hell off the bus.

He hears Gabriel listing all the rides he wants to go on in the back of the bus, the list quickly cut off by Sam’s protest of, “but you’re not tall enough.” He hopes the yelp that comes right after it means Gabriel pulled his hair.

Dean’s been to Six Flags a few times for various reasons, and each time is worse than the last. It’s not really a good time for a guy who’s not gonna ride the roller coasters. Usually he ends up wandering off alone, splitting his time between playing games and, if it’s hot enough, riding those water rides where the main objective is to get other people wet.

Dean’s good at getting other people wet.

He ends up with Benny and Kevin somehow, because the second they’re inside the park just about everybody else make a beeline for Superman. Dean has no idea how anybody can stand that fucking ride when all it does is dangle you three hundred feet off the ground.

Superman isn’t as cool as Batman anyway.

“So what do you want to do?” Kevin looks excited, and Dean’s not really sure why the kid didn’t head for the roller coaster with everyone else.

“I’m good with finding a turkey leg,” Benny drawls, staring with interest across the fountain to the Merry-Go-Round. His eyes are covered with dark sunglasses, so Dean’s not totally sure what he’s looking at. He’s not getting on that thing if Benny suggests it though.

“It’s ten thirty in the morning.”

Benny raises one of his eyebrows at Kevin. “You got a point?”
“Why aren’t you two going on roller coasters and fucking around with the other guys?” Dean asks, shoving his hands into his pockets. It’s fairly warm for October, and the park is already filling up. Dean had forgotten that it’s Fright Fest time, meaning the park is full of assholes dressed up in costumes. Dean hopes someone gets Sam’s reaction when they wander into the Mardi Gras area. Even he was wary of the weird ass clowns walking around there.

Benny gives him a look Dean can recognize even from behind his sunglasses. Goddamn bastard didn’t want to leave him alone. Kevin, obviously and cheerfully, says, “I thought it’d be cool to hang with you guys.”

Dean feels a surge of affection he doesn’t really want to be feeling here in the middle of an amusement park and masks it by clapping Kevin on the shoulder. “Course it would be. Benny and I are the only ones here who’re gonna give you any real fun,” he grins. “You got a favorite ride, kid?”

“That Dark Knight Rises ride looks cool,” Kevin says hopefully.

It’s not a roller coaster, thankfully. More of a indoor horror ride that runs on a track. It starts by showing a newsfeed that gets hijacked by the Joker, declaring he’s come up with a new plan to terrorize Gotham, then they’re loaded onto a car and flung around in the dark. Somehow this ends up with Batman saving the day when they finally leave the ride.

“That was awesome!” Kevin whoops.

Benny just groans, and Dean can’t help but smirk at the obvious problems he’s having with his stomach. “You alright there, big boy?”

Benny flips Dean off and checks his watch. “It’s eleven. Food time.”

Dean laughs. “You think greasy fries are gonna help out your stomach?”

“If I don’t think about them that way they will, Chief,” Benny replies, straightening from his slightly hunched position but with a hand still pressed to his stomach.

“I could do with a burger,” Kevin agrees.

Dean was having a surprising amount of fun with Benny and Kevin, considering the weird combination the two of them make. Dean almost split his sides laughing when they began arguing about the Pirates of the Caribbean in line for the ride, Benny calling the pirates a bunch of bad ass motherfuckers and Kevin insisting that Jack Sparrow’s yearly piratical intake would not have supported a crew. However he really should find some other members of his team, since Bobby has declared him babysitter.

Well, maybe he hadn’t, but it was basically in his job description as Captain.

“I’ll catch up with you guys later,” he assures Benny and Kevin. “Gotta make sure Gabriel hasn’t done a Gabriel thing, like piss off Daffy Duck.”

“Don’t worry brother, we’ll see you around.”

“Maybe we can go skydiving at Daredevil Dive,” Kevin suggests.

“I’ll do it if you can get Benny to, smartass,” Dean offers as parting words. He grins when he hears Benny’s, “Aw hell no, boy,” and continues to walk through the park.

The whole thing is basically shaped like a circle, so it’s impossible to get lost. Besides that, Six Flags
is nowhere near the size of Disneyworld, making it pretty easy for Dean to walk around it in a short amount of time. He assumes most of the guys are in line for rides and that’s why he can’t see them, but he does catch Ed and Harry playing a water gun game in the American area, and Gabriel is actually harassing a Bugs Bunny dressed like a vampire near Cartoon Network Land.

Luckily being alone means he’s not a huge target for the zombies and Frankenstein’s monsters wandering around, but he does have to duck out of their way a few times as they make a beeline for a group of freaked out, giggling preteens.

Dean gets hungry and stops off at the Mooseburger Lodge, mostly because the giant animatronic moose in the middle of the restaurant reminds him too much of Sammy to pass up. He’s standing in line staring at the menu when he hears a familiar deep voice.

“-Dean captain?”

“You know how it was between him and Benny?” And that is definitely Sam’s ‘so get this’ voice. “Benny is pretty great, and he’s a good leader, but Dean…he was born to be captain of this team, y’know? He doesn’t show it much, or anything, but he really cares about everybody and is always the first one to help.”


“See? That’s just the kinda guy he is. Last Christmas Gordon’s sister got in some kind of trouble, ended up in the hospital, and Dean visited them practically every day. Not like Gordon appreciated it, but I know his sister still calls Dean up sometimes to talk.”

What the hell is Sam talking about? He’s never told anybody that, because it’s not a big deal. He’s talked to Gordon’s sister maybe three times since she’s left the hospital, really pointless conversations where she tells him she’s doing alright and then there’s a bit of awkward silence before Dean tells her he has to go. He should’ve known not to trust Sam with his phone, even if it is locked. Kid always had a knack for electronics.

“It makes sense,” Krushnic says slowly. “I am beginning to see that Dean is not really the person he wants you to think he is.”

“Oh,” Sam laughs. “You mean that jackass act? It’s funny, he seems to really not like you, but he played that exact same card with Benny, and now they have this weird, sexual –”

Okay that’s enough from Sam and his weird fucking theories. Dean turns around abruptly and moves back in line behind the couple separating them, throwing his arm around Sam’s shoulder. “Man, you gushing about me, Sammy?” he grins lazily at Krushnic. “He’ll do that in his sleep, too.”

Sam shrugs Dean’s arm on his shoulder, typical little brother annoyance clear on his face. “Were you eavesdropping?”

“Sammy, when you put my greatness out there, the universe is gonna let me know.”

“You’re not that great,” Sam mutters.

Krushnic tilts his head at Sam. “I thought you were telling me he was?”

“Yeah Sam, were you lyin’?”

“Please don’t inflate his ego,” Sam warns Krushnic.
Dean clucks his tongue and shakes his head. “Sammy’s jealous,” Dean says conspiratorially, leaning closer to Krushnic. “The only stuff he ever overhears about himself is Gabriel and Balthazar talking about his feet in the bathroom.”

“That was only once!”

Krushnic squints at Dean. “I don’t understand. Why would his feet be a matter of interest?”

Dean grins widely. “Because big feet usually means big d—“

“DEAN,” Sam protests loudly, looking properly scandalized for an oversized giant standing in the middle of a moose themed restaurant. Dean catches sight of the giant animatronics behind him with almost the exact same stance and expression on his face and finds himself unable to speak through his laughter for a good five minutes.

Krushnic actually fucking cracks a small smile when Dean is able to gesture out the resemblance to him through his laughter, and Sam pouts and refuses to talk until they sit down with their food.

Dean sits down next to Krushnic before he realizes what he’s doing. He frowns down at his burger before picking it up and taking a larger bite than he can handle. Through all his making fun of Sam, he’d forgotten to be pissed about his presence, too.

“So what have you been doing?” Sam asks, apparently deciding to forgive him for bringing up the size of his feet in public. “Castiel and I went on the Eagle and the Raging Bull and we watched Balthazar almost get beat up by the boyfriend of a girl he was flirting with.”

“That was slightly entertaining,” Krushnic adds, nodding.

“Dude, you sure you don’t want some food?” Dean asks, not for the first time. The table in front of Krushnic is noticeably empty, since he’d shaken his head every time Sam suggested chicken fingers to him.

Dean couldn’t really blame him for that, but damn, this mooseburger was pretty good.

Sam shoots Cas a look, one Dean’s not sure he really likes. “See? Mother hen.”

“Shut the fuck up, Sam,” Dean says, burger in hand as he gestures at him. “Asking a man if he wants to eat is not mother henning. It’s a question of sanity.”

“I haven’t found much food here that I like,” Krushnic replies, an obvious look of distaste on his face as he stares at Dean’s burger.

Dean deliberately takes an even bigger bite than before and says through the food in his mouth, “’Ou ’ave’t ‘ad the righ’ ’ood,”

“Dean!”

Dean ignores Sam and sends Krushnic a smile, cheeks still bulging with burger.

Krushnic stares back at him, long enough that Dean begins to feel uncomfortable. Freaky soul-staring blue eyes. He looks away and works his throat furiously to swallow. “Seriously though, man, if you haven’t found any American food that you like yet then you’re doing it wrong.”

“Maybe,” he shrugs. “There are other things I like here. The food does not matter to me.”

Dean shakes his head. “Food matters the most.”
“Leave him alone, Dean,” Sam rolls his eyes and drops his fork into his empty plastic salad bowl (yeah, Sam got a salad at a burger place). “Do you guys wanna go on the Viper next?”

Dean thinks about the old rickety wooden coaster that takes turns so sharp the wheels sometimes lift off the track and immediately says, “No.”

Sam narrows his eyes at him. “Well, what are you going to do?”

Dean knows Sam’s got this idea of him wandering around the park, alone and unable to hang out with any of the guys because he doesn’t like roller coasters, and he’s definitely not going to say that he doesn’t like roller coasters out loud. Except Sam’s version of him sounds pathetic, and Dean’s not pathetic. He’s a damn good time actually, and if anybody decided to follow him around instead of waiting five hours in line for a death trap, he could prove it. “I’m gonna do a water ride, smart ass.”

“I don’t want to get my hair wet,” Sam says, making a face.

Dean ignores this soft ball and stands up to throw his trash away. “Then I guess it’s a good thing I didn’t ask you to come with me, Miss America.”

Alright. He swung at the soft ball. Can you blame him?

Sam harrumphs and shoves his trash over as punishment, which Dean takes without complaint because he’s pretty great like that. When he returns to the table, Sam is gone and Krushnic is sitting there patiently, waiting.

“Sam go to the bathroom?”

“No,” Krushnic shakes his head and stands up. “Where is the water ride?”

“Woah, woah,” Dean holds out his hands, palms up. “You’re not coming with me.”

“Why not? I want to.”

Krushnic says it matter-of-factly, like just wanting to should be reason enough for Dean to let him come with. Which leaves him stumped, actually, because what the hell do you say to that? Meanwhile Sam’s decided this is as good a chance as any for him to fuck off and force some one-on-one time with Krushnic on Dean. He wonders if the water ride is even something Krushnic wanted to do, or if Sam somehow convinced him it’d be good times.

He cannot fucking see himself enjoying a water ride with Castiel Krushnic. On the other hand, he’d have to be a heartless bastard to just leave him here all on his own.

Dean’s never managed to be a heartless bastard on purpose. The guilt always manages to kill him.

“Fine, come on,” he mutters. “We’ll go on a water ride.”

For such a small park, there are about four water rides to choose from. There are the logs and the boats, which are both pretty much traditionally the same thing – you go up a big hill, you rush down it at top speed, and splash, you’re soaked. Dean doesn’t care how many times Sam tries to explain the physics to him, those rides do not strap you in, and there is no way some loser hasn’t fallen out. Dean doesn’t need to be that loser.

Another one of the rides is a giant inner tube deal. There’s no huge drop, but it does mimic what Dean assumes rapids might feel like, with large bumps to splash people, waterfalls to be pushed under and water guns along the ride for either ride attendants or people watching for their friends to
squirt them with. He likes this one alright, except there aren’t a lot of water guns.

Which leads him to his favorite water ride, probably one of the most embarrassing things in the park.

Unlike other rides in the park, the way this one is set up allows you take in the whole thing, and to fully appreciate the incredible experience you are about to have. Dean stops abruptly in front of it and stands still to let Krushnic take a good look at it.

There’s a longer silence than he thought there would be. Understandable. Two kids push their way between them, yelling as they head for the line to the ride.

“This is what you want to go on?” Krushnic asks finally.

“Hell yeah it is,” Dean answers, voice as serious as he can force it to be. He can’t look at Krushnic’s face. If he does, he’ll lose it. “You don’t like pirates, Cas?”

“I’ve never formed an opinion,” he replies as Dean starts to whistle along to the sound system playing ‘Yo Ho Yo Ho’.

“You definitely got the voice to be a pirate,” Dean shrugs. “All growly and shit. Maybe if hockey doesn’t work out it can be your next job.”

“Since I’ve been playing hockey the better part of my life, that’s rather a disappointing prospect,” Krushnic replies, running a hand through his hair. Dean watches in amazement as it manages to be even messier than before yet still manages to look good.

“Pirates of the Caribbean didn’t have any Russians in it anyway.”

Krushnic gives him a confused look before turning back to the ride. It’s really just a lagoon type deal, where you boarded a pirate ship with water cannons so you could spray other pirate ships and targets they set up along the ride. There were also cannons all around the outside of the ride, so people who didn’t want to board a pirate ship could still join in.

Man, this is awkward. No wonder it’d been so easy for him to dislike Krushnic. He has nothing in common with the guy, and on top of that, he won’t even talk. Either Krushnic is naturally close lipped, or people in Russia get around with one word sentences all the time.

“Dude, you wanna get better at all this American crap, you better start talking,” Dean informs him.

“Fine,” Krushnic agrees, and Dean realizes he’s been led over to a water cannon without realizing it. Krushnic is studying it closely, turning the crank and watching the water shoot out. A girl on the pirate ship passing by shrieks. “What would you like to talk about?”

“You know the whole reason we’re here today is because of you, right?”

Krushnic narrows his eyes at Dean. “I thought it was because of you.”

“Bullshit,” is Dean’s knee jerk response, and he feels the familiar rush of anger that usually accompanies Krushnic and the dumb things he says. They can’t fucking keep doing this. They have a game in two days, the first home game. He wants to be able to play hockey again god dammit, to be comfortable with his team on the ice. He takes a deep breath. “Look, man, Bobby wants us to be buddies, and I want to be able to play hockey. So let’s make this as painless as possible, alright?”

Krushnic continues to stare at the water cannon, turns the crank again and hits another person dead on. Dean has to admit he has ridiculous aim. “I don’t believe friendship is required among
teammates, but I respect Coach Singer. If he believes we need to,” his mouth twists, “be buddies, I will try.”

Dean has no idea how he managed to insinuate so much with the word ‘buddies’, but holy fuck did he do it. “Uh huh,” he says uncomfortably. “So, wanna get on the ride?”

“I’d much rather ride a roller coaster.”

Dean feels his chest clench, because it figures. Does he have to spell it out? The guy already knows he’s not a fan of planes, you think he’d make the logic leap. “Roller coasters aren’t really my style.”

Krushnic drops the cannon’s crank and turns toward him, forcing Dean to realize how close they’d been standing. Their feet are almost toe to toe, now. “Are you afraid?”

He doesn’t ask maliciously, or sarcastically, or even as a challenge. The words are dripping with genuine innocence, and somehow that pisses Dean off more than anything else would. Because this guy thinks he’s not afraid, and now he really is some kind of pansy if he can’t prove that he isn’t.

“Course I’m not afraid.”

“Sam says you like Batman,” Krushnic replies, because of course Sam probably tells Krushnic about Dean any chance he can get. Kid gets antsy when he thinks Dean can’t make friends on his own. “Would you like to go on the ride?”

“GET A ROOM!” someone yells, and Krushnic looks around in surprise. Dean immediately takes a huge step back. He knows his cheeks are burning, even though they shouldn’t be, because it doesn’t matter what some asshole teenager yells at him in the middle of Six Flags, but still. He avoids looking at Krushnic again. “Fine. Let’s ride Batman.”

It takes them only a few minutes to get to the line for the ride, made up to look like a park in the middle of Gotham that leads them through a steam pipe into the underworld of the city. Since Dean’s never been in line here before, he’s afraid he might be embarrassingly nerdy about it, but Krushnic doesn’t look annoyed or like he’s laughing at him.

“How do you make friends?” he asks suddenly as Dean is reading the motto of Gotham City set above their heads.

“What, you don’t know how to make friends?” Dean ask distractedly.

“If I did I would not be asking,” Krushnic replies testily.

Dean tries not to think about how sad that is. Hell, he probably wouldn’t have friends either if it weren’t for the team and the people he grew up with, but Krushnic is in the same situation as him. He had teammates, back in Russia, and Dean knows not all the guys here feel the same way about him as Dean does.

Come to think of it though, Krushnic never really talks, and all the guys are the type to never shut up.

“You talk to them, I guess,” Dean shrugs. He has no idea how he makes friends. Who was the last one? Benny probably. “You uh, talk to them and hopefully you’ll have a good time together. And then that just keeps happening.”

Krushnic’s listening intently, and now he frowns. “I don’t know what to talk about,” he says in frustration. “I do not think I share any experiences with you.”

Dean rolls his eyes. “Talk about whatever you want then. If the other person doesn’t care, they’re
probably a pretty shit person anyway. You ever hear of icebreakers? It’s something they like to do a lot of in hockey.”

“Icebreaker,” Krushnic repeats, like he’s trying out the word for the first time. Which he probably is, duh Dean. “No, I do not know what this is.”

“They do it for game programs. You’ll probably get asked a couple soon. The media guy will come around and ask who on the team is most annoying, or who’s always late to practice, or who has the best hair, and y’know, it’s an ice breaker. Opens up conversation.”

The group of kids waiting in line behind them start fooling around, pushing each other, and Krushnic takes a few steps closer to Dean to get out of their way. “What are the answers to those questions?”

“Easy, Gabriel’s the most annoying, Andy’s usually late, and everyone on the team is gonna say Sam has the nicest hair, but only because he wants it so badly.”

Dean hears Krushnic make a small noise in his throat and glances at him. He looks almost happy. “I could have guessed all of those,” he says proudly, his voice quieter now that he’s standing shoulder to shoulder with Dean.

“Proud of you man,” he blows out a breath. They’re getting closer to the entrance of the steam pipe, which means closer and closer to the fucking roller coaster. “Now you know how to do it.”

Krushnic doesn’t say anything for a while again, and when Dean finally looks to see if he’s wandered off or something he’s staring. Just staring. “I ever tell you that’s creepy as hell? ‘Cause it is.”

“It got you to talk you me,” Krushnic points out, and Dean thinks he’s actually smug about it. “Doesn’t that count as an ice breaker?”

“No, man, it counts as an introduction to the wrong end of a restraining order.” Dean shakes his head and turns towards him. “Look, I’ll do you, and then after this you can go off and make friends with Garth or somethin’, alright? Garth’ll be easy.”

Krushnic just looks expectant, which Dean takes to mean ‘give me the fucking icebreaker already.’ “So, Castiel,” he says in an overly fake, pleasant voice. “Got any family?”

“No. Try again.”

“It’s not a fucking game,” Dean says, and of course now all he wants to know about is all the other Krushnics running around Russia. “You either answer and we have a conversation, or you don’t and we stand here in awkward ass silence because you’re a stubborn fuck.”

Dean knew Krushnic would stay silent after that, but he lasted longer than Dean would have expected. They actually make it to the entrance of the pipe, just enough time for Dean to properly start freaking out and begin regretting every decision that led him to this line. When was the last time this fucking ride was tested? That should be on display somewhere, shouldn’t it? Like, legally?

“I have one sister.”

Dean latches onto this gratefully, desperate for anything to distract him from what he’s about to do. “Yeah? What’s her name?”

“Anna,” Castiel replies reluctantly. “She is eighteen. I brought her over with me, and she attends the University of Chicago. It’s a good school.”
“Really good school,” Dean agrees, and notices Castiel gets a familiar look on his face that Dean often catches himself with when he’s telling some complete stranger about Sam. “She must be smart.”

“Anna is much smarter than me,” he agrees. “She speaks English very well.”

Dean laughs. “Yeah, and you’re so horrible at it.”

Castiel shrugs. “I still do not understand many things you say.”

“I dunno if that’s because you don’t get English, man, more like you don’t know what the fuck I’m talking about,” Dean shrugs. “Like if I go Space Balls, Star Wars, Star Trek and The Nutty Professor, you’re getting all those words, but I bet you didn’t catch the meaning.”

“There was no meaning there,” Cas says, shifting. “Was there?”

Dean hadn’t even noticed, but they’re inside the pipes now, standing on the stairs that lead them up to the platform provided for boarding the coaster. Luckily Krushnic has moved to the left side, which means they won’t be getting into the front car. Because fuck that.

“Buncha awesome fucking movies,” Dean tells him. Krushnic pitches forward suddenly, slamming into Dean, and Dean catches a glimpse of two kids pushing their way through the line to get to the one leading to the first car. “Watch it, assholes!” he yells. Castiel is still pressed against his chest, and Dean tries very hard not to think about how good it feels to have a body up against his. Maybe Sammy’s right and he does have a problem, it’s only been a week since Tessa and that other girl. Maybe he needs therapy. Hehe. Dick therapy.

Shit, Castiel is still pressed completely up against him. Now this is weird. Maybe he’s waiting for Dean to push him off? Please don’t fuck up for once.

“Uh—“

Krushnic’s already pushing off of him. “Sorry,” he says roughly.

“S’fine.” Dean rubs his arm and turns away from him again. He figures that’s probably ended the conversation, and he’s right. Castiel doesn’t speak up again, so Dean is left to continue his silent freak out as they get closer and closer to boarding one of the middle cars on the coaster.

He’s working himself up into a pretty good silent panic attack when Castiel suddenly says, “I don’t know anything about Batman. Is he really half a bat?”

Dean’s so amazed that anybody could think Batman is half bat that he snaps out of his mental freak out almost instantly. “No, he’s not a bat, he’s billionaire Bruce Wayne.”

Krushnic climbs into the roller coaster and pulls the harness down. Dean follows without really thinking about it. “If he’s a billionaire, why does he have to be a superhero?”

He doesn’t have to be, he does it to save Gotham. Look man—“

Batman: The Ride is the fucking most terrifying thing Dean has ever been on in his life. And he loves it. He doesn’t realize how high up they are because he’s explaining to Cas what’s in the utility belt (or what he knows is in the utility belt, anyway; motherfucker keeps adding new shit), and when he finally notices, it’s too late, and they’re falling, and his stomach is in his throat and he’s positive his feet are going to hit a tree and he’s too dizzy to tell which way is up.
And then it’s over, and the shot of adrenaline to his heart reminds him exactly of like how a good hockey game makes him feel.

“Fuck Cas,” he says breathlessly as he leads him out the exit of the ride. “That was like…like—,”

He’s having a hard time finding a word for it, but Cas fills it in without thinking. “Like flying,” he says. “Like skating on ice.”

“Yeah. Holy shit. What d’you think of Batman now?”

“I believe Bruce Wayne and Dick Grayson would be very proud of us.”

“Hell yeah they would!” Dean whoops, halting in front of the photo booth. “You see us?” Then Cas’ words register in his brain, and he rounds on him. “Wait a minute, I didn’t tell you Robin’s real name.”

Cas stares at him and shrugs.

Dean punches his shoulder and Cas looks down in surprise at where he’d touched him. “You asshole. You fucking knew Batman wasn’t part bat.”

“Maybe. You seemed like you needed the distraction,” Cas replies, nodding at one of the computer screens above the booth. “I think that’s us.”

Well great, Cas knew he was scared of the roller coaster. He’s not as upset about this as he really should be. Only Sam ever knows things about him, and even that freaks Dean out sometimes, so why isn’t Cas knowing freaking him out as much?

At least Krushnic probably isn’t gonna open his mouth about it.

Two keychains are fifteen dollars. Dean buys them without a second thought, shoving one at Cas. “This doesn’t seem…cool,” Cas says, like he’s not totally sure he’s using the word correctly.

Dean scoffs at him. “It’s got the fucking bat signal on the back. Whoever says that is lying.”

The picture’s dumb, and he’s never showing it to anyone, ever, least of all Sam. But he wanted it.

Cas doesn’t suggest a ride he wants to go on after that, so Dean doesn’t either. He should probably go find some of the other guys and see how they’re doing, but Cas keeps following him, and again when Dean thinks of just leaving him alone he feels inadvertently guilty. Not that he’s actually even considering it, but just thinking it makes him feel shitty.

He notices too late that Cas isn’t walking next to him anymore, and he’s hit with the same kind of rush of panic he gets when Chekov manages to gnaw off his leash. Dean turns abruptly, easily looking over the heads of a large group of people entertaining themselves with a man dressed as Dracula to spot Cas standing by one of the game booths, in a heated discussion with the kid running it. Dean heads over quickly, hoping to diffuse things before Cas gets deported for punching a glorified carnie.

“I want to buy that,” Cas is insisting, trying to push a wad of money at the guy.

“I told you pal, you can’t just buy it. You gotta play the game.”

“I’m not your pal,” Cas says threateningly, stepping closer.

“Cool it,” Dean says, pulling him back. He takes the bundle of cash out of Cas’ hands (there’s gotta
be a hundred dollars here – Dean makes a mental note to show the stubborn ass how to count American money later) and presses five dollars at the guy. “You gotta play the game if you want the prize,” he explains, taking the three softballs the kid hands over in return.

It’s one of those baseball type games, the ones where you’re meant to throw the ball at weighted pins that look like cats. Cas is obviously sulking at being forced to do menial labor for whatever fucking stuffed animal he’s decided he has to have, but he takes one of the balls at Dean and throws it at the pins.

It misses completely. Cas turns to glare at Dean and he hands over another softball with a barely concealed grin on his face.

Turns out Cas has a shit throwing arm.

“Didn’t think I’d ever find something you were bad at,” Dean says happily after he’s missed every single throw. Cas growls in annoyance and glares upwards, long enough for Dean to follow his gaze and notice the stuffed bumblebee he’s staring at.

“Y’know, the whole reason I decided to hate you is because you’re supposed to be some big replacement for my best friend,” Dean mentions conversationally as he hands the kid working the game another five dollars.

“I don’t want to be a replacement,” Cas replies, watching Dean take the softballs. “I want to be better.”

“If I was a sincere guy, I’d tell you you are,” Dean replies, throwing the first ball. Bullseye. “But there’s this thing called loyalty, you know. I’d rather have Victor.”

“Why would you want Victor when you weren’t winning with him?” Cas asks, brow furrowed. He sounds genuinely confused by this conundrum. “With me, we will win.”

“Dude, I don’t care if the Stanley Cup is handed over to us just because your name is on the roster,” Dean grunts, slamming down another cat. “It’s not gonna be the same without Victor, and it’s definitely not gonna be the same when we got no good vibe going on the ice. What a crappy memory that would make, winning the biggest trophy in sports alongside a guy you’re not even happy is there.”

“I believe we will begin to feel more comfortable on the ice,” Cas replies, watching Dean’s form closely as he knocks down the final cat. “I do not understand your need to connect with your teammates off the ice. As long as our hockey works well together, it will be fine.”

“I dunno what kind of operation you were running over there in the Motherland, but here in America we tend to want to like the guys we play with. Grab a beer, shoot the shit, make fun of football players,” Dean tells him, pointing at the bumblebee and handing it over to Cas once it’s in his hands. “Here.”

“Thank you,” Cas says solemnly, like it’s actually the Stanley Cup that has just been handed to him.

“Yeah,” Dean replies, looking him over for a second. Weird. “C’mon, we should get going.”

It’s late in the day, and Dean figures they’ve been in the park long enough to satisfy Bobby’s sadistic need to keep them all trapped with one another. If they head back to the city now, most of the guys will still be able to get together with their families, and Dean can go the fuck home.

It takes him a few minutes, but he finally manages to send out a mass text to everybody, telling them
to meet back at the bus. He and Cas are the first ones there, Cas still clutching to the dumb stuffed bumblebee.

“I got a date with Lola Bunny!” Gabriel whoops as soon as he comes into view. He holds out a hand to high five Cas, and ends up slapping his ass when Cas doesn’t respond.

“Get on the bus, dumbass.” Dean tells him. The guys are arriving in groups now, all looking tired but happy. Dean climbs onto the bus as soon as he sees them all coming. He’s not their mother, whoever gets left here can find their own fucking ride home.

He still watches everybody walk by on the bus, tracks as Cas climbs on after Sam and goes to sit with him again. Whatever. He’d told Cas to go make friends with someone else. At least Sam would be patient.

Benny slumps down next to him, neck sunburned and sunglasses still covering his eyes, even though it isn’t as bright anymore. Guy’s got a weird relationship with the sun. “Have fun with the kid?” Dean grunts.

Benny just smiles slow at him, like molasses sliding over pancakes. “Rumor ‘round the boys is you had a nice day. Have fun with Krushnic?”

Dean stares hard at him, trying to figure out what he means. Benny loves ambiguity, fucker thrives on it, loves making vague ass comments that Dean freaks out over for weeks. ‘Course if he’s been talking to Sam, the two of them have probably come up with a lot of stupid ideas.

“Shut up, Benny,” he finally replies.

Benny just laughs.

Dean can barely describe how it felt to win their first home game. The lights, the deafening sound, the stadium packed wall to wall with red, familiar announcers who actually knew how to pronounce all of their names— it all felt like home to him.

Best of all, being on the ice felt like home again to him too. God bless Bobby and his weird ass methods, but somethin’ must’ve worked, because being on the ice with Cas on one side and Benny on the other feels like the most natural thing in the world to him now. Their passes are smooth, their formation tight, and Dean barely has to think about where he wants someone before they’re there. They couldn’t have looked better. The crowd is eating it up.

Dean scores his first goal of the season, a slap shot high and to the glove side, and Cas is the first one on top of him after he does his victory fist pump, arm wrapped tightly and briefly around his shoulder before he gets out of the way for Sam to tackle him. Dean wishes he could ask what Cas thought of that goal, but Balthazar is waiting for him to get off the ice so the line can change, and he does.

They send St. Louis packing with a score of three to nothing.

Bobby is ecstatic at whatever he just witnessed, you can tell because he only gives them a gruff,
“Good game,” before he leaves them the hell alone in the locker room. Dean gets out the belt the team gives to their decided player of the game, because he feels like this is the first time they’ve really earned it this season, and passes it to Gabriel for getting them the shut out. Gabriel proceeds to strip down to his boxers and nothing else before slapping the large, gaudy wrestler-champion belt around his waist.

Then the media swarms in, eager to talk about the game and their predictions for the season. They’re all stupid, common sense filler questions that Dean answers anyway, because that’s what you’re supposed to do. “Yeah, Cas is a great guy, yeah, it looks like the season is shaping up to be a good one, yes, yes, yes.”

Since he’s captain, he doesn’t get away as easily as the others, isn’t even able to excuse himself when Jess drags over a flushed red Sam and invites Dean to come out with them, some of the ice girls and some other guys on the team. Dean shakes his head regretfully as he tries to listen to a reporter figure out what the rules of hockey are in his damn questions, and sends Sam a wink when Jess isn’t looking that makes him blush even harder.

Finally he’s able to make it home, intending to fall straight into bed, but Cas is standing in the lobby staring out the window with this look on his face, not one that really strikes Dean as sad but seems off in some similar away. Against his better judgment he drags Cas upstairs, and sits him on the couch, where Chekov pounces on him. “What is this?” Cas asks as he plays with one of Chekov’s floppy ears.

“Called being a good teammate,” Dean says shortly, flipping on the TV and expertly channel surfing to Dr. Sexy. He drops down next to Cas and they don’t speak the rest of the night, even when Cas leaves at midnight.

Turns out Sam is right (what else is new) and Dean’s some kind of bleeding heart, because he finds himself dragging Cas up to the apartment a lot. Mostly because he finds Cas looking out the lobby doors with that melancholy as hell look on his face. Dean mentions it once, but Cas just shrugs and says, “I’m not in Russia anymore.” There’s so much behind that statement that Dean drops it. Most personal things aren’t for teammates to know.

Still, hard not to find out some shit about Cas when he only lives two floors down and somehow keeps managing to get himself invited over. Cas tells him stuff, Dean forcing him to converse, because, “staring at each other for hours in my empty apartment is creepy, dude.” So he learns that the guy really likes springtime (something to do with green that Dean didn’t really understand), that he’s got some sort of unholy obsession with these dumpling things called Pelminis, and that he’s read a fuckton more books than Dean ever will.

But he also learns things that Cas doesn’t necessarily tell him, like that he’s not a morning person, and that he doesn’t really have family other than his sister, and that he’s got this weird thing where he has to pet Chekov at least once when he visits.

So, whatever. He’s getting more time with the guy than he ever really asked for, but it’s hard to avoid. It isn’t as bad as Dean might have thought it would be only a month ago, and the more time he spends with Cas off the ice, the better their playing gets. It’s a win-win for everybody, or at least a win-not-totally-a-lose.

Except apparently no one else realizes that.

Sam comes over towards the end of the month so they can fulfill their yearly tradition of watching Silent Hill around Halloween and scaring the crap out of each other. Except Sam is less interested in being scared shitless than he is in talking about Jess.
“Dude,” Dean finally pauses the movie. “Have you even kissed her yet?”

“No,” Sam says defensively. “I’m working up to it, okay?”

“Grow some balls, Sammy. Jess is way out of your league, if you don’t kiss her now you never will.”

“I will,” Sam counters. “I am, okay? I have a plan.”

Dean snorts. Figures Sammy is gonna plan out his whole first kiss with a chick in some elaborate arrangement. “It’s not a proposal, Sam.”

“I know, I just like spending time with her.” Sam plays with a loose thread on one of those dumb pillows he made Dean buy. Good, maybe he’ll wreck it and he can get some actual comfy shit. “Which is why I’m glad you and Cas are friends now.”

Dean gets a good laugh out of that before he realizes Sam is serious. “What?”

“Yeah,” Sam nods, eyes big. “I mean with Victor gone, and me starting to date Jess, and Benny’s got Andrea on the other side of the city…but you guys hang out. I shouldn’t have worried.”

“We do not hang out,” Dean denies, staring at Sam. “He lives downstairs, it’s kind of hard to keep him out. And we’re not friends.”

Sam squints a little. “You call him Cas.”

“It’s easier to say!” Dean’s aware that his voice is rising and tries to lower it. “I’m just being a good teammate, Sammy. It’s what everybody wanted, but I can stop if it bothers you.”

“Fine, you’re not friends,” Sam holds his hands up in surrender but can’t resist delivering one last parting shot, “it’s just usually you go out when you get bored.”

And he’s right. Whenever Victor was busy, Dean’d find himself at the Roadhouse or some other bar, usually to find a girl to bring home. Come to think of it, Tessa’s still the last person he had sex with, and the amount of time it’s been since then isn’t really eating him up like it usually would be.

When’s the last time he even looked at porn?

It’s easily Sam’s fault that he ends up at the Roadhouse a couple of nights later, sipping beer and scoping out women.

Jo had greeted him with a “hey, haven’t seen you in a while!” which yeah, was kind of the problem. He’s not sure where this sudden dry spell came from, or why it doesn’t feel like a dry spell at all, but now that it’s been pointed out to him, he doesn’t like it.

Except he’s seen about three beautiful women here so far, and he can’t make himself get off the barstool to go talk to them. Hell, there’s a dark haired guy staring him down from the other end of the bar, and Dean can’t even bring himself to flip him off.

Maybe it’s just laziness, he muses as he sips at his beer and casually eyes a blonde over in the corner. Picking up a chick is hard work. Maybe he should just go home and watch porn. ‘Cept he’d tried that last night and had somehow ended up on a video with a guy who reminded him a lot of Cas, and after that he couldn’t get the idea out of his head.

So no porn then.
Cas does kind of look like he’d make a good porn star though, what with the sex hair look and those big baby blues. His accent doesn’t hurt, and man, coupled with that stare, Dean bets he could make a girl come just by focusing on all his intensity on her. Jesus, he can just imagine what….

The hell. Brain.

It’s one thing to get a little hard in a public bar because you’re imagining pornographic scenarios in your head, but imagining your teammate within that scenario is on a whole other level. A pretty gay one.

Dean’s not gay, he just has an overactive imagination. Always has.

“What’re you drinking?”

Dean looks up in surprise to see that dark haired staring guy has slid onto the stool next to him, his own almost empty beer bottle in hand. Dean almost feels bad for him – he must be really desperate for some company if he came over here. Meant Jo wasn’t doing her job right. Amateur. “El Sol,” he replies, spinning the bottle so the label is showing. “S’got a nice zing to it.”

The guy gestures for another beer and smiles wryly at Dean. “I’m Aaron.”

“Dean,” Dean nods and finishes off his beer, but Jo’s already placing another one down in front of him, along with Aaron’s. “So what brings you to a bar on a Tuesday night?”

Aaron sighs and runs his hand through his hair. It sticks up a bit, like Cas’. “I’m a cop. It was a rough day. What about you?”

Dean winces. “Sorry man. I hear cops get a bad break. I’m, uh, a hockey player, so my time off can be kind of weird.” He knows he’s procrastinating what he actually came here to do by talking to this guy, but it’s not like he’s super invested in the conversation. He can leave anytime he spots a girl he likes.

“Hockey?” Aaron’s face lights up, and Dean’s eyes are immediately drawn from roving the bar and back to him. Good smile. “Hang on, I have to show you something,” he pulls out his phone and begins swiping through it, holding it closer to Dean so he can see whatever is on the screen. He doesn’t hold it close enough through, forcing him to lean close. It’s a picture of Aaron standing with the Stanley Cup.

“Holy shit, man,” Dean says admiringly. “Fucking awesome. You know I haven’t even seen the damn thing? I mean I can never touch it unless we win it, because it’s bad luck, but my brother’s got this weird idea that if we even look at it we’ll fuck everything up.”

“There was actually a rookie there from Ottawa who touched it—” Aaron starts. Dean listens intently, some story about how the poor kid didn’t know about the jinx and had everyone screaming at him, but his attention is briefly caught by a redhead a few seats down. She’s pretty, in a girl next door kind of way, and she seems interested in him. When he catches her eye, she gives an exaggerated wink and a thumbs up.

“—and the old woman’s screaming, ‘you idiot! MY purse is made of alligator, not crocodile!’” Dean tunes back in, realizing he’s been nodding along and pauses to grin brightly. Aaron trails off.

“Man,” Dean shakes his head wistfully and straightens back up a little. “I can’t wait until the day I finally get to meet Lord Stanley there.”

Aaron stares at him a second longer. “I have one of those high craftsmanship replicas,” he says
finally. “You wanna come back to my place and check it out? It’ll be almost as good.”

Dean thinks about it, he really does, because besides that weird wink from Red, his night isn’t really going anywhere. Except they’ve got early practice tomorrow, and if he’s not gonna be here he might as well be at home. “Nah, man, thanks. Maybe some other time.”

“Yeah, okay,” Aaron says quickly, standing up. “I should get going. It was nice meeting you anyway, Dean.”

Dean grins. “You too. S’nice talking to you.”

Aaron almost runs into a table waving at him, and then Dean’s turning back to his beer, only to find Red sitting right next to him, chin on fisted hand. “Weren’t feeling it?” she asks sympathetically.

“What?” Dean frowns in confusion at her, then realizes she must have heard the tail end of that conversation. “Oh, I told him some other time.”

“Magnanimous,” she nods sagely. “And your name is Dean.”

Ah. A groupie. Maybe he was going to have a good night after all. “S’right,” he smirks slowly. “You’ve got a bit of an unfair advantage there, Red.”

“I’m Charlie,” she smiles brightly and holds out her hand, which Dean shakes only after taking a while to realize what she wants. He’ll admit, this is the most unique pick up he’s ever experienced. “How are you?”

“Uh. Good?” Guess the uniqueness was gonna continue. “So,” he struggles for a line, something he’s never had to do before, and finally drags up the lame, “what’s a nice girl like you doing all alone in a bar like this?”

“Contemplating life’s hardest questions,” Charlie says seriously, looking at him with large brown eyes. “Like, if the Millennium Falcon and the USS Enterprise were in a dogfight, who would win?”

Dean has no idea how it happened, and he doubts he’ll ever figure it out, but Charlie manages to suck him in to one of the most engaging conversations he’s ever had with a woman. She’s adamant that the USS Enterprise would win, with its massive crew and superior fire power, while Dean’s pretty sure they would never be able to fire with all energy diverted to the shields, and plus, “it’s fucking Han Solo, Red!”

By the time they’re on their fifth beer together they’ve called a tentative truce, and Dean’s feeling less and less like taking Charlie home tonight, mostly because she’s starting to feel like the little sister he never had. But he should at least try, right? A girl he genuinely enjoys talking to is a better scenario than he could have ever hoped for.

“More people would be cool if they watched Star Wars,” Dean tells her solemnly, pointing at her with his beer. “I know this guy, Cas—,”

“You mentioned him before,” Charlie interrupts.

Dean’s eyebrows crease and he tries to think back. “Yeah?”

“Yeah, you said the size of the Enterprise didn’t matter, because if there was a guy like Cas on board the Falcon he’d just silently beat everyone into submission with his stubbornness and death glare. But he sounds like Spock to me, which means the Enterprise wins.”
“The Enterprise never wins,” Dean says firmly. “He’s kinda like Spock, ‘cept he’s never seen the movies.”

Charlie’s face twists into something a little like genuine horror. “That needs to be fixed. Immediately. Show him the next time he comes over.”

“Yeah,” Dean muses, twisting his bottle around in his hands. He thinks Cas would like Star Trek. He definitely said he liked Chekov, right? Shit. He needs to ask Charlie over. “Hey, uh, Red, so I got a dog named Chekov, d’you wanna come over and—,”

“You ready, babe?”

Dean’s head jerks up and he glares at Jo, because Jo is a horrible cock blocking, person. Actually another surrogate sibling he never wanted. “Since when are you callin’ me babe?”

“Gross,” Jo makes a face at him. “I was talking to my girlfriend.”

“Who?”

“Hey,” Charlie waves to get his attention. She’s frowning a little. “I thought you knew. You didn’t seem freaked that I knew your name.”

“Dean’s a big celebrity, he thinks everybody knows his name,” Jo says sarcastically. Dean continues to stare at Charlie, because he had not been picking up this vibe. At all. “You’re gay?”

“As Christmas,” she says cheerfully, but she’s still looking at him funny. “That’s not gonna be a problem, right? Because that’d be some serious self-hypocrisy right there.”

Dean points at her, “Hey, I told Jo I was cool with whatever she was figuring out. I could care less if she’s gay.”

Charlie raises an eyebrow. “Not Jo. You.”

“What?” Jo bursts into laughter and Dean whips around to face her again. “What the hell are you telling people, Joanna Beth?”

“Okay, one,” Jo wheeze, trying to catch her breath, “Don’t call me that. Two, I’m bi, not gay. And three, I didn’t tell her anything, she totally came to that conclusion on her own.”

“You mean you’re not?”

“What the hell makes you think I’m gay?” Dean demands. What the hell is it with people? Did somebody somehow get “homosexual” tattooed across his back without him noticing? Comments from other asshole hockey players made sense, because Dean was better looking than most and a better player, and no one wanted to be accused of taking it up the ass. But if a stranger (a gay one at that) was seeing something, he was going to need to reevaluate his life choices.

“I mean, I thought it was pretty obvious from the way you were flirting with that guy earlier,” Charlie says, looking confused.

“Flirting?”

“Dude, he asked you back to his place.”
Dean shuts up.

“Plus,” she shrugs, “You’re pretty into Han Solo, and you’re really into this Castiel guy. I mean, from what I could tell when you were talking about him, you got pretty animated. I figured that’s why you didn’t go home with the other guy.”

Dean continues to sit there in stunned silence. He has no response, because this is all too ridiculous to respond to. Han Solo is a badass, plain and simple. If he didn’t talk about him every chance he got something would be wrong with him. And maybe Aaron was hitting on him and he hadn’t noticed, but nothing happened, right? He wouldn’t have done anything.

And fucking Cas was always on his mind lately, but that happens when you start spending a lot of time with someone in close quarters. He can’t help it that they live in the same building and work together every day. Cas’ll be old news in a month, and then he won’t be so focused on him.

“I’m not gay,” he says, shaking his head.


“S’fine.” Dean stands up and finishes off the rest of his beer in one swallow, tossing some money onto the bar. “Hey Jo, can you call me a cab? I’ll be waiting out front.”

Jo nods and disappears into the back to use the phone. “Nice meeting you, Charlie,” he says, not waiting for her reply before heading out of the bar.

I’m not gay, he thinks, shivering in the cool night air. He knows that. So why is it starting to bother him now?
The universe is playing a joke on him. That, or Sam and Gabriel have somehow managed to figure out what’s been fucking with his brain the last few weeks, and are using it in their next elaborate prank. He wouldn’t put it past them, since Balthazar was still somehow convinced that it was the Queen he’d talked to on the phone last fall.

Sam does a creepily good old lady voice which Dean has warned him never to use again. Fucking uncanny.

In all seriousness though, ever since that issue with Charlie and Jo a few weeks ago, he’s been seeing same-sex couples everywhere. Or maybe he’s noticing them for the first time? He has no idea. Dean was pretty convinced Dr. Sexy was gunning after Nurse Picallo, hard, but now when he watches the show he can’t help but notice how much the good doctor likes to stare at hospital technician Jim Novak.

No way Gabriel and Sam could have pulled that off, right?

It’s not even only the show, just life in general. Dean’s seeing shit that’s never been around before. The other day while he was walking to the grocery store two girls holding hands in Winchester jerseys (one with a twenty-four on the back, one with a two) came running up to ask for his autograph. When he mentioned it was always great to meet siblings, they’d giggled openly and declared they were dating before rushing off again.

Not to mention at practice he’d found *The Joys of Gay Sex* stuffed into his locker.

On second thought, that probably was Gabriel.

Still, it was weird, and he was starting to get uncomfortable. Seeing all this shit kept forcing thoughts to the front of his brain, thoughts he then had to spend valuable time shoving deep, deep down, when really all of his concentration should be on hockey.

They were doing well. The month of October had ended with them ahead, second in the central division only behind Nashville, even though standings like that didn’t really matter this early in the year. Dean should be ecstatic, he really should.

Except one side effect to all this non-thinking is that he really wasn’t hanging with Cas anymore. Not that he was making an effort to ignore him, like he had before, just…he wasn’t making an effort not to either. And that, weirdly enough, was pissing him off. Because apparently, he fucking liked hanging out with Cas.

As usual, this was obvious to everybody else but him.

Halloween isn’t a holiday the NHL respects (fun sucking bastards, Gabriel calls them) and it’s not often that they don’t have a game. Dean’s never really been a fan to begin with, but Gabriel absolutely insists that they do something involving candy, which is how Dean finds himself over at the guy’s place first time they get a chance, along with Sam, Benny and Balthazar.

Gabriel had opened the door to them with a fake seventies pornographer-looking mustache on his face, grinning widely. “I want one,” Balthazar says instantly, and Gabriel slaps the one already waiting in his hand onto Balthazar’s face.

“Who else wants a mustache?”
Benny raises an eyebrow and rubs his scruff in response. Dean does pretty much the same thing (hey, it’s November, his cheeks are getting cold) and Sam, who probably couldn’t grow a good beard to save his life, makes a face.

“Spoilsports,” Balthazar sniffs, clapping Gabriel on the shoulder.

“Is anybody else coming?” Sam asks.

“Nah,” Gabriel says cheerfully, clapping him on the shoulder. “You assholes are the only ones I can tolerate after hours.”

It’s not so much a party as it is an excuse for Gabriel to fill his apartment with bowls full of candy and eat them. Dean finds himself getting bored with the drinking and wanders from the kitchen where they’re all gathered to the couch. The TV is flipped on to Naked and Afraid, and he finds himself getting weirdly invested in it.

No way does this chick want to go hunt an alligator with just a stick and bare ass naked.

“I could do this show,” Benny snorts from beside him. Dean hadn’t even noticed he’d followed him in here.

“Sure you could,” Dean nods, “But could the American public handle your ugly without the clothes to disguise it?”

“You’re just a basket full o’ sunshine tonight, aren’t ya?” Benny snorts, tossing a small KitKat at him. “What’s been going on with you, brother?”

Dean frowns at him. “What the hell are you talking about?”

Benny shoots him a look. “Come’n now Dean. I know you think you got it all buttoned up, and we let you believe that because you’re captain and we respect you, but I’m one of your best friends. You think I wouldn’t notice you’ve been actin’ off?”

“S’news to me,” Dean says, turning his attention back to the TV. He knows he’s been acting normal, because he’s been consciously trying really hard to do so. The last thing he needs is Sam swooping in for some touchy-feely talk over crap Dean himself isn’t even sure how to name. There probably is no name for whatever he’s been feeling, he’ll just have to suck it the fuck up and get over it.

“Brother, you’ve been quieter than I’ve ever known you to be, and don’t think I haven’t seen you avoidin’ your friends again.”

“Who am I avoiding?” Dean snorts. “I’m spending time with all you idiots right now, aren’t I?”

“You’re watching two naked psychos run around in a jungle,” Benny counters. “You’re not interactin’ Dean. Whenever a conversation is goin’ on around you, you space out like you got something else on your mind. And Sam says you haven’t seen Cas in a few weeks.”

“Do you guys run a gossip tree or something?” he complains. “So what if I haven’t seen Cas?”

Benny shrugs. “Figured that’s why you were sad, ’cause you were missing your friend.”

“That’s the dumbest thing I’ve ever heard. Cas and I aren’t friends. I see him at practice, why the hell would I miss him?” He says it too fast, his voice just a little too high-pitched, and Dean curses himself for making his words sound so blatantly false, because they aren’t.
“Uh huh,” Benny says, because of course the bastard noticed. Dean waits for him to say something else, anything, is particularly dreading the one thing that will absolutely make him lose it, but Benny remains quiet.

“I’m always here, brother,” he says finally, and that’s it. Nothing else.

So great. Dean’s become so moody and teenage girl-like that even fucking Benny has noticed. He wonders if in all these gossips sessions the team has figured out what’s wrong with him, because he sure as fuck hasn’t.

Luckily his apparent bad attitude isn’t brought up again (he can’t believe Sam is able to keep his mouth shut) and he’s able to get out of the party without too much trouble. He finds his jean pockets somehow stuffed with fun sized Snickers when he got home, but as long as he doesn’t think about how the hell they got there, he can say he escaped relatively unharmed.

He’s also able to forget about what Benny said, at least for a little while. Their next big road trip is out east, through New York and up to Boston, and for some reason PR has decided to schedule an autograph session while they’re in New York City. Something about cultivating their rapidly growing east coast fan base.

They head to the huge mall the signing is being held at straight from the plane, which would be bad enough due to how exhausted they are, if it weren’t also for the fact that the entire team was heading there. Usually autograph sessions happen with one player at a time, doubles at most, and Dean’s never experienced something like this with the entire team.

He’s almost ready to kill them all. They’ve all got these weird little quirks he’s never heard before. Chuck can’t sit at any table too close to the door, Balthazar needs his line to start at least five feet from the table, and Ed and Harry refuse to sign with anyone but each other (actually, that one shouldn’t have been a surprise).

Even Sam refuses to be seated near Dean. “I get too confused when everybody starts yelling Winchester,” he says apologetically when Dean gives him his best offended look. “I like to give my fans my full attention.”

So of course, after all the damn shuffling and bowing to his prima donna teammates, Dean finds himself at the table just inside the door of Steiner Sports, sitting next to Cas.

“Hello Dean,” Cas says when Dean reaches the table, looking slightly uncomfortable, and Dean wonders for a horrified second if Cas has noticed that he’s been acting weird, or if somebody has said something. Then he remembers Cas is oblivious, and foreign. He was fine.

“Hey man,” Dean says, pulling out his chair and slumping into it. “Hell. Autographs, huh?”

“I do not understand why we’re doing this.”

“What. Autographs?”

“Yes,” Cas frowns and his eyebrows scrunch. Dean looks away. “Why are we signing so many things?”

Dean huffs out a laugh. “What d’you mean? You gotta do autographs in Russia.”

“Yes, we do,” Cas turns to look at the storefront window behind them, were a couple hundred people in red are milling around and talking loudly. “Not this many. It was very controlled, who got to see us.”
“Huh.” Dean can’t decide if that’s better or worse than the American method. Sucks for the fans, not so much for the players. Except Dean loves meeting fans. So yeah, sucks. Sucks for Cas. “Sounds shitty. You’ll like this, promise.”

Cas turns away from the window to stare at Dean again. His eyes are a little wider than usual, and Dean wonders if he’s…holy shit, he’s freaked out. Dean’s not totally sure what to do, so he just stares back. He’s never seen Cas freaked out by anything, even when the two hundred a fifty pound winger from Ohio had threatened to sit on him last week.

Should he…should he touch his shoulder? Say something? What the fuck should he say? Where the fuck was Sam’s voice when he needed it? He kind of wants to touch his shoulder, no fucking idea why, it just seems like the right thing to do. It’s what those damn therapists do, right? Yeah. He should reassuringly touch his shoulder, in a totally friendly way, let him know it was gonna be fine…

“Hello Mr. Winchester, Mr. Krushnic,” a female voice says, causing Dean to jump and shove the hand that had been about to reach for Cas to the back of his neck. A dark haired woman in a professional suit-type outfit is standing in front of them, looking expectant as she takes them in. “I’m Hannah. I’ll be your handler today.”

Cas looks immediately to Dean. “It means she’s gonna keep any whackos from smelling your hair,” Dean replies, realizes he’s still rubbing the back of his neck for no reason, and awkwardly sets his hand down on the table.

Hannah walks briskly around the table, shoving a chair between them and settling down in it. “I trust you two had a good flight?” she asks politely as she opens up the folder in front of her. Dean spots a neatly typed up list headed, ‘When Fan Interactions Go Bad’. Promising.

“Not really,” Cas is saying. “I did not get to sit next to Dean.”

“C’mon man,” he protests half-heartedly, ignoring the stupid jump his heart makes. Maybe Cas has noticed they haven’t been doing much together lately.

“He usually explains the movies to me.”

Yeah, never mind. He forgot he was the pop culture translator.

“I’m sorry to hear that,” Hannah says. “Please let me know if there is anything I can do to make you more comfortable. If you decide you need to sit next to Mr. Winchester, I can always move.”

“No!” Dean says quickly. Hannah turns to give him a scathing look and he tries his best to smile. “I mean, it’s too late, everything’s set up…and people are coming in now.”

They’ve opened the doors to the store and are already letting the first hundred people in, shuffling them through the long line of players and letting them talk excitedly to each one. Ash is already sitting cross legged and barefooted on top of his table, and Dean decides he doesn’t care, even if he is the one that’ll get shit for it.

“Should we be doing that too?” Cas asks doubtfully.

Dean shakes his head. “Don’t do anything Ash does. There’s something wrong with him.”

Cas nods and eyes the approaching line with trepidation. Aw, fuck it. Dean reaches around Hannah and cups his shoulder briefly, shaking. “You’ll be fine, buddy,” he says, removing his hand quickly and never looking away from the first two people in line.
He thinks Cas says something, but it doesn’t register, and then he’s preoccupied with the absolute shit storm that is autograph sessions. The way their table is set up means that Cas doesn’t get anybody until Dean finishes with them, so he tries to power through as quickly as possible so Cas isn’t just sitting there. But what can he say? The people love him. It’s always the dudes that try to stick around the longest, he thinks because the chicks just want to stare. The guys have questions, ones he tries his best to answer before Hannah clears her throat loudly and passes them on to Cas.

Cas is still too new to get any questions like Dean does – he’s still in the ‘welcome to the team, how do you like it here phase,’ and Dean’s disappointed when he realizes a majority of the people in this line have Winchester jerseys for him to sign, and then a program or something for Cas.

He doesn’t think Cas minds – he’s got his weird half smile on his face, like he’s happy but isn’t quite sure how to express it, and he keeps glancing at Dean across from Hannah as he signs, like he’s making sure he’s doing it right. Dean answers these glances with a roll of his eyes or a sarcastic thumbs up, but he’s secretly kind of thrilled Cas wants some kind of approval from him. Fucking weird that he likes it, and he decides not to examine that one too hard.

About half an hour in, a teenage girl shows up with a trading card for Dean to sign. He catches the number eighteen on the sleeve of the jersey she’s wearing and can’t help his face splitting into a wide grin. “Hey, you got Cas’ sweater, huh?” He sees Cas’ head turn from the corner of his eye and pointedly doesn’t look at him.

The girl’s face lights up. “He’s my favorite! I mean,” she sneaks a glance at Cas, “Not that I don’t love you too, he’s just, he’s really…”

“Dreamy?” Dean winks at her and she blushes bright red. He signs her card as she sputters out excuses and apologies before handing it back to her. “Hold onto the jersey, sweetheart, it’ll be worth a lot of money one day.”

She stumbles out a thanks and moves on to Cas, who greets her with a, “you are a very kind person.” Dean hopes she doesn’t faint.

There are barely any kids at this thing, which is disappointing. All his fans are pretty great, but Dean loves the kids the best. They never hold back their enthusiasm and they are always ridiculously, out of this world excited to see him. Only two kids under ten have come his way so far, a shy little girl he’d had to coax out from behind her mother’s leg and an eight year old who hadn’t been able to stop chattering. Dean had waved Hannah off when she tried to get his dad to move the kid along, listening carefully to his story about taking his Iron Man to a hockey game.

Kids deserve to be listened to, in Dean’s opinion.

So he gets kind of excited when he catches sight of a couple with a stroller over at Sam’s table, signs autographs and listens to Castiel’s awkward conversations until they make it to him.

“Hi!” the women is dark haired, same as her husband and the kid. “Jesus, I’m usually only ever in here to buy Yankees shit for Father’s Day.”

“Maybe we shouldn’t swear at the professional sports person,” her husband suggests.

Dean laughs. “Nah, it’s good. Nice change from all crap the guys around here give me.”

“See?” she says, punching her husband’s shoulder. “He gets crap. I know it’s weird that we’re such huge fans in New York, but seriously, we love you. I’ve never watched another hockey team.”
“That’s good to hear,” Dean laughs. “You got something for me to sign?”

“Yeah!” she bends towards the stroller. “Hey, Patrick, can you give him the puck?”

Dean leans over the table to catch a better glimpse of the kid. He’s cute, chewing on the hockey puck Dean guesses he’s supposed to sign. The second he catches sight of Dean, he breaks into a wide smile, some of his teeth missing.

“He looks like a hockey player,” Cas says, and Dean realizes that he’s finished with his last autograph and is now waiting for Dean to finish with this family. Whatever, they can take care of them together.

“You guys know Cas Krushnic?”

“You’re the new guy, right?”

“Yes, that has become my new name today,” Cas nods.

The kid’s not giving the puck away, and his mom is actually struggling to grab it from him. Hannah’s beginning to get antsy, Dean can tell, so he holds out his hands. “Here, just give him to me.”

“You’re not supposed to be handling kids,” Hannah interjects almost immediately, but Cas sends her a dirty look, and somehow that’s enough for Dean to be allowed to handle a squirming bundle of three year old.

“Hey bud,” he smiles, and the kid shoots his toothy grin back. “So you’re Patrick, huh? You like hockey?”

“Yeah!” the kid says, the word shooting out from his mouth like a cannon, and Dean makes sure to look as surprised as possible.

“No way.”

“Yeah!” the kid insists again.

“Alright, then I need you to do something for me, got it? Can you turn the puck so I can see it?”

The kid gives him a calculating look that reminds him eerily of Cas before turning the puck so the flat side is facing Dean. Dean quickly reaches over with one hand and grabs a silver sharpie, scribbling his signature across the top. Patrick giggles as the movement of Dean’s signature moves his arm. It’s absolute crap, so he shifts the kid to his other knee, closer to Cas, and grabs for one of the photos they got hanging around on the table for people who don’t own anything for him to sign. “Here Cas, sign the puck,” he says as he carefully scribbles his name more neatly onto the photo.

“Dean,” Cas says quietly. “I don’t think they want me to sign the puck.”

“Sure they do,” he glances at the couple. “Right?”

“Please,” the woman nods quickly. Cas stares doubtfully at the puck and the kid, glancing uncertainly at Dean again. Hannah sits stiffly in between them, clearly fed up with the entire thing.

“Just sign it, Patrick’s cool,” Dean tells Cas, bouncing his leg a little until Patrick’s grin is facing Cas full on. Cas finally leans forward and signs quickly, his signature overlapping slightly with Dean’s because his fucking ‘C’ is like something out of a calligraphy book.
There’s a flash as a camera goes off and Hannah snaps to attention again. “No pictures!”

“Why not?” the dark haired woman frowns. Her husband rubs a hand over her shoulder.

“You can come around this side of the table,” Cas says suddenly.

“What?”

“Give Hannah your camera, she will take a picture.”

Hannah gives a loud huff of annoyance but pushes her chair out to do what Cas asks. Cas moves into her chair, brushing up against Dean’s side, and Dean starts at the touch. Patrick laughs again and bangs the puck on the table.

“Make the baby smile,” Cas orders.

Dean grins at his tone as the parents move behind him. “Man you’re demanding. How about you make him smile?”

“My face isn’t as amusing as yours.”

“Oh ha ha ha,” Dean says sarcastically. Patrick makes a loud squeal and Cas raises an eyebrow as if to say, see? Then the camera flash goes off. “Shit. Hannah, we weren’t ready.”

“It’s fine,” the woman says, taking the kid back from Dean. “We’ve wasted enough of your time.” They take their camera back from Hannah, and Dean hands over the picture he autographed. “I just want to say, you two are so adorable.”

“Rachel,” her husband says, voice low, “Come on.”

“Bye!” she calls, dragging the stroller behind her.

Dean barely has time to register what she said before Hannah is clearing her throat disapprovingly. “You spent way too much time with them,” she admonishes Dean. “That was totally unacceptable. Look at the line!”

“Hannah,” Cas says in a stiff voice. “I require something.”

“What?” Hannah says.

“Listen carefully,” Cas tells her, his creepy soul staring gaze for once directed at someone else. “I need some shokoladnaya kalbasa.”

“Some…what?”

“Now, please,” he says firmly. Hannah purses her lips and disappears without another word.

“Uh…what was that?” Dean asks, beckoning the next person forward.

Cas shrugs. “I didn’t want her here. She won’t find it. I asked for chocolate sausage.”

Dean screws up his face. “Gross.”

“It’s a type of candy, not really sausage,” Cas smiles slightly and twists the cap of his Sharpie, waiting patiently for Dean to pass on the next person in line.
Cas doesn’t move from Hannah’s seat, which makes it even more difficult to concentrate, because Cas is a lefty. Every time he signs something his arm brushes Dean’s, and he’s pretty sure that it’s happened enough that he has to be doing it on purpose. Right? Dean can’t be imagining this. Unless he is. It wouldn’t be too far outside the realm of possibility with the weird mood he’s been in lately.

He also seems to be more chatty with Hannah gone, managing to draw Dean into his conversations so often that Dean has a hard time figuring out when he’s speaking up because he’s actually interested in what’s being said and when it’s just because Cas gives him this…look. Which apparently has the power to make him say shit he doesn’t remember afterwards.

The next hour goes by quickly, and Dean’s pretty sure his hand is permanently stuck in a clamped position by the time he signs the last jersey, forcing a tired smile at the guy before dropping his pen and leaning back his chair. He stretches his hands above his head, lifting his shirt a little, and freezes when he catches Cas staring at him.

“Uh,” he quickly lowers his hands. “So. Not so bad, right?”

“No,” Cas agrees. “But I got to sit next to you this time.” He pushes away from the table and stands up, flexing the fingers of his left hand. “I am very hungry. I will see you in our room.”

“Yeah sure,” Dean nods distractedly, staring at his hand and trying very, very hard not to think about how Cas’ fingers are kinda slender like a girl’s, except stronger, he could probably do shit that felt just like…

Wait a fucking minute. “Our room?”

“Sam!”

The asshole knows what he did and he’s running onto the empty elevator, but Dean manages to tackle him into it just before the doors close, yelling triumphantly. “You asshole!”

“Get off, you perv,” Sam says, voice muffled from Dean’s palm smashed into his mouth. “Don’t you have sex in these things?”

“Only with the pretty girls,” Dean retorts. “What the hell are you doing, telling Cas he can room with me?”

“Well why can’t he?” Sam practically whines.

“What, is wanting to room with you not e-fucking-nough?”

A throat clears loudly and pointedly, and Dean looks up to see that the doors to the elevator have opened and an older couple is standing in the opening, staring at them. The brief distraction allows Sam to use his giant moose arms to push Dean off, and he scrambles to his feet, looking embarrassed. “Sorry,” he says quickly, pushing past them. Dean hauls himself off the ground and does the same, hearing the women mutter, “honestly, the audacity these gays have nowadays…”
“We’re brothers,” Dean yells back at her, shaking his head. Sam seems to think they’re in some kind of race, since he’s walking as fast as his long ass legs can carry him. Dean’s almost trotting to keep up. “Sick broad. Do I look like I practice homosexual incest?”

“Well…”

“Shut the fuck up, Sam.”

“I was only gonna say the homosexual part.”

Dean’s heart jolts and he stops dead. Sam notices about six steps later and, looking concerned, comes all the way back down the hallway.

He and the guys say shit like that all the time to one another. Dean’s not sure why it’s only hitting him now. Except there’s a chance – a tiny, microscopic chance – that on some level Sam is serious. “Why did you tell Cas he could room with me?” he asks lowly. “We always room together.”

Sam’s face immediately falls into ‘oh no I did something wrong’ apologetic. “I didn’t know it would bother you this much,” he says. “Look, Chuck somehow got an early release copy of the next Supernatural book and we were gonna…you know. Read it and talk about it.”

“Every day you get nerdier,” Dean mutters. “Don’t think I don’t know what you’re doing here, Sam.”

Sam’s eyes widen innocently. “What am I doing?” he asks.

Dean’s left gnashing his teeth, because now Sam doubly knows what he’s doing, calling Dean’s bluff and trying to get him to admit what he knows Sam is doing, which Sam definitely knows he’s fucking doing even if he’s playing dumb.

Like Dean’s gonna say it.

“Don’t look so smug,” Dean tells his brother sourly, making a face at him.

“Have a good night!” Sam calls cheerfully. Dean watches him whistle happily down the hall and disappear behind the door to room 323.

His room with Cas is all the way down the hall, at 343. When he opens the door, Cas is already there, flipping through the channels at a dizzying rate. Dean doubts he’s even registering what’s on the screen, and wonders again what the hell Cas did for fun in Russia.

“You talkin’ to Sam about me?”

“Hello Dean,” Cas replies, not looking up from his crazy remote clicking shit. “Sometimes we do. Other times we talk about the books we are reading, or the current state of political affairs.”

Dean takes a moment to wonder what the hell those chats are like (he imagines Sam crying in frustration and Cas screaming in Russian – hey come to think of it, he’s never really heard him speak Russian, has he?) before pointing at Cas. “What the hell are you two saying about me?”

“Oh,” Cas says.

“Sam says your childhood—,”

“Alright, that’s enough,” Dean says loudly, speaking over him. “Get your coat, dear, we’re going out.”

Cas clicks off the TV easily enough, and Dean thinks for once he’s actually going to listen without
asking any questions when he goes, right on cue, “Where are we going?”

“Who’s the captain here, Cas?”

“You are,” Cas replies, a hint of frustration entering his tone. “Although I fail to see why that allows you the right to be rude and ambiguous.”

“Nice,” Dean says admiringly, patting him on the shoulder and using the movement to propel him out the door. “Who taught you that word?”

“A show called Law and Order. Where are we going?”

“Man you’re pushy. Downstairs, I’m hungry.”

Cas stops in his tracks. “I just ate,” he states.

“So?” Dean raises an eyebrow. “C’mon, be a pal, Cas. Don’t leave me down there all alone to eat like some loser.”

Cas has got his stubborn face on, though. “I don’t want any more food.”

Dean groans. He fucking needs to get back at Sam, and although he could probably pull it off without Cas’ help, it wouldn’t be as sweet. Plus, it might be fun to get the guy to loosen up a little. Basically, he’s as close to desperate as he’s gonna get. “You wanna know shit about me, Cas? It’s normal to ask someone crap about themselves when you’re eating together, not going behind their back and gossiping with their kid brother.”

Cas hesitates, and Dean can actually see the stubbornness slipping away. “If I come with, we will have a conversation?”

“Yeah.”

“Where you will learn about me and I will learn about you. Not like when I come over and we are quiet.”

“Yeah,” Dean repeats impatiently, glancing down the hall at Sam and Chuck’s door. They need to hurry.

“Like a date.”

“Yea – no!” Dean whips around quickly to glare at him. “Not like a date. Asshole. Now come on.”

There’s a restaurant in the lobby of the hotel, and since Dean really is starving and they have to wait for Sam and Chuck to come down in order to do anything anyway, he has the waitress seat them instead of just sitting at the bar like he normally would. She’s a good waitress too, announces her name is Kate and heads off without loitering and pressuring Dean to order the most expensive fucking drink on the menu.

“What makes you think this is a date anyway?” Dean asks, opening his menu. Cas casts a skeptical glance at the set table between them, then raises his eyes to meet Dean’s.

“Alright, fine, smart ass,” Dean sighs. “Guys grab dinner too, y’know. You ever been on a date with a guy?”

Cas doesn’t answer right away, and suddenly Dean feels like he’s taking entirely too long to answer. He refuses to put down his menu to look at Cas’ face, because for some reason he’s become a
fucking pansy and doesn’t want to see what’s there. With every passing second, the importance of
the question grows, and Dean has no fucking idea why.

Jesus, is Cas dead? How fucking hard is it?

“No,” he finally answers, and Dean lets out a breath he hadn’t realized he’d been holding, wants to
kick himself for it. “I haven’t been on a date with anybody. This is just what I understand them to
be.”

“Hate to be the one to tell ya, man, but most of the time it’s just dinner.” Dean puts down the menu,
which must be some kind of magical signal to Kate. “I’ll have a Blue Moon,” Dean tells her,
glancing at Cas. “Cas?”

Cas gives him this deadpan look that practically screams what an idiot he thinks Dean is. “I’m not
hungry.”

Dean rolls his eyes at Kate. “Get the baby a Blue Moon too,” he tells her.

“Sure thing,” Kate grins.

“So no dating huh?” Dean says once she leaves. “Jesus, you really didn’t have any fun in Russia, did
you?”

“I thought we were going to talk about you,” Cas points out.

“Answer the question, then we’ll talk about me,” Dean says, shooting him his best shit eating grin.

“No, I did not do much in Russia other than play hockey,” he says flatly, a challenge in his eyes as
he leans back in his chair. Your turn, Winchester, pony up.

Bastard knows all he wants is to know more too. Fuck Dick Wolf for teaching him ambiguity.

“Alright, so what do you wanna know? Tragic back story? Sobbing over my parents? Maybe throw
in some child abandonment for flavor?”

Cas almost looks startled, like he hadn’t expected Dean to be so blunt, which serves him right. Taste
of your own medicine is good for you. Then his eyes narrow, like he’s figured out exactly what
Dean’s doing, and Dean’s almost excited to hear the question.

“Is Lisa your girlfriend?”

Dean blinks, like that’s gonna change the question. The most off point question he’s ever gotten, and
that’s including the time a reporter asked him if his hair color was natural during one of their playoff
runs.

“No?” he says, so thrown off it sounds like his firm answer is uncertain. Apparently Cas thinks so
too, because his eyes narrow and his mouth opens in accusation. “No,” Dean repeats, steadier this
time. “We’re actually not even supposed to be fraternizing with the ice girls, or whatever the hell the
NHL handbook says.”

“But Sam,” Cas starts.

“Anybody tells on Sam, I’ll cut off his balls,” Dean warns, just in time for Kate to arrive and hand
over his beer. “Besides, the girls are cool. We all get to be buddies and as long as no one narc and
there isn’t a huge sex scandal, the league isn’t bothered. So no knocking up Hannah or anything, got
it?”
“You Americans have strange expressions,” Cas observes, taking a sip of his beer and making a horrified face. Dean grins at him and is so amused he realizes too late Cas is changing the subject before he can ask why the question about Lisa, of all things. “Earlier Sam said your father was often three sheets to the wind, and that makes no sense to me.”

“Doesn’t have to make sense,” Dean says, losing the grin. “All you need to know is that he was usually drunk off his ass. Next question.”

“Fine,” Cas sighs. “What do you do for fun, Dean?”

“Easy,” Dean says, ticking each one off the fingers of his hand as he names them, “Fuck with classic cars, hang with Sam, hockey,” he waggles his eyebrows. “Sex.”

Cas purses his lips like Dean knew he would, ‘cause he’s a prude and Dean still thinks that face is funny as fuck, which is why he likes to leer at Cas whenever he can. “Hockey is your job,” he says, not for the first time. “Do you read?”

“Yeah, man, but I’m not into the Tolstoy, Orwell, smart deep political social shit you and Sam are in to.”

“What are you in to?” Cas asks, making these lame quotations with his fingers around the words ‘in to’.

“Did you learn that from Sam? Never do it again. You won’t ever get laid,” Dean says. “And I dunno man. Vonnegut was a pretty boss old guy.”

“Dean,” Cas says slowly. “Vonnegut is incredibly deep.”

“I don’t discuss ‘em, just read ‘em,” Dean shrugs, feeling the familiar indulgent smile slip onto his face. “It’s cool dude, you don’t have to pretend I’m smart. My dad used to joke my smarts got slammed into the boards of the Lawrence Ice Rink when I was eight.”

Cas looks puzzled, like he’s trying to figure something out. Dean can actually see the wheels in his head turning, and he’s trying to decide what about that sentence Cas needs translated this time (no man, my brains aren’t actually smashed into a wall somewhere) when his face clears. “I see,” he says finally. “You don’t believe you deserve any credit for your intelligence.”

“Hey, I totally took credit for that Get Sam Laid fundraiser.”

“I wonder,” Cas continues like he hadn’t heard him. “If you’ll take credit for anything at all.”

“Alright man, what the hell are you talking about?” Dean asks, exasperated.

“It is a great reflection on your character that Sam has turned out to be such an upstanding young man, Dean.”

Dean stares at Cas for a second, then waves Kate over without answering him. Are he and Sam having Dean-themed sleepovers? What the hell? He was going to have a talk with Sam later about how to make friends without revealing family history. He orders his burger, orders Cas one too because he doubts whatever he says he ate is substantial, and then, because he’s still feeling vindictive over the fucking interrogation he’s been subjected to (that Sam has apparently landed him in), he asks, “What about your sister? Anna?”

“What about her?”
'Why'd you bring her here with you?'

"She goes to university here," Cas says stiffly. "I thought that was fairly obvious."

"Nah," Dean shakes his head and grabs his beer. "I can tell. You got shit with your sister."

"Even if we do have ‘shit,’ as you so nicely put it, what business is it of yours?"

"Not so nice when you’re on the other side of the interrogation, is it?" Dean asks smugly. "Tit for tat, Cas, if you get to have little family meetings with Sam and you wanna ask me all these questions, you gotta be ready to reciprocate."

Cas glares sullenly for at the table for a moment, and it’s taking him so long to talk that Dean is thinking about telling him to forget it when he says, "Anna is unhappy with me. I have tried to visit twice now, and she won’t allow me to see her."

"When the hell do you leave your apartment?" Dean asks in surprise. For some reason it’d never even occurred to him that Cas had some life he didn’t know about. Like he just expected him to go into his own apartment and shut down when Dean wasn’t around to see him.

"Occasionally I find the time," he says dryly. "I’ve found some extra time these past few weeks." Dean feels a flash of guilt at the reminder that he hasn’t exactly been the best friend, ignoring Cas the way he has been.

Get a fucking hold of yourself, Dean. You’re not his friend, remember? You have nothing to feel guilty about.

He takes another long pull of beer.

"Anna is upset because I do not keep in touch with the rest of my family, and she is tired of being in the middle of it," Cas continues. "I don’t feel like discussing this anymore."

"Hey, I get it man," Dean smiles tightly. "Families can suck."

"I thought you got along with Sam?"

"Sometimes," Dean agrees. "Most of the time. But my dad was a hard guy to like. And I never knew my mom, she died when I was a kid."

Cas’ face twists in sympathy, "I’m sorry, Dean."

"Eh, not a big deal, right? Lots of kids’ moms die."

"That doesn’t mean your loss should be belittled, or ignored."

Dean’s glad Kate appears again (seriously, she has the best timing in the world) with the burgers, because it means he doesn’t have to acknowledge what Cas said at all. Not that it isn’t nice of Cas to try to make him feel better about his mom, but he doesn’t need it. She died a long time ago. He’s over it.

At least this burger is damn good, maybe the best he’s had. It’s so big he’s got to hold onto it with both hands, and he enjoys it quietly for a few minutes, struggling to keep the onions and tomatoes from dripping out the bottom before he glances at Cas.

The burger on Cas’ plate is untouched, and he’s watching Dean with a quizzical look on his face. "Dude," Dean admonishes, mouth full. "Eat your food."
“Chew with your mouth closed,” Cas counters, but he gingerly picks up the burger, twirling it in his hands a little before taking a cautious bite.

“I’m showing my appreciation,” Dean swallows and watches Cas. There’s no way this can be his first burger, but it feels as monumental as that, the first time Dean gets to watch him eat a burger.

Dean blinks at that thought. The uncharacteristic sappiness his brain is leaking is starting to make him sick. He shoves it down with another swallow of ground beef and cheese. “So? How is it?” he asks gruffly.

“This is very good,” Cas says in awe, way too exaggerated to be fake.

Dean’s about to tease him – seriously, who gets away without ever eating burgers – when he catches sight of Sam and Chuck near the hostess stand and snaps to attention. Shoving the rest of the burger into his mouth, he searches for Kate.

“Welcome to America,” he answers instead after swallowing heavily. Cas had stopped eating to watch him again, wide-eyed. “Eat up.”

“I can’t eat like you just did. I don’t think anyone can.”

“Aw thanks, Cas. You really know how to flatter a girl.” Kate comes into sight and Dean waves her over.

“Is everything alright?”

“Yeah, can we get a check and a to-go box?” Dean says, gesturing at Cas and rolling his eyes at Kate. Kate smile in return, gathering his plate before heading off again.

“Why are we leaving so quickly?” Cas asks, taking another bite of burger.

“What, you were enjoying yourself?” Dean jokes, but he swears Cas nods as he continues to dig into his food. “Sam just came down. We gotta get going.”

Cas abruptly stops eating. “What are we doing to Sam?”

“Nothing he doesn’t deserve,” Dean assures him. Actually, Sam probably deserves a lot more for trying to make Dean’s friends for him (and halfway succeeding, dammit) but he’s a generous soul.

“What did Sam do?”

“Don’t worry about it,” Dean snaps. Castiel’s eyes narrow almost instantly in response, and Dean wonders if their bodies are now tuned to just get immediately pissed off at the slightest sign of hostility from the other. He takes a breath, “Look man, Sam and I have prank wars all the time. They’re fun. You wanna have fun with me?”

Cas scrubs a hand across his jaw, which Dean notices is getting stubbly. The rasping sound it makes across his palm is followed by a reluctant, “Yes.”

“Great!” Dean says triumphantly, pulling his wallet out just in time to hand his card over to Kate. He thinks he sees Cas make an aborted movement out of the corner of his eye, which he dismisses as some sort of twitch until Kate comes back.

“I hope you two enjoyed your date here tonight,” Kate says earnestly. “Please let hotel staff know if there’s anything else they can do to make your stay more special. Room service does serve chilled
champagne.” She smiles one last time, prettily, before leaving them.

Dean pointedly doesn’t look at Cas. He’d been moving to pull out his wallet too. Dean hadn’t even thought about it. He always pays for Sam’s meals when they go out.

“See? She thought it was a date too,” Cas says, voice huffy.

“Put your burger in the box and let’s go,” Dean says sharply, pushing his chair back and standing up. “We got maybe an hour before Sam and Chuck finish up.”

Dean doesn’t wait for Cas, just heads out of the restaurant and into the lobby, but he catches up with him anyway, doesn’t even look hurried. “What now?”

“Gotta get into Sammy’s room.”

Cas tilts his head. “How do you think we’re going to do that?”

“Just follow my lead, alright? I do stuff like this all the time.”

Cas looks skeptical but follows him up to the front desk anyway, standing a little behind him as Dean leans up on the granite counter, shooting the receptionist his best smile, the one Ellen calls trouble. “Hey there.”

“Hello,” the receptionist smiles, eyes flitting between him and Cas. “How may I help you this evening?”

“Well,” he glances at her nametag, “Alex, we’re in kind of a jam here. See, both of us managed to come down to dinner without our room keys, and now we’re locked out.” He glances back at Cas, who catches him looking and manages to pull his stoic face into an expression Dean thinks is supposed to be sad.

“Oh no!” Alex says, pulling the perfect face of polite disappointment. “What is your room number?”

“It’s number 323.”

Alex begins clicking away at her keyboard and Dean turns to Cas once again, smirking at him until his face relaxes. It’s like the guy’s never twisted the rules a little before.

“Alright, Mr. Sam Winchester?” Dean nods and she clicks again. “I’ll just need to see your ID.”

Dean makes to go for his back pocket before widening his eyes in confusion. “Aw, shucks, you know what? I left that upstairs too.”

“I’m sorry,” Alex frowns. “But I can’t let you into the room unless you can verify who you are.”

“C’mon, Alex, you saying we can’t get into our room at all?” Dean asks. “My name’s Sam Winchester. Birthday is May 2, 1983.”

“I’m sorry,” Alex frowns again. “But I can’t let you into the room unless you can verify who you are.”

“C’mon, Alex, you saying we can’t get into our room at all?” Dean asks. “My name’s Sam Winchester. Birthday is May 2, 1983.”

“I’m sorry, sir,” Alex begins again. Dean hears Cas start to speak behind him and kicks his foot back, connecting with his shin and effectively shutting him up.

Dean leans forward until he’s hanging almost completely over the counter, toning the smile down so it’s softer. “I get you’re doing your job,” he says, “and you’re doing awesome, you really are. But it’s our one year anniversary and we’d really like to get back upstairs, you know?”

“Oh!” Alex’s eyes widen and she looks back at Cas. “Well, I guess…I could send a bellhop up with
you, and he could check your ID once the door was opened.”

“That’s a great idea!” Dean says enthusiastically. “Except,” he lowers his voice and hitches his
thumb over his shoulder at Cas, “he and I got up to a bit before coming down here for dinner, and
he’d be real embarrassed if a stranger saw how we destroyed that room,” he grins. “Guy’s an animal.
I’d just be really, really grateful if you could bend the rules just this once.”

“Well…” Dean can tell she’s wavering and goes in for the kill.

“Look,” he’s practically whispering now, “I really fucked up, and I was plannin’ on proposing
tonight. Please help me fix this?”

Alex’s face melts into that sappy look people get whenever weddings are mentioned and she nods.
“Of course, of course, I’d love to help. Here you are.”

Dean takes the key and taps it on the counter, grinning charmingly at her. “Thanks so much,” he
says, stepping back to fall shoulder to shoulder with Cas.

“It was no problem,” she says, her smile directed at Cas. “You two have a wonderful evening.”

“What the hell was that?” Cas asks as soon as they’re far enough away from the desk.

Dean shrugs and waves the card at him. “What can I say, man? I got a gift.”

“That’s not what I mean,” Cas says lowly. “You told that woman we are romantically involved.”

“How the fuck could you hear all that?” Dean shakes his head as they step onto the elevator. “Never
mind. Forgot you weren’t human. So what if I did?”

Cas is frowning deeply, obviously working through something. “You didn’t appreciate when I
insinuated such a thing, nor were you happy when the waitress did.”

“Well, yeah. I’m not gay.”

“You just suggested you were;” he bursts out in frustration. “How is that any different?”

Dean jabs the button for floor three. “S’different when I do it.”

“How?”

“Because I know I’m not gay,” Dean insists. “So I’m allowed to do it. It’s different when I know I’m
not, those other people don’t know I’m not.”

“Now the receptionist thinks you are.”

“Yeah, but only because I told her.”

Cas shoves a hand through his hair, his gaze boring into Dean. “You realize this makes no sense,
yes? You are making no sense.”

Dean can see where Cas is maybe having an issue, but he can only assume it’s because of some
cultural difference. He’s been lying for as long as he can remember to get things he needed, from
food to brand new hockey socks for Sammy, and there’s nothing weird about him calling Cas his
boyfriend if that’s what needed to be done. And of course that was okay, because he knew he was
lying. Kate thinking they were gay for each other is totally different, because it means she saw
something Dean wasn’t trying to make her see.
Obviously she was seeing what she wanted to see though, because no way did he and Cas look anything like a couple, nor did Dean look like he’d be into guys. It was harmless.

“It’s cool if you don’t get it, Cas. It’s just something that people do.”

Cas squints at him. “People here often pretend to be a sexuality they are not? This is normal?”

“Oh.” Well, come to think of it, no, actually.

The elevator door dings and opens and he pushes the thought out of his mind. “Just forget it. Look, we got the room key, right? Now the fun can start.”

“If you say so,” Cas says doubtfully. Dean wonders why he’s even here if it’s really that fucking boring. Sure, Dean would complain, but it’s not like he can make him do what he wants.

Whatever. Cas’ll leave if he wants to.

Sam and Chuck’s room is an exact mirror of their own, and Dean wastes no time in yanking open the closet door. Sam and Chuck’s bags are set neatly side by side and he grabs them both, looking up to see what the hell Cas is doing. He’s studying a book he must’ve picked up from the bedside table with a curious look on his face. “What is Supernatural?”

“This book Sammy is geeking out about,” Dean replies, brightening a little. After all, the damn thing is supposedly the reason by Sam’s sudden roommate change. “Hey, good idea. Grab those too.”

Cas hesitates and Dean thinks he’s gonna tap out, but then he shrugs and picks up the two books. “What are we doing with them?”

“Taking ‘em for now. Come on.”

The elevator is between their room and Sam’s, something Dean hadn’t considered when they’d come up. It’s not like he’s some professional criminal. Besides, Sam should have been down at dinner for at least another twenty minutes, but he’d forgotten to factor in how neurotic Chuck is in enclosed crowds. Oversight on his part, since the elevator door slides open just as he’s closing Sam’s door behind him and Cas, and Sam’s voice echoes out into the hallway.

“Drinking demon blood isn’t helping anybody.”

“Shit,” Dean swears. There’s an unmarked door right across the hall, and without even thinking about he quickly pulls it open and shoves Cas inside, shutting the door behind him. In the dim light he can see buckets and mops and figures they must be in a cleaning supplies closet.

“Dean,” Cas says gruffly. “What are you—“

Dean cups his hand across his mouth. “Shh.” He says. “You’re gonna ruin it.”

“Uh, well,” Chuck’s saying nervously. “Maybe Jared thinks he’s doing the right thing, and that Jensen doesn’t know what he’s talking about, and that’s why.”

“Maybe,” Sam says impatiently. “But then why wouldn’t he listen to Dmitri? I mean, the guy’s an angel, and Jensen believes him and he’s not even religious.”

Cas lets out a long exhale of breath onto Dean’s hand on the word Dmitri, and Dean wonders briefly if Cas has something to say, when Sam’s voice gets louder, and he snaps back to attention.

“I’m not the only one who sees the…thing with Dmitri and Jensen, right?”
“No,” Chuck answers quickly. “No, no, I see it. But they’re good friends.”

“Okay,” Sam snorts. “Or Jensen’s too wrapped up in himself to admit that he might love a guy. I mean, the way the books are written, God, it’s like they make a point to describe how close they’re standing and how they can’t stop looking at each other.”

Cas’ tongue flicks out to wet his lips, touching Dean’s palm, and he jerks his hand back in surprise. Cas stares wide eyed back at him, the muted lighting of the small closet only making the sharp contrast between his dark hair and blue eyes that much deeper. Dean hadn’t realized how closely they were standing before, too caught up in not being caught by Sam, but unfortunately his goddamn body has. Cas is pressed to his chest, one hand anchored around Dean’s waist in order to stop himself from falling backward, since the push of Dean’s hand over his mouth had forced him to bend over the space created by the buckets stacked against the wall. It makes him much shorter than Dean than he usually is, so that Dean is practically looming over him.

If he could ignore the interested twitch of his dick before, he definitely can’t after that thought. For a brief second he forgets that they’re in a closet, with his brother right outside. Forgets about the stupid prank and that he doesn’t really want this. Instead he curses the fucking books still clutched in Cas’ hand between them, preventing them from making full contact.

He’s getting hard, a problem he’s desperately trying to eradicate until he notices Cas’ eyes have left his and are slowly traveling down his body and he’s licking his lips again and fuck fuck fuck wait he’s gonna know and then he’ll think…

“My key’s not working,” Sam says loudly and clearly enough that he could be right next to Dean, and Dean freezes. Being found with Sam’s shit isn’t the problem anymore, it’s being found in the closet pressed against Cas with an unexplainable half boner that’s got his heart pounding.

He swears he’s actually getting harder, which what the fuck. He obviously needs to get laid.

“Lemme try mine,” Chuck says, and there’s a pause before the familiar beep of the door as it unlocks. Dean gives Sam and Chuck a few seconds to get inside their room before ripping himself away from Cas and opening the door, practically falling out. Cas stumbles after him, looking a bit dazed.

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“Let’s go,” Dean says shortly without looking at him. He doesn’t need to see whatever look Cas has got on his face now that he’s snapped out of the surprise of Dean practically jumping him, because Dean’s pretty sure the feeling of shame welling up in his chest is more effective than anything else.

He’s able to avoid really acknowledging Cas at all until they get back to the room, and then suddenly there’s a hand on his shoulder and he’s freezing up again. “What are we doing with the duffle bags?” Cas asks.

“Oh, yeah,” Dean dumps both of them on the floor and bends over to unzip Sam’s. “Just fill it with shit.”

Cas blinks at him. “That’s all?”

“Yeah,” Dean shrugs, taking in the look on his face and allowing himself to smile a little. “Dude, pranks are supposed to be mildly annoying, not outright malicious. Anyway trust me, Sam likes bitching over the little things.” He reaches over to the counter above the mini fridge and grabs two glasses, stuffing them into the bag. “There, see? Those can be for his tears when he realizes his stuff is gone.”
“I see,” Cas says slowly. And despite the fucking deadpan tone, he does. Dean ends up on one of the beds, because apparently when Cas is given something to do he becomes fucking determined. He ends up shoving Sam and Chuck’s bags full of towels, free packets of coffee grounds and the bible from the nightstand. The tightness in his chest eases as he focuses only on what Cas is doing, watching the bags become so overstuffed Dean actually lets out a laugh as Cas is trying to fit one of the bathrobes into a bag.

Cas pauses and looks up hopefully. “Is this good?”

“Yeah man, that’s awesome,” Dean tells him, finally feeling completely relaxed as he falls back onto the bed. Cas announces he’s taking a shower and Dean’s not interested at all. He’s the opposite of interested, thank god. Yawning, he picks up Sam’s book from where it lays on the bed beside his head. Lazarus Rising, huh? He starts flipping through it.

Cas is an angel, with black wings so dark they glint a midnight blue, and Dean wants so badly to touch his wings, to get the attention of those soul searing blue eyes directed at him, dissecting him, knowing him…

A phone rings and Dean snaps awake, Sam’s open book sliding off his chest as he twists to look towards the nightstand. Cas is sitting on the other side of the bed, shirtless with wet hair, and Dean is mortified to see he’s got a hand wrapped around Cas’ ankle, and the guy’s watching him, looks like he has been for a while.

He’s got a fucking boner again too.

The phone rings again.

“Hello?” Cas says evenly. He must’ve picked up the phone while Dean was struggling to turn over onto his stomach, the familiar pain from earlier building in his chest again. He manages it just as Cas says, “It’s Sam.”

Dean awkwardly holds his hand out for the phone, pressing it to his ear. “’Lo?”

“Where’s our stuff?” Sam asks angrily.

“Woah, woah, what stuff you talkin’ bout Sammy?”

“I know you took our bags, Dean.”

Sam’s annoyance pulses through the phone and Dean focuses on it, imagines Sam is seriously mad like that time in high school when Dean took his first authentic jersey and had the original patches replaced with clown iron ons.

He got it fixed eventually, but Sam wouldn’t talk to him for a month. Probably the worst month of Dean’s life.

Even though it sucks, the memory makes it possible for him to turn over on his back again.

“Hey, your bags missin’?” Dean asks, sounding surprised. “Ours are too. Hey Cas,” he cranes his head back and catches sight of Cas’ bare chest once again. It’s a fucking good chest too, and Dean wonders if Cas had to work for any of that definition or if it just comes naturally.

“Dean!”

“What?” Dean snaps back. “Hey Cas, Sam’s bag’s missing, isn’t that weird? ‘Cause ours are too?”
“No they’re not,” Cas says blankly, focusing on him. Great, now he’s got Sam’s fucking book open. That thing needed to go back to his brother, no other book had ever given Dean weird and completely fictional, never gonna happen wet dreams like that.

He rolls his eyes anyway and speaks loudly. “Cas says his is missing too.”

“Listen, Dean,” Sam starts, “I know you’re jealous or something because I wanted to room with Chuck, but that doesn’t mean you have to be a jerk. We were really looking forward to discussing those books together.”

“Look Sam, there’s nothing I want more than to give you your nerdy book,” Dean says. “But I don’t have it.”

“I believe Sam and Chuck know this book well enough not to need it to discuss it anyway,” Cas comments, flipping a page. “That’s what it sounded like in the closet.”

“That’s because they’re nerds.”

“What closet?”

“What?”

“You and Cas were in a closet?” Sam asks suspiciously.

“No, shut up. Look, maybe if you’re a good little boy the bag fairy will bring your bags back in the morning.”

Sam’s silent for a moment. “So like, a metaphorical, sexual closet or an actual –,”

Dean hangs up and glares at Cas. “Great. Now Sam’s gonna think I’ve got some repressed feelings bullshit going on.”

“He thinks that already,” Cas replies, glancing at him.

Dean opens and closes his mouth a couple of times before saying shortly, “Well yeah, no wonder. What the fuck are you doing in my bed man? And why the fuck are you shirtless?”

“I just took a shower,” Cas says, like that’s an answer. “And this is my bed. I chose it earlier.”

“Well you could’ve moved me!” he retorts.

Cas frowns. “Why would I do that?”

“Because!” Dean sputters, trying to figure out a better answer and deciding, fuck it. “Because it’s gay! You’re in the bed I was sleeping on, shirtless…I was fucking cuddling your ankle! Which is not my fucking fault by the way, alright? You’re the one who put it there.”

“I see,” Cas says gravely, setting the book aside. He stares at the wall for a moment, and Dean wonders if he can really be so upset when he’s still in this bed, trying hard not to follow the drop of water that dripped from Cas’ bangs and is slowly trailing down his clavicle…

“Dean, are you attracted to me?”

“What?” Dean’s eyes snap back to Cas’ face. “No!”

Yeah his traitor brain whispers. You kind of are.
Thing is, Cas is somehow his type. No idea how, since despite the typical dark coloring Cas is way too closed off and weird to be anything like the flirty, open girls he takes back to his place.

But for some reason, Cas is doing it for him. Personality wise anyway. Slap a pair of breasts on him and Dean wouldn’t be having any of these issues.

His dick is fucking agreeing, even as his chest decides to do that thing where it feels like a thousand pound weight is pressing on it, and Dean lets out a few short huffs of breath, trying to ignore his brain and everything else so he can just go back to normal, god dammit.

“Then it’s not…gay,” Cas is saying decisively. “If you’re not attracted to me and I’m not attracted to you.”

The feeling in his chest lifts. “Yeah?” he asks blankly.

“Yes,” Cas nods, and then he smiles. “So if you are worried about anything, now you don’t have to be. Since we know it is not, it cannot be misconstrued as romantic. That’s what you said earlier, right?”

“Right,” Dean parrots. Well…thank god for that then. So he and Cas can be buddies, and he can do stuff like fall asleep in his bed when he’s shirtless, and that’s…that’s fine. Because he’s not attracted to Cas. And Cas isn’t attracted to him. Awesome.

There’s no weight pressing against his ribs anymore. Instead he feels weirdly hollow.

Relief, probably.

As long as you’re not someone like Buffalo, or Edmonton, it’s hard to go through the season without winning pretty regularly. All the same, the feeling never, ever gets old. You leave the stadium on a huge high from all of it, the cheering fans and the adoration of the reporters that crowded the locker room and every guy on the team in a fucking fantastic mood, even Gordon. It’s hard to go straight to bed after something like that, even if it is eleven at night and you have an eight a.m. flight in the morning.

So Dean ends up at the bar with Sam and Gabriel and Cas, some of the other guys having followed them in as well and peeling off to do their own thing. Hey, he never said he was responsible.

The bar is some Irish deal real close to the stadium, and it’s got that blue collar vibe Dean feels most at home in. Sam rolls his eyes when he mentions it. “Dude, I don’t how many times you’re going to make me say you’re as far from blue collar as you can get.”

“Hey, hockey’s a blue collar sport,” Dean snaps.

“If you really wanna be blue collar, you can give me half of your paycheck, Deano,” Gabriel suggests. “Then you’ll really be able to live like the little people.”

“I don’t understand,” Cas says, frowning, “Our colors are red and black. We do not have blue collars.”
Of course this launches Sam’s smart guy explanation of labor and class distinction, which eventually turns into a rant that grows increasingly heated. When Sam had been little and in his rebellious phase, he’d always warned Dad he was going to run off and become a lawyer. Dean thinks he’d have made a good one, but it just wasn’t possible for Sam to get away. Hockey was in their blood.

Even though Sammy’s still blabbing Cas’ ear off, he somehow maneuvers it so Dean’s sitting on Cas’ other side and not Gabriel. Dean’s not gonna worry about it – he’ll have to have a talk with the kid soon about not freaking out over every person he happens to be friendly with. ‘Course, Sam’s always been like that. Thinks Dean has a problem making new friends. In a few years, Cas won’t even be a big deal, just like Benny.

“As interested as I am in this conversation,” Gabriel cuts in, looking anything but. “You think we could get some beer before we dive deeper into the evils of capitalism? That or I can shove a knife through my skull, it’d probably have the same effect.”

“Save the Drama Queen shit for the ice, Gabe,” Dean says, waving the bartender down. “You were bad enough, waving at that girl in the second row all damn game.”

“It’s the finer things in life, Deano,” Gabriel sighs. “Guess you saw her too.”

“Yeah, because your dick was pointing right at her.”

“Gross, Dean,” Sam sniffs disapprovingly.

Gabriel glances at Dean before grinning widely. “What can I say, I enjoy the blonde ladies.”

“She was brunette,” he replies automatically, his look of superiority quickly switching to wide-eyed horror. “I mean, I assumed because Dean—,”

“Nice try, Sasquatch,” Dean singsongs, smirking. “You looked too.”

“Yeah, well, it’s not my fault, the whole team was looking at her,” Sam says, gaze shifting to Cas. “Back me up here, man.”

Not like Dean’s been paying attention to Cas, but he knows the guy has no fucking clue what they’re talking about, and his suspicions are confirmed a second later when he says, “I can’t. I never saw her.”

“You know, with the…” Gabriel makes circles with his arms that Dean thinks are supposed to be breasts. “I pointed her out to you!”

“Oh,” Cas says blankly, looking half apologetically, half uncomfortably towards Sam. Sam doesn’t notice. He’s got his thinking face on, the one that means he thinks he’s just figured something out that didn’t need fucking figuring out in the first place.

Now that they’re not talking about boobs anymore, Gabriel’s lost interest. “Where’s my alcohol?” He demands, slamming his hands onto the table and standing up. The bar is packed, probably with fans just come from the game, so Dean can understand why they haven’t been served yet. “Come on, Sambo, if I have any hope of making it to the damn bar, I need your ridiculous giant body.”

Dean wolf whistles, which obviously gets Sammy’s panties in a twist since he gets up all huffily and practically drags Gabriel to the bar.

“I don’t understand how you could have all been looking at a woman when there was a game to pay attention to,” Cas comments.
“C’mon Cas, there’s more to life than hockey,” Dean scoffs. “We had our minds on the game, we just appreciated the nice scenery too. You can’t argue when you didn’t see her, man.”

“I saw her.”

“You told Sam you didn’t,” he accuses.

Cas just shrugs. “I didn’t have anything to say about her.”

“What?” Dean frowns. “Why not? She was gorgeous. One of those every man types, you know?”

Cas quietly pushes his lip out stubbornly and doesn’t say anything.

“So what,” Dean lowers his voice and leans forward, tilting his head and forcing Cas to look at him. He does so, reluctantly, lip still jutted out in a way that makes Dean want to associate the word ‘adorable’ with a one hundred and ninety pound man. “First you don’t think I’m attractive, now this chick? Who you waitin’ for, Audrey Hepburn?”

“I never said you were not attractive Dean. I said I wasn’t attracted to you.”

“Oh-ho,” Dean feels a slow grin spread across his face, its smugness probably the reason Cas looks away again. “Look who’s gettin’ all fancy with his English now. So you do think I’m pretty?”

He bats his eyelashes, even though Cas is making a huge effort not to look. Sure enough, the corner of his mouth twitches up in a small smile. “You are very…pretty, by many standards.”

“Geez Cas, buy me a drink first.”

Cas looks uncertainly at him. “I can do that.”

Dean suddenly realizes how close he is to Cas and abruptly draws back, clearing his throat. “It’s a figure of speech,” he mutters. “You don’t actually gotta buy me a drink.”

“Isn’t that a flirtation?”

“No,” Dean answers automatically, because no way does he want to open the can of worms that is anywhere near flirting with Cas, no matter how jokingly.

He pauses briefly. Except they’ve already established that it can’t be flirting, haven’t they?

Fuck it. Why does he have to censor himself? It's not like John is around.

“Trust me Cas,” he says, leaning in close again and flashing a smile. “You’d know if I was flirting with you.”

Cas turns slightly to stare at him, his nose only inches from Dean’s, and Dean raises an eyebrow. Challenging. Hell, this might all be worth it just to see if Cas even knows how to flirt.

“Does it involve asking me to help adjust the grip on your stick, Dean?” Cas asks lowly. “Because if you’re asking my advice, you choke up too much on it when you get excited about scoring.”

Laughter rips out of Dean in a snort before he can even think about stopping it and he slaps Cas on the back, cupping his shoulder in admiration. “The greatest thing is I can’t even tell if you’re being serious.”

“These are legitimate concerns I have about you Dean,” Cas says seriously, his face grave.
Dean pushes his shoulder with the hand still clasped around it and shakes his head. “Who knew you were so dirty?”

“Hey, you mind giving us the table?” a voice interrupts roughly, tone aggressive.

Dean turns on his stool to face the speaker, a stocky man with hard eyes and a beard flanked by two other men. He can tell they’re already a couple of drinks in, in addition to the beers in each of their hands. “Sorry man. We need it.”

“See, I don’t think you do,” the guy says, his eyes narrowing. “I think you can find somewhere else to practice your filthy gay flirting.”

Dean’s stomach sinks, his hand jerking from Cas’ shoulder and curling into a fist. “We’re not gay,” he growls.

“Regardless,” Cas adds. “That was…” he pauses and frowns, like he’s searching for a word before finally coming up with, “uncalled for.”

“What are you, some kind of illegal alien?” The guy’s face twists into something ugly as he takes a threatening but wavering step towards him. Dean stands up to stop him, feeling a perverse pleasure that he towers over the guy by a good few inches.

“Back off man, we ain’t got no problem with you.”

“I got a problem with you!” the man spits, “Dragging your shit into our bar, fagging it up with your fucking accents and flirting. I knew you looked wrong, only needed to be told before we came and got you out of here!”

Hey,” Dean barks, the anger in his chest steadily rising. “Get the hell out of my face asshole, before I make you!”

Dean’s used to fights. It’s part of his job, if team morale is low or some asshole clotheslines a member of his family. You shake off the gloves and you go at it. But hockey fighting is different from street fighting, where there are no short jabs, no tearing at jerseys, no refs to pull you apart when someone finally gets knocked to the ice and it gets really dangerous.

He knows how to street fight though.

Chin up, John had told him. Never back down, never look away. Only swing first if the element of surprise is on your side, otherwise let him swing, block it, move from there. Never let your opponent get above you, never let him get you in the stomach. Dean’s played this game before too.

“Yeah?” the guy leers. “Who’s gonna make me? Gonna be you, fairyboy?” Out of the corner of his eye Dean sees one of the assholes friends making a move towards Cas, and it’s either bad luck or fortune that he catches what’s said next. “You kiss your mother with those dirty queer lips? Bet she and daddy have already disowned you, huh?”

He breaks dad’s rule and swings first.

The guy’s drunk, and he goes down easily when Dean’s fist solidly connects with his jaw. He brings the table down with him, manages to grab onto Dean and slam him onto the floor too. The table narrowly misses his leg, and then the guy’s rolled on top of him and manages to clumsily slam a fist into Dean’s nose. Dean kicks out blindly and catches something that causes a yelp of pain and scrambles away, wiping at his face. His hand comes away bloody. He knows people are yelling, even thinks he hears his name and worries briefly about Cas before his attention is forced to the
drunk asshole who’s found a cue stick and is coming at him. He swings viciously and Dean ducks, managing to grab a hold of it and jam it towards him hard enough to jab him in the stomach and knock the air out of him. He throws it to the bar floor with a clatter and gets ready to swing again.

“Dean!”

The minor distraction awards him a punch in the kidneys and he doubles over briefly, allowing himself to be punched once again before he manages to block, catches the guys arm and manages to push back and twist at the same time until he cries out and loses his balance. Then Dean’s on top of him, hitting him again, there’s blood on his knuckles and then suddenly a hand on his shoulder.

“DEAN.”

He stops.

“What?” he snaps, breathing heavily. He can taste blood in his mouth. Cas drags him off the guy, because of course, Cas is strong as fuck. Dean catches sight of the two other men sitting on the floor, groaning, and has a brief moment to wonder how in the fuck Cas did that before Cas is pulling him dangerously close.

For a split second. Dean thinks Cas is gonna kiss him.

Which is stupid. Stupid, because he only hisses, “We need to be going before somebody recognizes us,” before shoving Dean away to a reasonable distance again.

He’s right. Now that Dean has had a chance to breathe, he notices the huge crowd, knows somewhere in that crowd is the bartender trying to work his way through, the owner of the place calling the police. Sam and Gabe are there somewhere, along with some of the rest of the team, and Dean needs to leave, fast, before any of this has a chance of making it to the organization.

They’re in a foreign city, and they’ve picked a bar kind of like the Roadhouse, one that doesn’t pay much attention to famous people, but that doesn’t mean they won’t get recognized soon.

“Come on,” Dean mutters, heading towards the door. The crowd of people blocking it part like the Red Sea, and Dean can’t tell if it’s because of him or Cas, because he keeps his head down. They make it outside just as it begins to rain.

“Great,” Dean curses and uses the opportunity to spit the blood in his mouth out onto the sidewalk. “I didn’t even get a fucking beer.”

“You’re hurt,” Cas says, and Dean’s surprised to hear that he sounds fucking angry about it. “Why did you fight?”

“Why didn’t you fight?” Dean counters, rubbing angrily at the stinging knuckles of his right hand. The dried blood washes away easily in the rain and he glares sideways at Cas. “Half of that was directed at you, you know.”

“They didn’t say anything I cared about,” he says roughly, staring straight ahead. “Obviously they did not miss the mark with you.”

Dean knows what Cas is thinking and he can’t help but resent him for it. “You think I beat that guy up because he called me gay?” he asks bitterly. “The shit he said was insulting, yeah, and I’m not gay, but I’m not gonna give some dick the satisfaction of getting beaten up over some wounded masculine pride thing.”
“Then why—”

“Because he mentioned my mom!” Dean cuts in, almost yelling. A pedestrian pushes roughly past him, swearing, and he doesn’t even notice. “Because my dad would be fucking disappointed if he could see me now, Cas, if he knew what the fuck was going on with me, just like he always fucking was!”

Cas turns sharply towards him. The rain has plastered his bangs to his forehead, making him look even younger than twenty-four, but the hard determined glint in his eye is ageless and old in a way Dean is familiar with but doesn’t think he’ll ever understand. “Dean Winchester,” he says lowly, and Dean has to strain to hear him over the rain pounding on the sidewalk. “If fear of your father’s disappointment made you fight, then he was probably not worth fighting for.”

“Well,” Dean’s laugh sounds half hysterical even to his own ears. “You never met him.”

“Tell me about him.”

“What?”

“Tell me about him,” Cas demands.

“Dude,” Dean tries to purse his lips and ends up gasping a little as it tugs on his injured face. “Fuck. Ow. I’m not telling you anything. It’s raining.”

“Later,” Cas says, and it sounds way more like an ominous promise than a suggestion.

“Fine.” Anything to get him to shut up so he can mope over his busted nose. “Later.”
If it were anyone else, Dean’s pretty sure they’d forget that they asked about his dad. What really was there to know that people didn’t already? John Winchester, a veteran center who worked hard and eventually made it to the Edmonton Orcas, where he helped mentor a group of young kids to four Stanley Cups in a row and create a dynasty.

Everybody knew John Winchester.

Not everyone knew his dad though, which is where the differences began to emerge.

John loved hockey so much he probably pushed playing longer than he should have, and instead of retiring on a high after his run with the Orcas, he made a quiet exit on an upper body injury years later. Finally married his childhood sweetheart Mary Campbell, a woman just as familiar with hockey as he was, due to her family’s prominence in the sport. Had two kids, lived comfortably.

Then Mary died in a car accident when Dean was four, and it all went to shit.

Dean’s not sure if his mom ever wanted him to play hockey. He doesn’t remember much about her, only vague impressions of laughter and brightness and so much kindness his chest aches. He doesn’t know what his life would have been if Mary hadn’t died. All he knows is, she did, and dad turned back to the only other thing in his life he’d ever loved.

Well, the only two other things, if you were gonna count the booze.

Dean can’t imagine his life without hockey. He’d been raised in it, starting from the age of five where John immediately signed him up for a peewee league. He’d taken that route hockey players do, from four am practices before school to an eventual scholarship at some typically hockey famous college to his draft, his fast catapult through the American Hockey League to his call up to the big leagues, to the NHL. Sammy had done almost exactly the same, except both of them had had the added bonus of a famous hockey player for a dad, of hanging out with the big names and meeting true champions. He’s not sure if it’s because he’s never known anything else, or because maybe it makes him feel closer to mom or what, but Dean just loves the goddamned game.

Maybe the only thing he’d change about it is John.

Anyway Dean knows all these things, and most of the team’s got some kind of idea. Hell, anybody who followed hockey in the eighties thinks they know John Winchester. But apparently Cas doesn’t fit into any of these categories, because he’s clearly aching to follow up on his promise of ‘later.’

Dean tries his best to avoid letting him ask, and it works for a while. But even if Bobby doesn’t know about the fight (at least, Dean’s pretty sure he doesn’t know) he clearly doesn’t believe that Dean’s bruised face is from the game, and that’s how Dean ends up getting ordered to help the equipment team with laundry the one week in November they have nothing but home games.

Because he’s back in middle school again and Bobby is adding punishment to his all too frequent detentions.

Laundry’s not so bad, but unfortunately for him, Bobby spotted Cas’ bruised knuckles too, and Cas didn’t even seem to care that he was being punished for no reason.
He wanted to talk to Dean that badly, apparently. Or something else. Dean’s not really gonna think about it.

Hauling around the massive amount of laundry the team goes through ain’t no easy task, so Bobby at least lets them out of practice early so they can get to the stadium and get through all the uniforms used in the game the day before. Dean’s busy trying to stuff all of the red jerseys into the industrial sized washer when Cas appears, dragging a huge cloth bag behind him.

“Aren’t you cleaning helmets or somethin’?” Dean asks, not looking away from the window of the washing machine. The dizzying spin of bright red is almost gory, and Dean hopes to God nobody’s white uniform got accidentally mixed up in the mess.

Actually, he takes that back. That would be kinda funny. Gabriel’d probably love a pink uniform.

“I didn’t like sitting in the locker room alone,” Cas replies. There’s a loud thump as the cloth bag hits the floor, and Dean turns to see that Cas has stuffed it full of black helmets, and is now making himself comfortable on the floor and pulling out the first one to clean.

Dean rolls his eyes. “Stop pussyfooting around and just admit you missed me.”

“I missed you,” Cas shrugs and says it with the same tone of voice he might use to say, ‘I like scoring.’ Matter of fact and to the point and duh. Dean chooses to ignore it as he slides down the washer and grabs one of the helmets and a cleaning cloth before leaning back against it, letting the gentle vibration soothe the aches from the beating he got during the game the other day.

“So, how ‘bout those Jersey Devils, huh? We sure showed them.”

“What was your father like?”

Dean scrubs harder at the bright white number twelve set against the inky black of the helmet. Trust Balthazar to have a difficult helmet to clean. “Come on, Cas. You know my dad. Four time Stanley cup winner? Recipient of the Conn Smythe? The Selke? Ringing any bells here?”

“None of that means anything to me,” Cas frowns. “Except the Stanley Cup. They told me if we did well this season we would get a big cup. I hear it’s shiny.”

Dean’s head shoots up and he stares at Cas incredulously, unsure if the guy actually understands what a huge fucking honor it is to…the bastard is smirking at him. Barely, but Dean knows what it looks like now.

“You asshole,” he mutters. “You get the idea. It was John Winchester. He was a legend.”

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“You asshole,” he mutters. “You get the idea. It was John Winchester. He was a legend.”

“I’m sure,” Cas murmurs. “But what was he like as a man?”

Dean remains silent. This really, really isn’t something he wants to get into, and he doesn’t understand why Cas is pushing so hard for it. It’s not a big deal, anyway – John died a couple of years ago, and before that was just Dean’s childhood. Nothing special.

“Hey,” he says suddenly. “What were you like as a kid? I can’t imagine it.”

“Excuse me?” Cas asks blankly, and Dean resists patting himself on the back for throwing Cas so completely off track.

“Yeah, you know. Me’n Sam, we did the whole prestigious club hockey to college to draft to big leagues. That how it goes in Russia? Or you not been playing that long?”
Cas has got this mildly offended look on his face, and Dean’s not sure why until he says, “I have always played hockey. I was sent away to play hockey, and I did, and now I’m here. I’m uncertain what you mean by what you said.”

“You went to school?”

“Yes,” Cas says, and he’s staring at Dean like he’s crazy, except it should totally be the other way around. “Sportivnaya Detsko Yunosheskaya Shkola.”

“What the fuck is that?” Dean asks, totally not fucking noticing how much stronger and deeper Cas’ voice got when he spoke in Russian, how his accent curved around each syllable. Totally not fucking noticing.

“It is a school where young children go to play hockey,” Cas explains patiently. “From there I was selected for the KHL, and when I was made aware that the NHL was interested in me I ordered my agent to speak with the interested parties. I believe I told you before, Dean, that I wanted to leave Russia.”

Dean’s still trying to wrap his head around the idea of a hockey school. He’d have attended that as a kid in a heartbeat. Probably would’ve had much better grades, too. “Yeah, you said. To get Anna here, right?”

“Among other things,” he says stiffly. “There were difficulties in acquiring her student visa.”

“What about your family?”

Cas’ face grows dark as he sets a helmet aside and grabs another one. “I have not spoken with a member of my family other than Anna for over a decade, but I am given the distinct impression that they are not pleased with me.”

There are so many questions there Dean doesn’t even know where to begin. Doesn’t know where, and can’t. Because he wouldn’t tell Cas about dad, and now he expects the guy to play Doctor Phil with him? Dean may be an ass sometimes, but he tries not to be a hypocrite.

But Cas is continuing on his own anyway. “I was provided room and board since the age of seven in order to attend school, which is how I’ve avoided them. But I believe they are displeased because of my eagerness to come here. I don’t mind, I’m often told I am odd.” Cas frowns down at the helmet, Ash’s, and runs his towel over it one last time, looking deep in thought.

It doesn’t look like a good thought.

Cas has a look on his face that Dean doesn’t like at all. He wants it off. Now.

“When I was ten,” he says loudly, so suddenly Cas might’ve jumped, but Dean plows ahead, “Dad took Sammy and me to this meet up with a bunch of his old hockey buddies. Met Mike Guenther. You know him?”

Cas nods slowly. “He was a very good goalie.”

“Right. Anyway, Sammy was bored and I was tired of entertainin’ him, so I wandered off, and next thing I know this huge man’s got his giant arm around my shoulder, and he’s going, ‘kid, you wanna know the meaning to success? Play hard, get a pretty lady, and one day you’ll be just like me.’”

“That doesn’t sound like very good advice,” Cas frowns, tilting his head.
Dean laughs. “Bobby didn’t think so neither, fact he told me Guenthier was probably drunk, since that’s…you know. What they did. But you know, it was advice from one of the greats, and a lot of other guys there agreed with him, even I knew that as a kid. It’s advice I try to follow.”

“Did you know Bobby as a child?”

“Dude, I thought you knew,” Dean grins. “We lived with Bobby.” Cas squints at him and Dean nods. “Yeah, he and dad go way back, and you know, Dad was only really ever around for hockey practice…he was kinda obsessed with tryin’ to find a way to break back into the NHL or something as a coach, who knows. But Bobby took us in. He coached a minor league team back then, it was real fucking cool getting to go to games every other night as a kid in seats right behind the bench.”

Cas offers him a hesitant smile. “That does sound very cool,” he nods. The word is unfamiliar on his tongue, more foreign than usual, but Dean likes it, because Cas said it for him. The giant washer behind him buzzes to announce it’s finished its cycle, but for some reason he doesn’t move to get up, instead choosing to stay sitting in Cas’ presence.

Cas continues to polish helmets and doesn’t look at Dean, so after a while he manages to haul himself up and begins moving the uniforms and socks to the dryer.

“I’m sorry,” Cas speaks up suddenly. Dean pauses and doesn’t turn around. He thought he’d made it through fairly ambivalent, that maybe Cas hadn’t noticed…but then, Cas had shit too. Maybe they both had stories they were pretending not to share with one another.

“Sorry?” he says, still paused. This could go either way. Cas could want to talk more openly, something Dean doesn’t think he can do, or he’s going to acknowledge that he didn’t miss what Dean had been saying, that he’s gotten a glimpse of what kind of man dad was and what kind of man he could have been, the one Dean wanted him to be. Dean’s shoulders are tensed, ready for all possible outcomes.

“I think I ruined your helmet,” Cas continues, and the sentence takes a moment to register in Dean’s mind before he whirs around. Cas is holding up Dean’s helmet, a sheepish grin on his face. There are little silver angel wings drawn around the two and the four.

“Why the fuck did you do that?” Dean asks, more baffled than anything else.

Cas shrugs and tosses the silver Sharpie (probably not too hard to find with the amount Gabriel has stashed around here) aside. “I like Sam’s books. And,” he adds. “You haven’t been scoring as much lately. Perhaps you need a guardian.”

Dean throws a sopping wet sock at him and pronounces him a jackass, but there’s no real malice behind the insult.

Despite having to do laundry, November starts off pretty great. Home games are the best, but a whole string of ‘em in a row are the stuff you look forward to all season. It gives you the opportunity to play as much hockey as you want and then go home at the end of the night, see your friends and your city for more than a day at a time.

The last home game of the week is tomorrow, Saturday night, and they actually manage to get all the laundry done at a reasonable time. Despite their awkward as fuck feelings moment, he’s ready to invite Cas up to his apartment to watch TV or something, but the guy’s shaking his head almost as soon as he brings it up. “I need to sleep sometime tonight Dean, and you prove to be distracting.”

Huh. Like what the hell is that supposed to mean?
So it looks like he’s going straight to bed too, like a responsible athlete, except when the elevator
door opens Victor is leaning against the wall next to his door, and the sight is so familiar Dean almost
forgets things are no longer like this.

“Victor?”

Victor, who looked like he’d been dozing off, snaps to attention, eyes landing on Dean. Dean can’t
help giving him a huge grin, not holding back on the happy because fuck it, and receives a punch in
the arm as a response. “Ow!”

“Way to make me stand out here for an hour,” Victor says grumpily, though his eyes are cheerful.
“You think I got all day to wait for you, Winchester?”

“Hey don’t blame me,” Dean protests, rubbing his arm before unlocking his apartment door. “I
wasn’t sure you’d be able to get away from the kids before the game tomorrow night, since you’re
their new daddy. How’s that C treatin’ you?”

“Dunno why you were always bitching. Captaining a hockey team is the easiest job I’ve ever had in
my life,” Victor jokes, following him inside. “So where were you, anyway? Roadhouse crew hadn’t
seen you in a while.”

“Roadtrip last week,” Dean says by way of explanation. “And Bobby’s got me doing laundry with
Cas.”

“Cas?” Victor’s brow furrows in confusion before the expression clears. “Oh, you mean Krushnic.
Damn, you musta really pissed the coach off to get stuck in a double punishment like that. Laundry
and Krushnic? That’s cold.”

“Heh. Yeah.” Dean pulls two beers from his fridge and tosses one at Victor. He’d forgotten that he
hadn’t exactly told his friend that Cas isn’t so bad, once you start talking to him and get him to
lighten up. Hell, Dean could probably call him a friend now.

He’s not sure why he doesn’t. He only knows he’d promised himself Cas would never replace
Victor, and now…

He’s gone and fucked everything up again, hasn’t he?

Victor stays most of the night, just shooting the breeze. They somehow manage not to talk about
hockey at all, maybe because they’re on different teams now and don’t want to give anything away.
Personally Dean thinks it’s because they haven’t talked in so long and had too much to say to each
other, and it’s a bit of a relief to him to know that hockey wasn’t the only reason he and Vic were
ever friends.

‘Course, that friendship is pushed to the very back of his mind the second they set foot on the ice for
warm ups twenty minutes before the game the next night.

His team looks ready to go, but Dean can’t help thinking they’re not taking the game as seriously as
they should. Gabriel’s performing his regular shit talking show as they practice shooting him on him,
voice going a mile a minute in a way that Dean thinks has become more a familiarity for the type of
team than any type of annoyance. But it’s good practice for Gabriel too, since he’s usually able to
piss off at least one or two of the players standing in front of him enough that they miss an easy shot.

Besides his goalie’s typical pissing around though, everybody else seems a bit lackluster. Pucks are
barely getting flipped into the net, easy shots are getting missed, and the skating is more of a glide
than a hard rush towards the goal.
The horn sounds, signaling they need to get back to the locker room before returning to the ice for the Anthem, and as Dean skates over to the door he thinks he knows what it is. Including Victor, Winnipeg is a team that has a lot of their old players – almost feels like they’re playing a pick up game with friends.

There’s no way they’re gonna win if that’s the mentality going on around here.

After Bobby announces the starting lineup (Lafitte, Winchester, Krushnic, Winchester, Shirley, Milton in net), Dean stands up, making sure all eyes are on him. “You guys looked like shit.”

“Well,” Balthazar grins cheekily, “please don’t hold back.”

“I’m serious. Just because most of the guys on the Forks are guys we know doesn’t mean we can take it easy.”

“Relax, dude,” Ash calls. “The game’ll be a riot!”

Dean pauses, frowning deeply. Out of the corner of his eye, he can see Cas, customary stone cold look on his face as he performs his regular pregame, ‘stare a hole into Dean’s face’. “Y’know,” Dean says slowly. “That’s what Victor told me last night, right before he had a laugh over how easy it was gonna be to beat your weakasses into the ground with his awesome team.”

The locker room erupts into shouting as Dean grabs his stick and heads out to get on the ice. “Clever,” he hears Cas say quietly from behind him, and he tries not to grin, even though his heart gives an unwanted thump of pride.

Skating to the center of the ice and seeing Victor in blue on the other side is weird, almost like this is some sort of practice, but then when he bends over and places his stick on his knees, ready to take the face off, Victor mouthes ‘game on, Winchester,’ and from there it is.

He knew baiting the idiots on his team would work, but it is surprisingly effective. Possession is instantly off to the great start as he wins the face off and hits it back to Sam. Sam takes it up the ice, over the half line and dumps it, allowing Benny to go after it, slamming a Winnipeg player into the wall before getting the puck to Cas. Cas settles it down to quickly shoot it, only to have it blocked and held by the goalie.

Dean glides over to the bench for the line change, vaulting over the wall and squeezing between Ash and Kevin before they finally make some room. “Did Victor really say we sucked?” Kevin asks.

“What?” Dean asks, then interrupts whatever Kevin says next to yell and bang his stick against the wall as Balthazar gets slammed into the ice right in front of them. “Yeah, he did!”

He feels Ash get up from the bench next to him, and then he’s over the wall and into the ice, immediately slamming into the first Winnipeg player he meets.

Dean’s not totally sure, where the shift was, or if that was it, but suddenly, the game is getting way more aggressive, faster and harder. Chuck draws a penalty late in the first when he gets a stick to the knees that sends him sprawling halfway across the ice, but even with Cas shooting every time the puck comes into contact with his stick, and despite the extra player on the ice from the penalty, the first period ends with the score still tied at zero.

“Dude,” Sam says, keeping in step with Dean as they head off to the locker room, “Some of the guys are getting really pissed.”

“Yeah?” Dean grunts. “Well they should be, shouldn’t they? Not like we’re winning.”
Sam’s lecture face is beginning to form, and Dean knows he’s being a good captain today, motivating and leading by example and all, so he cuts in, “look Sam, hockey makes ya mad. It’s a contact sport. Once we score it’ll settle down.”

“If you say so,” Sam says grumpily, striding ahead of him. Dean can’t find it in himself to be worried over whatever Sam has decided to worry about, not when Sam’s stride looks more to a waddle due to him having to walk on his skates.

The second period starts out even rougher than the first, something Dean doesn’t really mind (did he mention how much he likes the legal hitting aspect of the game) until Cas, who is usually pretty good at avoiding hits, catches a stick in the face and immediately goes to the ice. The ref blows the whistle and Dean skates over quickly, heart pounding from adrenaline or some shit, but Cas is already getting up, frowning. “What the fuck, shit head!” Dean yells as the Winnipeg player skates to the penalty box, but the guy just waves his glove and smiles at them before stepping inside.

“Play the game, Winchester!” Victor calls, smirking.

Dean grits his teeth and rounds on Cas. “Dude, you gotta start hitting people or they’re gonna come after you.”

Cas just shrugs. “Take the face off, Dean,” he says simply before skating away. Dean grinds his teeth even harder against the plastic of his mouth guard before skating to meet the ref at the face off dot.

He wins the draw again, passing it quickly off to Sam, who skates into the corner easily, using his size to fight everyone off until he’s got an open path to fling it into the center of the ice. Cas is there, having somehow magically shaken off his mark once again and he shoots it low to the corner. Benny’s up front, trying to screen the goalie, with a Winnipeg player on him, and when the goalie makes the pad save he immediately starts whacking at the puck, trying to get it into the net. Dean’s already there to help him, showing people off and yelling. There are guys everywhere, somebody’s on the ice and Dean’s not even sure his stick is still in his hand when the goal horn blares loudly, and Benny’s yelling and skating to slam himself into the boards where Chuck is already tackling him.

“FUCK YEAH!” Dean yells, skating over and hitting Benny in the shoulder.

“Lucky shot!” Victor says as he skates by, and Dean grins at him.

“Dude, you really started sucking since you left the team,” he calls, waving his gloved hand at Victor. “Can you even play anymore, or should they ship you back to the minors?”

“You wanna say that to my face, Winchester?”

“Why? You gonna fight me?”

Dean makes the expected rude gesture before clambering over the boards and back onto the bench, grinning as he watches the replay of the goal on the screen above center ice. Maybe Sam will relax now.

Except the game doesn’t become less aggressive, and the chirping Dean hears when he’s on the ice is getting nasty.

One player questions Balthazar’s masculinity and suggests he shove his stick down his pants to feel better about himself, and the next moment Balthazar’s in the box for hooking his own stick around the guy’s ankle and tripping him on a fast break.
Shit like that keeps happening no matter how much Bobby’s yelling at them to cool it. Dean’s doing his best to support his team and calm them down at the same time, but it’s getting harder and harder as he’s repeatedly slammed into the boards and denied the puck, making it impossible for him to calm down himself.

Though Dean would argue against being called a role model, he does understand how a captain’s attitude and play can affect the rest of his team, and he knows if they want to keep the lead they need to settle down and play their game, with skill and agility instead of outright aggression.

The second intermission allows time for the team to calm down as Bobby rattles through the things he wants to see from them, less bullshit and more scoring etcetera. Dean breathes slowly and deeply, staring at the wall and concentrating so hard he nearly jumps when he feels a hand on top of his shoulder.

“Time to go,” Cas says, looking excited. His eyes are bright, almost electric and his hair is completely mussed and sweat dampened, sticking up at absurd angles before he shove his helmet back on, the chin strap swinging as he suddenly unleashes the biggest grin Dean has ever seen on him, with teeth and everything. “Time to kick ass, yes?”

Dean’s still trying to get his fucking breathing back to normal when Bobby slaps the side of his helmet and tells him to get his ass moving. Bastard ruined his concentration.

They come out playing their game in the third period, calling for passes and getting shots on net, even though they’re not going in. Not that it matters much, since Sam is playing a whole new level of defense that isn’t even allowing the puck to make it anywhere close to Gabriel.

“Nice job, Sammy,” Dean says, skating around him as they set up for a faceoff in their zone. He lets a Forks player bump into him on his way to the dot, because he knows the guy’ll get more pissed off if he pretends not to notice.

He’s bending over to take the faceoff when he hears “Hit him back, Winchester, you gayrod!” and his hand twitches, just enough so that he loses it. The puck gets passed to the point, then to Victor off on the left wing, who takes it to the middle before leaving it on the ice for another player to pick up. Sam’s there, and Dean knows the kid, with the puck, Jessie, draft pick traded last year because Bobby couldn’t help him with his tendency to shoot the puck straight into the goalie like he was always giving them a fucking gift. So he’s not worried when Jessie looks ready to shoot.

Either Sam will block it or Gabe will.

Except Sam’s girly hair must be in his eyes or something, because he doesn’t try to get in front of Jessie at all. The puck is going straight for Gabe’s glove, an easy enough save, but then a Forks player is skating across the edge of the crease, right in front of Gabe, and then, somehow, the puck is in the net.

Gabe’s up immediately and shoving his mask off yelling obscenities at the ref and gesturing wildly. Dean skates over to get between them before Gabe gets himself thrown out, ignoring Bobby screaming from the bench. “What the hell happened?”

“Fucker knocked my glove!” Gabriel spits, as mad as Dean’s ever seen him. “I couldn’t make the damn save!”

Dean rounds on the ref. “Well?” he demands.

“None of us saw that,” he says, shaking his head. “You know the rules, Winchester, no reviews on
goalie interference claims. It’s a goal.”

“That’s fucking bullshit!” Gabriel snaps.

“Thanks, we got it,” Dean says, pushing Gabriel backwards. “Get in the net, man. Let them have their shitty ass no-call. They’re not winning, alright? You just keep doing what you’re doing.”

“Fine,” Gabriel says darkly, flipping his mask back down. “But next time that shithole comes near my net, I’m knocking him on his ass.”

Dean’s pretty sure that’s fair.

The rest of the period is just a back and forth volley of shots. The goal really lit a fire under Gabriel’s ass. He’s a good goalie to begin with, but he’s been making saves Dean didn’t believe were possible, and he jumps off the bench with the rest of his team to cheer loudly every time the puck is stopped.

There’s only a minute left in the third and Dean is fully expecting the game to go into overtime as he chases the puck down the ice. He slams into the corner of the boards to stop, swiping the puck away and absorbing the hit from a Fork he swears is even bigger than Sam before getting back in front of the net. Benny’s battling for the puck along the boards, using his body to keep the two guys on him away from it until suddenly, the puck finds its way to the ice and Cas is right there, with the puck, just staring at the goalie.

It’s gonna be the greatest game winning goal ever. But then, out of desperation, a Winnipeg defender throws his stick out, slamming it into Cas’ left wrist so hard the shaft splinters off, and Dean’s not sure if the cracking sound is the stick itself or Cas’ wrist bone or a combination of both, but he must black out because the next thing he knows, Benny’s got his arms around him and Dean’s screaming at the guy who did it, and he’s screaming right back.

“LEARN YOU PLAY HOCKEY YOU FUCKING ASSHOLE, YOU COULD HAVE SERIOUSLY HURT HIM WITH THAT CHEAP ASS—,”

“WHY DON’T YOU TEACH YOUR TEAM HOW TO HOLD A LEAD, YOU STUPID PIECE OF—,”

“EAT A DICK!”

“SO YOU CAN WATCH AND GET OFF? FUCK OFF, WINCHESTER.”

Dean takes a swing and Benny hauls him back even further with the help of one of the refs who is now attempting to settle Dean down by putting him in a headlock. Between the ref’s arms Dean can make out Victor, yelling at his defenseman, and a shaken looking Cas, who is clambering slowly to his feet with his left arm held at an awkward angle.

“Is he okay?” Dean asks, pushing at the ref. “Jesus fuck, get offa me, is he okay?”

The ref lets go and Benny slowly backs off. “Into the box, Winchester.”

“For fucking what?” Dean asks, trying to skate around him to get to Cas, but the ref’s not having it.

“Get in the box,” he repeats, pushing at Dean’s shoulder, and Dean feels his frustration and something else working through his chest until it rips through his throat in a growl.

“What. The fuck. Did I do?”
“General acts of violence,” he says.

“What the hell is violence anyway? Define it for me.”

The ref shoots him a dirty look and blows the whistle loudly right in his ear. Dean swears at his retreating back and gets into the penalty box with the official, watching as they get the Forks defenseman who slashed Cas into his own box next to Dean.

Dean bangs on the sheet of glass that separates them, clearly startling the guy and granting him a sick rush of satisfaction. “If you seriously hurt Cas,” Dean calls through the glass. “I’ll fucking kill you.”

He scoffs but looks away uneasily, and Dean turns his attention back to the ice. He should be afraid, because Dean’s gonna hurt him whether Cas is injured or not.

It’s four on four now, with thirty seconds left in the game. Cas hasn’t gotten off the ice, which means Bobby thinks he’s good or he doesn’t and Cas is ignoring Bobby anyway. Benny’s taking the face off since Dean can’t, and someone must’ve sacrificed a goat or something to the fucking Hockey Gods, because he wins it. Sam gets it and passes it to Chuck, who gets it back to Benny who skates it around behind the net. Dean’s gotten to his feet without noticing, swearing as Benny almost loses it before regaining control, and Cas is at center ice…Dean thinks he’s out of the penalty box before the goal horn even blares, but then it does and the stadium is erupting into cheers so loud Dean can’t even hear himself screaming at Cas as he tackles him, arm tight around his neck and visor pressed closed to his.

He’s so close to Cas his eyes can’t focus on anything but his lips, and he’s somehow not having a bad time doing that before he feels Benny slam into his and Cas’ side. He gives a loud oof and he thinks he hears Cas make a noise of discomfort. Fuck, he got hurt, didn’t he? “Get off, Benny,” he says, elbowing him away and stepping back. Cas looks fine though, blinking in the sudden intrusion of light and noise after he’d been stuck between two men, and Dean grins abruptly, slinging his arm around his shoulder again to lead him off the ice.

He doesn’t let go of Cas once they get to the locker room. The reporters must’ve been making so much racket they let them in earlier, because Dean’s barely able to get his helmet off (still not letting go of Cas) before they’re swarming them, shouting questions. Cas looks startled and like he doesn’t enjoy the attention much, which sucked for him, because when he actually did answer, the media ate it up.

“Castiel! Castiel! Krushnic! What went through your head when you scored the game winning goal?”

“I was a little unhappy because I knew I would have to speak with you,” Cas says seriously. There’s a loud round of laughter, and Dean knows they think Cas is joking.

“We’re not that bad!” an attractive blonde calls out.

Cas blinks. “Yes you are.”

Laughter again. They ask about Cas’ injury, which he says isn’t an injury, the same thing he’d say if he were holding his intestines in his hand. Talking about injuries is bad business in hockey – it just provides other teams with an easier target. They ask him how he likes the NHL, if they think he’s settling down, all questions Cas answers dutifully. Just as Dean’s beginning to realize his arm is still around Cas and he’s not even being asked any questions, and he feels stupid and wow he must look like a fucking idiot, a reporter turns to him. “Dean,” he says eagerly, “You and Castiel had a bumpy start at the beginning of the season. Have you settled down as players, and how does he compare to
“You can’t compare Vic and Cas,” Dean says immediately. “I mean they’re a whole…different thing. But hell have Cas and I clicked. You saw the game tonight, right? I’ve never seen anybody get to the center of the ice undefended as many times as he can. And that goal! Hell, that must’ve been the hardest slap shot you ever took, right buddy?” he glances at Cas, who looks like he’s having a hard time focusing. He’s got this weird half smile on his face, different then the quirk of the lips Dean usually sees, different from the full out grin he’d seen earlier. It’s kinda…Cas is kinda beaming, and for some reason Dean can’t stop staring, and he can’t swallow around the lump in his throat.

There’s the bright flash and whir of a camera and Dean’s arm immediately drops from Cas’ shoulder as he stares out into the crowd of reporters. Fuck. What the hell was that, Winchester?

“Alright, all a’you outta my locker room!” Bobby yells. There’s the repeated slam of something, probably Bobby hitting a stray hockey stick against the wall, and the reporters stop whichever player they’re talking to and file out grumbling, presumably to wait outside the door until they emerge again. You’re supposed to play nice with the reporters as good publicity for the team and the league, but once in a while Bobby’s not in the mood. Astoundingly enough, most of the media allows him his sporadic elevated grumpiness, fondly referring to him as erratic.

“Hell of a win, boys!” Bobby announces as soon as they’re all gone, and that’s all he says before he disappears into his office with Rufus.

The guys, in various states of undress, all look to Dean, who stares back before saying slowly, “Think Victor’s singing the same tune?”

“He damn well better not be!” Balthazar roars above the loud cheers of the team.

“Who’s got the belt?” Dean calls above the din. “Pass it off!”

Harry stands up, and Dean turns to Cas, because Harry would be an idiot if he wasn’t about to hand it over to the guy. Except Cas has dropped to the bench, left wrist held in his right hand, and even then Dean can see that his hands not going the right way. He drops quickly to a crouch, forcing Cas’ chin up. His face is pale, made even paler to the stark contrast of his dark hair and stubble. “Cas?” he says urgently. “Speak to me, buddy.”

“Dean,” he says, so familiar he almost fools Dean into thinking he’s fine before he falls forward heavily to lean on his shoulder.

Last time Dean was in a hospital, he was getting stitches after Michael had busted open his nose. The time before that, Sammy had broken his collarbone after getting the game winning goal of their twenty-fourth straight win of the season, setting an NHL record. The time before that, dad was dying.

Hospitals were weird. Dean’s not sure how he feels about them. But he’s pretty sure Cas doesn’t like them at all, and that’s making him more anxious than he should be.
His teammates get hurt all the time, sometimes seriously and sometimes superficially. He’s pretty sure Cas will be okay. But it took forever to convince the guy he needed to go to the hospital, both Dean and the team doctor Frank combined, and even when he got here Cas was quiet, in a different way than usual, not talking to anybody. The worst part is they wouldn’t let Dean stay with him.

So now he’s sitting out in the hallway waiting to hear what’s wrong with Cas, thinking about how the guy’s in a strange place in a country he’s not familiar with, and he’s supposed to trust the people fucking around with his body.

Never mind. Dean knows exactly how he feels about hospitals. They suck.

“How’s it going kiddo?”

Dean stops glaring at the no cell phones sign to glance at Gabriel, who is sucking casually on a lollipop. Dean can see three more sticking out of his jacket pocket. Wouldn’t surprise him if Gabe had gotten those from the nursing station. Some of the girls here were pretty. “What are you doing here?”

Gabriel laughs at him and leans against the wall. Dean’s been parked on a chair down some random hallway for a while now, ever since the doctor kicked him out and he went wandering. He has no idea how long it’s been, or why Gabriel is here or how the hell he found him. “The entire team is here, Deano. You didn’t think you were Cassie’s only friend, did ya?”

“No,” Dean huffs, not even denying it because it’d be pretty pointless, now. He mulls over the fact that apparently his entire team is sitting somewhere in this hospital, spends several more minutes trying to figure out what kind of scene that makes, and then asks, “Didn’t you guys want to go out and celebrate?”

Gabriel gives a one shoulder casual shrug. “Sure. Team just wanted to check up on the patient first.”

Dean stares at Gabriel, and Gabriel stares back. Lots of guys on the team have been hurt before, a lot more serious than Cas. Most of the team will visit them in the hospital, but not all together. Yet here there are now, waiting to hear about Cas and his first NHL injury.

Jesus. He really is one of them now.

“You worried or something?” Dean asks, grinning slightly.

“Not as much as you,” Gabriel shoots back, straightening up and focusing on someone just behind Dean. “Where’s my coffee?”

“Gonna be down your shirt if you don’t behave.” Dean turns slightly to see Victor standing with one of his teammates, who has a cup of coffee in his hands. “Give him his coffee Zeke. Then you can get out of here.”

Gabriel grabs it from Victor before Zeke can, then sticks his tongue out at him because Gabriel is still five. “Next time you mess with my goaltending, I’ll mess with your face,” he says completely cheerfully, wiggling his fingers in a goodbye to Dean before sauntering away, whistling. Zeke shoots Victor an incredibly exasperated look before heading in the opposite direction.

“Good to know some things never change,” Victor says, shaking his head.

Dean snorts and kicks the empty plastic chair next to him towards Victor. “You’re a good captain, Vic.”
“High praise.” Victor drops into the chair and leans back, regarding Dean. “Hell of a game, huh? Never seen you get so angry.”

“That why you’re here?” Dean asks, raising an eyebrow. “I promise sweetheart, I could never be mad at you.”

“Yeah, you wish I cared that much.” Victor rubs at his chin and regards Dean thoughtfully, so much so that Dean finds it difficult not to squirm. Victor couldn’t read him like Sam, and he didn’t hit straight at the core of Dean’s shit like Benny did, but he was always good at sniffing out the stuff he did want to know. “So. Guess this Castiel Krushnic character isn’t so bad after all.”

Dean does squirm slightly now, reminded that the last time he’d talked to Victor, Cas had been Krushnic. He was still the asshole he was before, just…Dean kind of liked him now. “Guess not,” he grunts noncommittally. “He’s alright.”

“Seemed more than alright to me,” Victor remarks. “Good player. You two seemed friendly.” Dean opens his mouth and Victor shoots him a hard look. “Oh please. Please try to deny that so I can point out what you’re doing.”

“What?” Dean protests anyway. “I’m his captain, it’s the guy’s first NHL injury. I’m being supportive!”


Dean has no idea what the fuck he does, if somehow what just flooded his brain is now visible on his face, but two more seconds of Victor looking at him and suddenly his eyes are narrowing and he’s shifting forward. “Dean,” he says, and Dean’s never been more thankful for an interruption than he is when he hears, “Mr. Winchester?” from the end of the hallway.

“Yeah,” he says, shooting to his feet, and the nurse, who made it to them pretty quickly after calling his name, replies. “You can see Mr. Krushnic now. He’s been asking for you.”

Dean shoots an uneasy glance at Victor, who only raises an eyebrow in response. “Want me to let the rest of your team know?”

“Thanks,” Dean says quickly. “And thanks for coming to check on Cas, Vic. Classy of you, but I don’t wanna keep you any longer.”

“I didn’t come to check on Cas,” Victor says dryly. “But now I’m interested. Think I’ll stick around.”

“No, you really don’t hafta—,”

“Can I have your autographs?” the nurse cuts in, and Dean’s about to snap at him when he notices how young the guy actually is, and how hopeful he looks. Victor shoots him a smug look and signs the guy’s clipboard before taking off down the hallway, leaving Dean to sign his own name and follow the nurse down a couple of corridors.

They’re all empty except for one attractive woman with flaming red hair. She’s standing outside a patient’s room and doesn’t look familiar at all, so Dean begins to pay more attention when the nurse stops in front of the door she’s closest to, gesturing at it. “He’s ready whenever,” he says cheerfully. “Thanks for the autograph!”

“No problem, man,” Dean accepts the offered high five and gives him time to leave, staring at the door to Cas’ room even after he knows the nurse is out of sight.
“Who are you?” the woman asks, and it’s the slight accent similar to Cas’ that clinches it for Dean.

“You’re Anna.”

Anna’s eyes widen and she frowns at him. “Who are you?” she repeats.

Dean jerks his head towards the door. “Your brother’s teammate. Are you here to see him?”

The question seems to take her off guard, and she hesitates for a second before plowing forward.

“What is wrong with him?”

“I dunno,” Dean frowns, starting to get annoyed. “Something with his wrist. You’re going to go in to see him, right? He’d probably like that.”

“I doubt you know what my brother would like,” Anna says, looking him up and down and frowning even harder, if possible. “He does not make close relationships.”

Dean shrugs, “We’re doing okay.”

Anna’s brown eyes lock with his for a moment. “Treat him well. He doesn’t like hospitals.”

“Why don’t you?” Dean counters. “Just go in and see him. I’ll leave.”

But Anna’s already shaking her head and turning. “Goodbye, Dean Winchester.”

“I’ll tell him you were here,” Dean offers after her.

“No you won’t,” Anna calls over her shoulder. “Because then you will only upset him.”

She’s fucking right too, which pisses Dean off enough to quit puzzling over how the hell she’d figured out who he was so fast. Scowling slightly, he opens the door and is immediately greeted by the white sterility only hospital rooms can achieve. The league’s health insurance at least gets a private room, something Dean can’t help but be grateful for when Cas calls, “Dean!” the second he appears and heat rises to his cheeks.

“Hey Cas,” he says, making his way over to the hospital bed. Cas would look completely normal, if not for the hospital gown slipping way too low and the white cast wrapped around his left wrist. Otherwise he looks fine, blue eyes alert as they follow Dean. “So. What’s the word?”

“Fracture,” Cas replies solemnly. “I have a slight bone fracture in my wrist.”

“Kiddie stuff,” Dean grins. “You’ll be back on the ice by December.”

“Tell the doctor,” Cas sounds disgruntled. “He seems to think I need to be kept overnight.”

“Yeah, well, you did pass out there, Sleeping Beauty.”

Cas purses his lips. “I did not pass out. I simply lost all feeling in my thumb.”

Dean shrugs and grins. “Gotta listen to the doc, Cas. If he thinks you need surveillance, you gotta have surveillance.”

“Can’t I just come home with you?” Cas asks petulantly, and Dean is so taken aback by the question that he doesn’t answer before the door to the room bursts open and the whole team comes pouring in, talking excitedly.
“Lemme sign the cast, Cassie!” Gabriel calls, producing one of his ever present Sharpies and eliciting an argument over who got to sign first. Dean finds himself pushed away from the bedside and standing next to Sam, who’s observing the mob with amusement.

“Hey, they’re your team,” he says when he catches Dean glaring at him.

“You guys are gonna kill him.”

“Guess it’s a good thing he’s in a hospital then, huh?” Benny drawls, appearing beside him.

Normally Dean would encourage this type of behavior, but Anna’s mention of how much Cas hated hospitals coupled with his weird behavior when they arrived and his insistence that he not stay overnight was making Dean… hell, Victor was fucking right. He was mother henning.

“Don’t worry, Dean,” and there Sammy goes, reading his mind. “He seems fine.”

Surprisingly enough, from what Dean could see, Cas was fine. He was watching intently as Gabriel carefully drew something that was hopefully not a penis onto his cast, cutting in to the ensuing argument between him and Balthazar (“It’s art, jackass.” “Well then you are an insult to artists everywhere”). Kevin was even sitting on the edge of his bed, occasionally hitting his leg to get him to weigh in on whatever conversation he was having with Chuck, and Cas didn’t seem to mind.

“He usually this out of it nowadays?” he hears Victor ask, and he focuses his attention back to Sam and Benny, who have been joined by their former teammate.

“Nowadays,” Benny repeats, and he and Sam give Victor such a nearly identical look that Dean feels an immediate urge to get them all as far away from each other as possible so that they can never talk or exchange looks again.

“Don’t you have a new team?” he asks Victor roughly.

“Ouch,” Vic laughs, grinning at him. “Just came to tell ya to watch out for Gordon, is all, and maybe to invite you over when you come to Winnipeg, if you can find your manners.”

Sam, whom Dean had expected to laugh off the warning about Gordon, looks dead serious. “What do you know about Gordon?”

Victor shrugs. “You hear things up in Canada. The press actually pays attention to us there. Guess Gordon’s been spilling some things to the media, looking for money or trouble, sure he’s happy with either.”

“Been keeping an eye on him lately,” Benny says grimly. “Think he’s sitting on that bar fight you just had yourself, Dean.”

Dean raises an eyebrow. “Seriously? You think he’s gonna leak that?”

Sam and Benny glance at one another. “We think maybe he could be responsible for it.”

“Right,” Dean grins, because they must be joking. “Gordon told two meatheads his teammates are gay and goaded them into beating us up. You know how that sounds, Sammy?”

“There’s something off about him, brother,” Benny observes, shaking his head. “You notice how he’s not here now? He just don’t like different.”

“Remember when he wouldn’t even look at me that entire week I was on cortisone for my arm?”
Sam asks quietly.

“Alright, I’m not arguing he’s not a dick,” Dean holds up his hands. “But what the fuck about me’n Cas is different?”

Now Victor gets to be involved in a round of glances. That’s great.

“Just watch out for him, Dean,” Victor tells him. “You know we’re all looking out for you.”

Crap. So now on top of the weird shit his mind has been putting him through, he’s gotta worry about Gordon too.

The whole team finally clear out about an hour later, and Dean only manages to leave by promising Cas that he’ll visit him at his apartment when he gets home in the morning. Cas is going to be out for at least the month, which leaves the left wing on the front line wide open. It’s going to be strange playing without Cas – hopefully they’ll be able to make it without too much damage.

And just how weird it is, that only a month after Dean refused to make him a part of the team, not being able to play with him was going to be a challenge.

Bobby ends up pulling Ash up to play with him and Benny, which surprisingly works out alright for them. They don’t win as much as Dean thinks they would have if Cas were healthy, but they don’t sink, and they’re definitely managing to make their way through the month relatively unscathed. The deeper into the season they get, the more important games get, as they get closer and closer to things like the trade deadline and the playoffs.

Cas actually turns out to be the most difficult part of this whole process, having to come to games dressed in his suit and his cast and being sent to sit in the press box with the rest of the corporate guys instead of on the bench with everyone else. Dean is amused to find that he’s a decidedly grumpy patient who has no patience for his injury or any coddling, instead continuing to insist that he’s fine and could play the second his cast comes off. Deans finds Cas in his apartment during the month of November more than he has any other time, and it becomes so frequent that Dean’s beginning to wake up in the middle of the night wondering where the fuck the guy went.

Not normal thoughts you should be having about someone who is slowly and surely becoming something like a best friend.

And he’s definitely not going to think about why he’s been looking for him in his bed.

Somehow the end of November is always packed full of games, even though they only get three days off for Thanksgiving. Every year Dean gets sucked into the hockey turmoil and is pretty useless as a person until he’s sitting at Bobby’s with a stomach full of turkey and football on in the background. This year, he can’t seem to achieve the same laser focus that’s usually effortless for him.

He knows who’s fucking fault it is too.

“So,” Bobby had grunted at him on their way out from practice a few weeks ago. “You invitin’ Cas to Thanksgiving or what? Kid’s got no family boy, he ain’t gonna wait forever.”

Yeah. Instead of getting excited about the pickup in hockey games, Dean Winchester is fucking freaking out over asking a guy to come stuff his face full of mashed potatoes with him at his family at his surrogate father's house.

He’s really tired of being a pissbaby about this.
Cas has a key to his apartment now (he doesn’t remember, how it happened, don’t ask) but the idiot’s still got some kind of aversion to just walking in. Dean’s kind of thankful, because he doesn’t even want to think about a scenario in which Cas catches him without clothes on, but he doesn’t knock on the door either. Just stands there until Dean happens to open it. If it weren’t for Chekov’s whining, Cas might be out there all night.

This time when Dean swings open the door, Cas isn’t there. Dean frowns down at the dog, who just looks up at him with what he swears is a grin. “Useless,” he tells him. Chekov’s tail wags harder.

Whatever. Time to bite the bullet, right?

Dean heads down the flight of stairs to Cas’ apartment and knocks on the door before he can think too much about it. Luckily for him Cas opens it almost immediately, and Dean can tell from his vacant expression and the T-shirt with a collar so loose it’s falling off his shoulder that he’s been sleeping all day.

“Dude, did you just wake up?”

“No,” Cas says grumpily, which means yes. It’s on practice days like today that Dean really worries about Cas, because he doesn’t have to come to those. Dean doesn’t think Cas actually does do anything outside of hockey, and with his wrist the way it is…s’like Cas just ceases to be whenever he’s out of Dean’s sight.

“Y’know,” Dean starts uncomfortably, “If you have nothing to do and I’m not around, you can always head up to my apartment. Sure Chekov would appreciate the company.”

Cas’ eyes clear a little at that, and any reservations Dean had about letting Cas into his apartment like he belonged there or any teasing he’d get from the guys vanishes. “I would like that. Thank you, Dean.”

“Yeah. So, uh,” Dean leans against the doorjamb and crosses his arms in an effort to look casual. “Thanksgiving’s in a couple of days. You got any plans?”

Cas’ brows furrow and he gives Dean a look. “I do not celebrate American Thanksgiving.”

Right. Russian. Dean could hit himself, but he’s fairly certain that would only make Cas think he’s more of an idiot than he actually is. “Still,” he pushes, because somehow it’s even sadder thinking of Cas being alone on Thanksgiving when he doesn’t even know what the damn thing is, “You should do something nice. Everyone else is.”

“What would you have me do?” Cas asks flatly, raising an eyebrow. “Guilt Anna away from her friends when she has no desire to see me? Or perhaps I should try calling my mother to wish her a happy American holiday.”

Dean winces. “You could come with me.”

There’s a pause, slight hesitation, and then Cas says, “Come with you where?”

“To Bobby’s,” Dean is finding staring just over Cas’ shoulder and into his family room is a way easier way to do this. “Sam’ll be there. And my…and Ellen, and her daughter. They’re, uh, family.”

Dean is sure Cas is going to say no, but turns out he apparently doesn’t know Cas that well. “Yes,” Cas nods firmly. “Thank you Dean.”

“Hey, not a big deal,” he laughs weakly. “Just don’t want you to be alone on a family holiday.”
He tells himself it’s not a big deal. He’s not totally sure when he became such a crappy liar.

Bobby’s got land in Wisconsin, an old farm house with a giant yard that’s at least a two hour drive from Chicago. Weirdly enough, Sammy opts out of driving up with them in the Impala, mumbling something about letting Dean have his time with Cas before hanging up the phone. Dean’s suspicious, because what the hell, but Sam’s acting way too weird for this to actually be about him and Cas, so Dean figures he’s probably bringing Jess up and thinks this is gonna be a surprise to anybody.

Dean had been considering leaving Chekov in a kennel for the next two days, but the idea is quickly abandoned when Cas lets the damn dog sit on his lap as soon as he climbs into the car.

The ride’s not as awkward as it could have been. Dean spends most of the time fielding questions from Cas on what you’re supposed to do on Thanksgiving, what the point of it is, and who Ellen and Jo are. He seems particularly interested in them, calling Jo Dean’s sister so often that Dean doesn’t bother to correct him after the first few times.

It’s weirdly…nice. And normal. There’s no anxiety, none of that building pressure he’s been feeling with Cas lately, none of those scary thoughts he’s been doing such a good job pushing to the back of his brain. Just regular bro time, enough to make him start thinking that maybe it had all been a fluke.

Once in a while you get those weird attraction hiccups you can’t explain, right? Like the crush nine year old Sammy had on five foot ten sixth grader Abby. Cas was just his weird attraction thing, and the car ride proves Dean is over it. And it doesn’t make him gay or anything either.

What a fucking relief.

It’s late when they make it to Bobby’s, so Dean lets them in with the key he has. He has no idea where Bobby expected to shack Cas up anyway, with only three extra rooms and one of them with a closed door (presumably with Jo in there) so he shows Cas to his old room and dumps their duffle bags before heading down to the den and Bobby’s couch. He swears he’s only asleep five minutes before something wet is sliding over his face and there’s a voice in his ear.

“Dean, there are two women here asking me who I am.”

“You’re Cas,” Dean mumbles and attempts to push Chekov away so he can sit up. He finally manages to get the dog onto his lap and continues to rub a hand over his back as he blinks blearily at his surroundings. Jo and Charlie are grinning widely at him while Cas stands awkwardly off to the side.

“This is Cas?” Charlie says, turning to him, and observing him. “Star Trek Cas?”

“Um,” Cas replies.

“Geez Dean, a little more warning next time. I ran into your room to jump on your bed and this guy was there instead.”

“Why the hell were you going to jump on my bed?” Dean shakes his head and scrubs at his eyes. “Don’t answer that. Cas, this is Jo and Charlie.”

“Your sister?” Cas asks, and Jo grins widely again.

“Awww, Dean! You told him I’m your sister?”

“Shut up.”
“That is a kick ass accent,” Charlie says to Cas. “You sure you’re here for the right holiday, dude? You sound like someone the Pilgrims would’ve crapped their pants at meeting.”

“I’m not sure what that means.”

“It’s his first Thanksgiving,” Dean says, swinging his legs over the side of the couch and scrubbing a hand through his hair. Chekov jumps off the couch and trots into the kitchen. “Sam here yet?”

He can feel both Cas and Charlie staring at him and carefully ignores it as Jo replies. “Not yet.”

“Bobby and your mom?”

“Hunting,” Jo says matter-of-factly. “You know it snowed last night, right Dean? Maybe you wanna put on a shirt.”

Charlie sniggers and Dean shoots her a dirty look. For some reason Cas is engrossed in the creepy black and white photos on Bobby’s mantle. “Kiss my ass, Jo. When you start cooking dinner you can go topless all you want too.”

“Oh, I’d totally petition for that,” Charlie says solemnly. Cas glances at her like it was an odd thing to say, and Dean realizes he hadn’t actually mentioned Jo and Charlie were dating, or whatever.

Oh well. He’d figure it out.

Sam shows up as Dean’s shoving the turkey into Bobby’s older than balls oven, and it’s only when he returns to the family room to find Sam and Cas discussing the controversial history of Thanksgiving and Charlie telling some story about a video game she’d beaten last week that Dean sees it.

He’s in couples hell, and by default he and Cas are a couple.

Sam must’ve noticed it right away too, the smug, smart ass bastard, because he interrupts his own sentence to say, “Hey, Dean, Happy Thanksgiving. There’s a spot next to Cas.” He points to the small sliver of space on the couch between Cas and Charlie, looking at Dean expectantly.

Dean’s not going to play this game though, especially not when he’s pretty sure he’s got his shit figured out and doesn’t need to be confused again. “I got some potatoes to peel,” he says, pointing towards the kitchen and backing away. “But y’all have fun.”

Eight people eat a lot of fucking potatoes to begin with, but Dean always doubles the amount anyway at Thanksgiving because of the starch he and Sam can put away. He’s only peeled two when he hears someone at the door, and a few minutes later Charlie is leaning against the counter next to him.

“Can I help you, Red?”

“Probably,” she says. “Question is, are you gonna, or are you gonna be a baby?”

Dean wordlessly pulls open the drawer next to him and fishes out an extra peeler, handing it over to Charlie. She grabs it and a potatoe and turns to lean over the sink with him. “So, I have a question.”

“Still not gay.”

“Dude,” she makes a face. “Way to be Captain Rude. I told you that was an honest mistake. I believe you.”
“Oh,” Dean pauses and clears his throat. “Uh, alright. What d’you want?”

“I have hockey questions,” Charlie says seriously. “Since Jo is a player and everything.”

Dean almost laughs out loud with relief. This is easy to talk about. “So what, you wanna know what icing is? How trades work? Just say the word, I’m your man, Charlie.”


Dean glances at her and grabs another potato. “You don’t want to know about hockey, do you,” he says finally. “You want to know about that program.”

“Please Dean. It’s not that hard to read up on hockey or watch a couple of games to figure it out. No offense, but you guys aren’t exactly playing D&D out there.” She sighs. “It is, however, harder for me to understand the strides hockey has been making towards LGBTQ acceptance from a league perspective without someone in the league.”

“Why don’t you ask Jo about this stuff?”

“I’m asking about this stuff because of Jo,” Charlie frowns. “I don’t want her life to become hard because of her relationship with me.”

Dean bites his lip and runs the peeler confidently over the potato in his hand. He hadn’t really thought if Jo would be getting any shit for her new girlfriend, but then again, he’d also never been able to really compare women’s hockey to the NHL, mostly because he has no idea what the atmosphere in a women’s locker room is like.

“Alan Corbett was the son of Phillip Corbett, general manager for Toronto. Pretty well respected guy, you know, and Alan was a hockey scout for some college…anyway, he came out a few years ago, closest to anyone the NHL has had coming out in the organization. He was a really big voice for kids bein’ able to play their sport without being affected by who they were. He died in a car crash a few months later, and his dad and his brother do a pretty good job of keeping his voice strong in the league.”

“The You Can Play Program.”

“Yeah,” Dean quirks a smile at her. “I’m guessin’ you’ve seen the commercials. If you can play, you can play. It’s a nice thing they got goin’.”

“But no hockey player has ever come out as gay, even retired ones?” Charlie asks.

“No,” Dean frowns, “But—,”

“And homophobic slurs are still considered the worst insults?”

“Well, yeah, of course they fuckin’ are,” Dean snaps and takes a deep breath. “Sorry. Look. I’m pretty sure you got nothing to worry about with Jo. She’s tough, she’s more than capable of taking care of herself and that’s just…it’s not the culture, alright?”

“What do you mean, the culture?” Charlie pushes. “Do you experience hockey differently?”

“Well yeah, of course I do,” Dean laughs. “Charlie, my dad and a bunch of his hockey buddies bought me sex from a stripper on my sixteenth birthday. I grew up with a bunch of guys who fought to solve their problems, and if you didn’t wanna fight, you were a skirt wearing cocksucker. It’s just a mentality that sticks around. Jo and the other girls don’t have any of that.”
She’s staring at him, so Dean takes him time dropping another potato into the pot before looking at her. “That doesn’t sound healthy, Dean.”

“No, but it’s the way things are,” Dean shrugs. “And that’s why no one’s come out in the NHL.”

Charlie frowns deeply and tosses another peeled potato into the pot. “I get it,” she says finally. “When I started working at the Roadhouse, Jo was never weird about me liking her. I never thought anything would come out of it, but she accepted that she liked me too pretty easily. I don’t think I’m worried about her.” She glances at him, “But it sucks to hear the NHL isn’t as awesome.”

“Hey,” Dean protests, “The NHL is fucking awesome. Just turns out no one has been gay yet.”

Charlie gives him a funny look Dean barely has time to try to interpret before Sam’s voice interrupts. “Hey, we’re not interrupting anything, are we?” he says loudly from behind them, making more noise than a fully packed stadium on opening day as he clomps into the room. Jo, Jess and Cas trail in behind him and they all settle around the kitchen table.

“We thought maybe you two were bored in here,” Jess says earnestly, “So we decided to bring the party to you!”

“Thoughtful,” Dean replies, which earns him a dirty look from Sam. Dean flicks a potato peel at him in response.

“We were gonna play Never Have I Ever,” Jo chimes in.

“Can’t,” Dean says immediately. “No booze.”

“Charlie, can you grab the beers from the fridge, please?” Jo asks, ignoring him.

“That’s not gonna get Cas drunk.”

“And the bottle of Johnnie Walker Blue in the cupboard.”

“What is Never Have I Ever?” Cas asks.

“A drinking game,” Sam explains, leaning forward in his chair a little. “Some says something they’ve never done, and if you’ve done it, you drink.”

“He’s trying to get you drunk so he can feel you up under the table later, Cas,” Dean says.

Cas looks alarmed enough for Dean to begin feeling guilty before Charlie slams the alcohol down on the table, pushing a beer towards everyone except Cas, who gets the whole bottle of Johnnie Walker. “Sit down, Dean,” she smiles sweetly, kicking the chair next to her towards him.

Dean drops reluctantly onto the chair and cracks open his beer, draining a good quarter of it before setting it back down. “So, who’s going first?”

“Oh, I’ll start on an easy one!” Jess says. “Never have I ever been arrested.”

Dean lifts his beer to his lips to drink and isn’t at all surprised when Sam the goody goody doesn’t do the same. Jo’s drink isn’t a surprise either, nor is Charlie too far-fetched to imagine, but Dean almost falls out of his chair when he sees Cas raise his bottle dutifully to his lips.

“What the fuck were you arrested for?”

Cas shifts uncomfortably. “Do I have to answer?”
“Yes,” Dean says firmly before Sam can ruin all the fun by saying it’s not part of the game.

Cas purses his lips. “I was in Moscow with a teammate, and we had hailed a car. We agreed upon a price before the drive, but when we arrived the driver insisted he needed eleven extra rubles we did not have. He would not let us out of the car until we paid, so my teammate punched him.”

Dean grins widely at him. “You got arrested for that?”

“Yes.”

“Damn, look at Cas beating up taxi drivers,” he says in satisfaction, leaning back. Nice to know the guy had some human qualities. “How much is eleven rubles, anyway?”

“About twenty cents,” Sam replies helpfully.

“Fucking beautiful.”

“My turn,” Jo announces, loudly. “Never have I ever been pantsed at a charity function.”

“That was one time!” Sam protests.

Dean laughs and raises his beer bottle at him. “Hazing’s a bitch Sammy, but someone’s gotta do it. Drink.”

The game progresses without any really big surprises as they get to their second round of beer and Cas continues to look as solid as a rock despite having drunk at least a fifth of the bottle. Dean’s fairly confident he’s gonna make it out of the game with just a warm buzz and the delicious smell of turkey wafting through the air when Sam says, “Never have I ever kept a dog and refused to name it.”

“Targeting,” Dean accuses, only hesitating for a moment over the lie before taking a large gulp of his beer. Cas, though, has got his puzzled face on.

“Why did you drink?”

“Because I got a dog with no name,” Dean replies. He’s pretty sure Cas is too literal to pick up telepathy, but he’s trying his damndest to silently tell him to shut up anyway. It doesn’t work.

“No you don’t,” Cas says, smiling a little. “His name is Chekov.”

“Aw,” Jess coos.

“As in of the USS Enterprise Chekov?” Charlie asks happily.

“Wait a minute,” Sam says slowly. “So this dog has a name, and you’ve been letting me think you’ve been calling him ‘dog’ for the past nine months?”

“He doesn’t have a name,” Dean says, glaring at Cas.

“Methinks the lady doth protest too much,” Jo sing songs, raising her voice. “Chekov! Come here boy!”

Dean isn’t even able to put out a partial prayer that for the first time in his life the dog doesn’t respond when the golden comes streaking through the doorway and heads straight for the girls, sliding across the tile floor into Charlie’s legs. “Ahhh, who’s a good little ensign?” Charlie asks, bending down to rub his ears. She’s quickly joined by the other two girls and it’s not long before
Chekov is getting his belly scratched.

“What the hell man?” Dean sighs, looking at Cas.

Cas shrugs. “I did not want to call him dog all week.”

“Man,” Sam laughs, shaking his head. “It’s not a bad thing to love a dog, Dean.”

“I don’t love it alright? It’s just got a damn name,” Dean argues. “Can we get back to the damn game, please?”

“Fine,” Charlie says, not looking up from scratching Chekov’s belly. “Never have I ever kissed a man.”

Dean waits for Jo and Jess to pop up and take their drink and almost misses Cas raising his own bottle from the corner of his eye.

“Hang on,” Dean turns in his chair so violently that the legs scrape across the floor and cause Chekov to roll back onto his stomach. “Since when have you kissed guys?”

“As long as I can remember?” Cas says hesitantly, like he’s unsure if this is the right answer. “It is not uncommon for two men to kiss in greeting.”

Dean’s brain must be broken, because it keeps playing a jagged loop of Cas and kissing and Cas kissing guys since forever ago—

“You know Europeans aren’t as big on kissing being a sexual thing Dean,” Sam laughs, like this is funny. “You’ve met Balthazar, right?”

“Balthazar makes everything sexual,” Dean snaps.

The sound of the front door being slammed open echoes through the house, followed quickly by Bobby’s sarcastic, “Honey, I’m home!”

“If you all expect to be invited back next year, you best come help us unload these birds!” Ellen shouts after him.

There’s a quick scraping of wood against tile as chairs are pushed back and everyone begins to make their way out of the kitchen. Sam’s the last one out, turning to look at Dean with a raised eyebrow. “You coming?”

“Yeah, just a minute,” Dean mutters. “I gotta put the potatoes on.”

He’d been fine, damn it. Fine. There had been totally normal, platonic feelings, friendly feelings you have towards guy friends. But apparently Cas kisses his guy friends. Or strangers. Any guys he meets, guess all you have to do is say hello.

Dean can’t fucking shake it. “Hello, Dean.” And then a kiss, right? What? Was he supposed to be getting one and Cas was holding back? Why? Was he not good enough to kiss?

Is it not gay if you’re European or something?

Dean can feel those thoughts beating at the wall in the back of his brain again, the one escaping through the cracks an image of Cas leaning forward, hands on Dean’s cheeks and pressing a firm kiss to his lips in a very commanding hello Dean kind of fucking way.
God DAMMIT.

Maybe Cas wasn’t his passing attraction after all.

Chapter End Notes

The You Can Play Program is the real deal, as is the story of the founders. Unfortunately, the NHL still has not had any known LBGTQ members, despite the league's insistence that they are more than ready for them.
Thank god for his family, because Dean’s not sure he would have been able to make it through dinner without their distraction. Realizing he still actually had an attraction to Cas, however platonic (Dean equates it to admiring a fucking painting or something – Michaelangelo drew some pretty buff dudes, and he wasn’t gay) was still something he didn’t like to think about, making it harder to sit next to him through an entire Thanksgiving dinner. His family definitely got him through that, with Bobby and Ellen bickering, Jess and Sam competing for some sort of most sickening couple competition, and Jo and Charlie trying to convince Dean it’d be fun to put on a costume a couple of weekends a year and sword fight in the park.

Cas didn’t say much, but every time Dean worked up the nerve to look at him, he could just tell. He was enjoying the hell out of himself. Dean’s be willing to bet he was the most thankful one here.

The thought kind of sobered him, enough so that he was able to convince himself to stop being such an idiot. Cas didn’t have a family. This was ultimately about making him feel welcome, about showing him how awesome America was and that he had friends here.

Besides, being attracted to Cas didn’t mean anything. He still wasn’t gay. And he’d been attracted to tons of girls that he’d never gotten anywhere with. Alex Morgan, for instance, still hadn’t returned his calls.

Whatever, crisis averted. Cas is kind of hot, Dean’s moving on.

Or at least he would be moving, if he hadn’t eaten so much.

“Why am I such a goddamned good cook?” he complains, kicking out a foot and landing it in Cas’ lap. Bobby’s couch is probably too small for him to be lying on it while Cas is trying to sit, but his stomach doesn’t care.

“I don’t understand why you had three helpings,” Cas says, and Dean cranes his neck in time to catch the repulsive awe on his face as he studies Dean’s foot.

“Because it’s rude if you don’t,” Dean points at him. “Rude, Cas. You’ve destroyed the sanctity of Thanksgiving.”

“I can’t decide if America is truly this strange, or if you are just full of…” Cas frowns and trails off.

“Shit?” Dean guesses and grins, lifting his leg to tap his socked foot to Cas’ cheek. “Probably a little of both, man.”

Cas makes a face and pushes his foot away, wrapping a strong hand around Dean’s ankle. Alright, tactical, touching stuff, probably not a good idea. Geez he’s got a good grip, and Dean’s suddenly pretty sure he knows why Cas’ stick handling is so good. “Are you sure I shouldn’t be helping with the dishes?”

“What?” he snaps back to attention and scoffs. “No way. You’re a guest.”

“Charlie is helping.”

“Nah, she’s just sucking up to Ellen. When you get a girlfriend you do dishes all you want, it’ll probably get her dad to like you a little more too.” Though Dean’s not really sure what girl’s dad wouldn’t like Cas. Sure, the guy was intimidating, but he radiated an ‘I will murder before the
person I care about gets hurt' attitude he thinks any old man would appreciate.

“Jo and Charlie…are dating?”

“Yeah,” Dean laughs and stops abruptly when Cas’ hand starts rubbing over his ankle. He’s pretty sure it’s not a conscious act. Clearing his throat, he adds, “You, uh, you didn’t know that?”

“I suppose I hadn’t thought about it,” Cas shrugs. “Women are not allowed to date each other in my country.”

Oh yeah. Dean remembers there being some sort of shit during the Olympics last year, of gay athletes who weren’t sure they wanted to be in Sochi. Being a hockey player it hadn’t really affected Dean, and he’s kind of forgotten about it once the games had started. “It’s not weird for you or anything, is it? Because if you’re gonna be a jackass…”

“I would not be a jackass to your sister, Dean,” Cas smiles slightly. “And I do not have any problem. It is a good thing to see.”

“Good?” Dean repeats, shifting his foot out of Cas’ lap. “Good in what way?”

The sound of the sink had disappeared several minutes ago, so it shouldn’t surprise Dean when Sam bounds into the room with a big, dopey grin on his face. “No way, Sammy,” he groans immediately. “I ate too much turkey. I fucking mean it this time.”

“Bull shit,” Sam says cheerfully. “You’re just complaining because you lost the last two years.”

“Jo plays fucking dirty!”

“Win a game of Rock, Paper, Scissors for once in your life and you can pick her for your team.” Sam shoots back before disappearing.

“You play fucking dirty at that,” Dean grumbles but reluctantly sits up, jerking his head towards the way Sam had retreated. “Let’s go, Cas.”

Cas raises an eyebrow at him. “Where are we going?”

“To play the fuckin’ annual Winchester-Harvelle hockey game.”

As a kid who’d grown up at Bobby’s and had spent his limited free time out on the backyard pond practicing his wrist shot, Dean’d never really thought of the place as anything special. He can tell though, as soon as he sees the look on Cas’ face, that it must be.

Bobby loved hockey arguably as much, if not more, than John, the only difference being that he’d realized when it was time to hang up his skates. He just hadn’t hung them up permanently. Every year when it’d gotten cold enough for the pound to freeze over, Bobby would be out on the ice, painting the blue lines and the face off dots. And when Dean was young and Sam was still young enough to be in peewee, he’d tromp outside while Dean was shooting at the make-shift net they’d made out of scrap pieces of plywood and fishing net, put on his skates, and insist that Dean join him in, “playing the damn game for fun, boy. Your daddy ain’t watching.”

Dean liked Bobby’s little pond-turned-hockey rink. It held some of the best memories he had.

“Cool, huh?” he asks Cas.

“Yes,” Cas quietly exhales and Dean can see his warm breath misted in the cold November air. “It
reminds me of home."

On the far side of the pond is a large oak tree Bobby’d thrown a scrappy looking bench under so Dean and Sam wouldn’t have to struggle to lace up their skates in the snow. Jo and Charlie are already there, so Dean leads Cas that way. Bobby and Ellen are on the other end of the ice, sticks in hand and bickering over something.

“This makes you happy,” Cas observes as he sits down.

“What?” Dean realizes he’s been smiling and quickly schools his face into a neutral expression. “I mean, yeah, I guess. This time of year is all about family, right?”

“Speaking of, thanks for inviting me, you guys,” Charlie butts in, nudging Dean. “Not that I wasn’t looking forward to another wild turkey day at Dave and Buster’s.”

Jo gasps. “You didn’t tell me we could have gone to Dave and Buster’s!”

Charlie laughs and kisses her on the cheek before standing in her skates, making it two feet out onto the pond before she promptly falls onto her ass. Dean bursts into laughter as a grinning Jo glides smoothly over and pulls Charlie to her feet. “C’mon, I’ll teach you how to skate,” she smiles, directing Charlie to grab onto the back of her belt before skating off.

Charlie twists around to make a peace sign at Dean and Cas, calling, “Later, nerds!” and the sight of her being dragged behind Jo on the ice causes Dean to burst into laughter all over again.

“Thank you for allowing me to observe your family,” Cas says quietly from next to him.

Dean’s laughter dies down abruptly as his knee jerk reaction to the statement is to tell Cas he’s not observing, he is family, except…is he? Sure, in the hockey sense, everybody on the team is an extension of Dean’s family. But Cas feels like more than that, and Dean is afraid of saying it out loud, of trying to put it into words.

“Charlie can’t skate?” Sam asks as Jess sits down next to Dean.

“Apparently not,” Dean glances up from doing up his laces and catches the look on Sam’s face. “No way, Sam. She can be on your team.”

“Maybe,” Sam smiles and plops down on the snow as Dean finishes with his skates and stands on the ice, twisting to look at Cas. Sam is kneeling in front of Jess, tying the laces of her skates and smiling as she whispers something to him, and Cas is staring.

“You gonna get on the ice anytime soon, Cas?”

Cas’ eyes flick briefly to Dean before directing back to Sam and Jess, and then to Dean again, longer this time.

“Dude,” he says, chuckling a little, “I’m not tying up your skates.”

“It’s hard to do with my cast,” Cas says in a disgruntled voice.

“Here, I got it,” Sam says, making to move towards Cas.

“No, it’s fine,” Dean says quickly, kneeling in the snow. “Help your girl, Sammy.”

Sam gives him a weird look but helps Jess to her feet. “Ready for that hockey lesson?”
Jess laughs. “I’ve been practicing so much, I think I could convince Bobby to hire me as your replacement.”

Dean keeps his eyes fixed firmly on the laces of Cas’ skates as they skate away, concentrating on tying them and not on the fact that he’s kneeling in the snow in front of Cas, doing up his laces like he’s the goddamned boyfriend.

“Why didn’t you bring a girl?”

“I brought you,” Dean says without thinking, mentally cursing himself and quickly adding, “You’re kind of like a girl.”

Cas pulls his foot away and stands up, bending over to speak lowly to a still kneeling Dean. “I’m not the girl,” he says quietly.

Dean doesn’t get up until Bobby yells his name and the snow is beginning to soak through the knees of his jeans, because he can’t believe he just got a little heated over Cas implying what he just had.

‘Course, guy probably didn’t realize he’d done anything at all. All he’d done was deny being a girl.

Pull it to-fucking-gether, Dean.

Thankfully hockey’s got a way of doing that for him, even if it is with your family, out on a pond with Bobby’s crappy wooden sticks. Dean ends up getting Bobby, Jo, and Charlie on his team, and they immediately direct Charlie to go stand in net so she doesn’t have to skate.

Sam and Cas are obviously the best on Sam’s team, though Ellen definitely shouldn’t be counted out, and Dean doesn’t want to ignore Jess’ recent lessons either, even if she does look like she’s going to be playing the other team’s goalie.

“Jo, you cover Cas,” Dean directs right away. “Bobby can get Ellen, and I’ll trip Sam over as much as possible.”

“No way!” Jo snorts. “This isn’t the Cavs, Dean, you’re not Captain. You know how Cas plays better than me, why don’t you cover him? Sam’s easy to trip up, all you have to make him do is blush.”

“She’s got a point,” Bobby grunts decisively, and that’s the end of that, because Dean may not always be Captain, but Bobby’s always coach.

Jo’s got a point, even if Dean doesn’t want to admit it. He should be covering Cas, he just really… doesn’t want to. Because even if this is a pickup game of pond hockey there’s inevitably going to be touching, and if Dean wants to get over this crush his body has decided to go with, he really should try not to indulge whatever fantasies are lurking in the back of his brain.

Then again, buddies play pickup hockey together all the time, so maybe this will just help him.

Charlie turns out to be surprisingly not bad in net, mostly because her sight of where the puck is going is so bad everytime she tries to flinch away from it she actually moves into it. Dean can’t hear exactly what Jo is chirping Sam with, but it must be dirty and crass, because Sam’s face is almost always red and he keeps sputtering Jo’s name. Bobby and Ellen are being typical, pretending they don’t like one another by attempting the worst disguise at flirting Dean has ever seen.

Of course Cas is taking the whole thing seriously, even in his ill fitting borrowed skates and crappy wooden stick. Which Dean finds hilarious enough that when Cas makes a shot that causes the stick
to slide out of his hands, Dean skates by him and says, “Hey, Cas, the stick too long for you?”

Cas straightens up from picking it up and gives him a disgruntled look, “At least I’ve got good hands.”

“Yeah, but can you put it in the five hole?” Dean grins and flips the puck back onto the end of the stick before batting it over to center ice.

“You asking him to prom?” Bobby yells. “Quit fooling around and take the face off, boy!”

Cas follows him over to Bobby in order to stand across from Dean, and Dean raises an eyebrow, tapping Cas’ stick with his own. “You sure you can take a face off, Cas? Because we can call Jess over if you’re not sure and she can try it out.”

Cas cocks his head at him. “All I have to do is win one, and my face off percentage will be better than yours.”

“Well, yeah!” Dean says, straightening up indignantly, “Because I take them every game and you don’t take—“

He’s cut off as Bobby drops the puck and Cas swipes it quickly behind him to Sam without looking away from Dean. “One hundred percent,” he says calmly.

It gets serious after that.

Nobody’s really keeping track of score, too focused on getting the puck in the net and starting again for anyone to call them out. Finally as it’s getting dark, Bobby calls, “Next shot wins!”

Somehow, Bobby lets Ellen pass it to Sam, and Dean finds himself right in front of Charlie and the net, pushing at Cas with his stick as he tries to move him out of the way so Charlie can see. “C’mon Cas, get outta the crease,” he grunts, whacking him with the stick at the same time as he pushes at him with his hip. “You know I’m just gonna take the puck and score.”

Cas snorts and pushes back, muttering, “Please, Dean. If you want me to show you how easy you are to undress, at least wait until we get back to the house.”

Dean’s caught just enough unawares that he stops pushing for a split second, but that split second is just long enough for Cas to make his final shove, and with no resistance they both go sprawling onto the ice, Cas landing on top of Dean and causing all the air to rush out of his lungs in a loud “oof!”

“Sorry,” Cas says, trying quickly to scramble off of him, but the unevenness of the ice and Cas’ crappy skates aren’t doing him favors, and really all he’s doing is rubbing himself up and down Dean’s crotch.

Dean hopes to fucking god Cas is too preoccupied to notice the steadily increasing situation going on down there.

Cas does it one more time, somehow with more friction, and Dean’s hands shoot up to clamp around his upper arms. “Woah, stop,” he says in a strangled voice, and Cas does immediately, looking curiously down at him. “Just…hang on a minute.”

“Alright,” Cas agrees. Dean stares up at the sky, breathing deeply and trying to will his erection back down whatever hole it crawled out of. He can feel Cas’ eyes on him, studying him, and Dean’s steadfastly ignoring him, but Cas’ hands must get cold or something, propping him up on the ice, because suddenly the entire weight of him has drops onto Dean’s chest and Dean is yelping and
pushing him away before anything else can happen.

Sam’s huge grin is the first thing he sees when he sits up. “We won.”

“Yeah, thanks for the concern, asshole,” Dean grumbles, climbing to his feet. “I’m fine, so’s Cas. Was it worth it?”

“Yup,” Sam’s still grinning. “Because you get to pay loser’s price.”

“Oh come on!” Dean cries, looking to Bobby. “That was a bullshit goal, Cas interfered inside the crease! Call it a wash.”

Bobby shakes his head. “You know the rules, Dean.”

Dean rolls his eyes, rubs a hand over his face, and mumbles, hoping that will be enough.

Sam cups his hand around his ear in an exaggerated gesture and leans forward. “What was that?”

“Sam Winchester is the next Wayne Gretzky and the Stanley Cup should be named after him,” Dean says loudly, scowling.

“Damn right.”

“And he’s got Soccer Mom hair.”

“Bobby!”

Bobby scowls at the both of them and chooses to completely ignore then in favor of skating off with Ellen, leaving Jess to pat Sam on the arm. “I like your hair, Sam,” she says soothingly.

“Yeah,” Jo adds, smirking. “You’ll be the most popular dad at the PTO.”

“You guys suck.” Sam is in full pout mode now, arms crossed and lower lip protruding as his stick swings awkwardly against his leg.

“As Gabriel would say,” Cas says seriously, “At least none of us blow.”

Somehow Dean manages to make it through the rest of Thanksgiving and the drive without accidentally climbing onto Cas’ lap or something equally stupid. He’s not sure how though, and he hopes to god things even out a little with the rest of the team surrounding them, because he can only take so much one-sided sexual tension.

“Ottawa, able to get it out…Lafitte back in. Lafitte centers it, HERE’S KRUSHNIC FOR WINCHESTER. He shoots…and THEY SCORRRRRE. Dean Winchester, off the shot from his brother Sam! Four points tonight for the Winchester brothers, and their team is back in front!”

“Now watch this play right here at the net. For all you young hockey players out there, pay attention, because—,”
“DRINK,” Gabriel bellows from his family room, and Dean swears he can actually hear glasses being brought to mouths. Usually Bobby would make them watch game recaps early in the morning before practice, but Dean had managed to convince him that the guys needed a break. It was the season of giving after all.

He has no idea how they continue to get away with these apartment game watching sessions when they usually show up to practice the next day hungover, but Bobby does seem to enjoy blowing the whistle a little more on those days, so maybe it’s a win-win.

The breakfast bar in his kitchen is strewn with bottles of alcohol, some a lot emptier than others, and he’s busy trying to figure out if he wants to fill his glass with rum again or just go straight for the whiskey when there’s a knock on the door.

“Somebody get that!” he yells into the family room.

“When you bring me a bloody martini!” Balthazar yells back. Someone turns up the TV and Gabriel yells “DRINK,” again as the game goes to TV timeout, so Dean swears and heads for the door, sticky glass still in hand.

He swings the door open and glares at Cas, who apparently didn’t even bother to put on shoes to come up here. “You can come in without knocking, Cas.”

Cas ignores him and eyes the glass in his hand curiously. “What are you doing?”

“C’mon man, you know we’re watching last week’s games. You’re late, I think we’re halfway through the second period of Monday night’s already.”

“No,” Cas frowns and shakes his head as he follows Dean inside. “I mean why are you—“

“Dean-o!” Gabriel comes running down the hallway, neon pink colored alcohol sloshing over the lip of his glass and onto the stained wood floor. “You got one for the young’ns and then one for unnecessary Ice Girl cleavage. Drink up.” He shoves the glass into Dean’s hands and Dean takes it without hesitation, gulping down two mouthfuls of the sweet tasting liquid.

“Jesus Gabe, what are you drinking? Does Barbie fill her gas tank with that shit?”

“I’ll ask next time she’s over,” Gabriel grins, jabbing a thumb at Cas. “Where’s his?”

“Relax, I’m gettin’ him a drink,” Dean says, nudging at Cas’ arm. “Go into the TV room. Gabriel will explain the rules while I get you something.”

“Rules?” Cas asks blankly.

“Rules,” Dean quirks a smirk at him. “Gabriel?”

“Aye, aye, Captain!” Gabriel tries to salute with the hand his glass is in, sloshing more of the bright pink liquid all over the floor before he drags Cas away.

Dean just pours Cas a straight vodka, because the name of the game is to get drunk, and this is the only thing he knows that will even get Cas started. A loud cheer goes up as he enters the family room, and he barely has time to shove his own glass to his mouth before Gabriel yells, “DRINK.”

When he lowers his glass again, he catches sight of Cas regarding him with a bemused expression, Chekov’s tail thumping happily against the arm of the chair Cas is sitting in as he pets him.
“Here,” Dean says, stepping over Chuck’s feet and handing Cas his glass. “What were we drinkin’ for?”

“Chuck and his damn hooking penalty,” Benny grumbles, kicking his leg out at chuck, who’s leaning against the couch near his feet.

“It’s not my fault!” Chuck whines. “I have weak wrists! The stick just turns that way!”

“Is that the excuse you give your girlfriend as well, then?” Balthazar asks, causing Chuck to turn bright red.

“Guys, chill,” Sam says with a straight face, bringing his glass to his mouth and holding it before snickering into it, “It’s not Chuck’s fault he has a crooked stick.”

“Hey,” Dean settles on the floor at the foot of the chair Cas is in and lobs a stray potato chip of the carpet in Gabriel’s direction. He’s not even that impressed when he catches it without looking and eats it. “You tell Cas the rules?”

“Don’t worry princess, he knows the rules. You’ll get your kiss at every TV time out.”

Dean really hopes his asshole teammates are too busy laughing to notice how embarrassed he is by that, mostly because a dirty part of him wishes it were true. “Eat a dick, Gabriel.”

“Go grab me a bottle of ketchup and it’ll go right down, Dean-o.”

“Excuse me,” Cas interjects. “What are these rules everybody keeps mentioning?”

“It’s a drinking game,” Kevin tells him. “We noticed from watching so many of our games that a lot of stuff is repeated, like quirks or things the announcers say, so to make it more fun we drink every time one of the things on our list happens.”

Cas furrows his eyebrows. “Like what?”

“Like when Gabriel flips his mask at someone after he makes a save,” Harry supplies.

“Or when the announcer says ‘Winchester brothers’. ”

“Or when Sam’s on the bench with his helmet off because he’s fixing his fucking hair,” Dean says, twisting to grin at Cas.

Cas nods slowly. “How will I know –,”

“DRINK,” Gabriel yells, and Dean quickly does. Cas is still just watching them all, so Dean reaches up, tapping the bottom of the glass in his hand until he lifts it to his mouth and drinks.

“Perhaps if you sat in his lap it would help him relax and swallow it down easier,” Balthazar says smoothly. Dean flips him off and turns back around to face the screen, determined now not to pay any more attention to Cas while the entire team is camped out in his TV room.

He really should know by now that the more you drink, the harder it is to keep lying to yourself.

Two hours later and nobody’s noticed that an hour ago Dean’s ass had started to hurt and he’d squeezed into the chair next to Cas. It doesn’t matter because even though they all played this game live last week, even though they all know what happens, what’s going on right now is a fucking bad call. They’re drunk, and it’s hockey, and they love hockey.
“It’s a fucking goal!” Ed is yelling indignantly.

“Over the line, over the fucking line,” Benny growls.

Meanwhile, Gabriel is having the time of his life, laughing his ass off. “How the fuck did you assholes miss such an obvious goal?” he snickers. “Who forgot to feed Kev his extra biscuit?”

“The puck was rolling,” Kevin says adamantly, it was over the line!”

Dean’s watching the screen too intently to chime in, remembering how angry he’d been during the three minute wait while the refs had tried to determine whether the puck Kevin had shoveled over the goal line and had quickly been kicked back out by Dallas’ goalie was actually a goal.

“Ah, there goes our fearless leader,” Balthazar says loudly, pointing to the TV. On it, Dean is skating over to the ref with an annoyed look on his face, gesturing with his gloves.

“What are you saying to him?” Cas asks quietly from next to him.

Dean squints at the TV, because he’s yelled at so many refs he doesn’t actually remember, “Uhhhh…” he starts, and then decides fuck it. He has yelled at a lot of fucking refs, hasn’t he? He can just adlib. “I’m telling him to give Kevin the damn goal, because Mrs. Tran is at the game and he’d have a better chance of fighting Dallas’ whole team and winning then he would her.” Come to think of it, that’s probably pretty close to what he said. “You know, just looking out for Kev’s stats.”

He’s still watching the screen intently when Cas does the most amazing thing. He chuckles. “I see,” he says, still chuckling. “Because Kevin’s stats are not very good.”

Dean turns to stare at him and is immediately distracted by how close Cas’ face is. The alcohol had been distracting him from the press of their thighs, how Cas was practically in his lap whenever he shifted, but now. His fucking eyes are right there, something Dean hasn’t had a chance to study a while, and he still doesn’t get a chance to, because then Cas’ tongue flicks out to wet his lips and his eyes flick down to follow the movement. Just one kiss, that’s all he needs—

“Why do you always look at me like that?” Cas huffs, his voice rough.

“What?” Dean swallows, “I don’t – it’s to get back at you for all the staring, asshole. I can’t help it if you think I’m gorgeous.”

Cas opens his mouth only to be interrupted by Kevin, who says, loudly and pointedly from his spot on the floor, “My offensive stats aren’t good because I’m a defenseman.”

Dean jerks away from Cas as much as he can, turning to scowl at Kevin. “Try explaining that to Sam’s stats.”

“To be fair,” Sam muses, “Kevin’s always up against the harder lines.”

“After reviewing the play, the goal is inconclusive,” the suddenly loud voice of the ref on the TV says. “No goal.”

“What a shit call,” Balthazar laughs as Benny throws a handful of chips at the TV. Chekov hops off of Cas’ lap and scrambles over to eat them.

“And Winchester senior, not looking happy…”

“DRINK,” Gabriel yells.
Three hours later and they’re almost finished with the last game, listening to Chuck’s drunken rambling explanation of how the Florida offense can’t get over the blue line because of his and Sam’s defense. Dean’s finding it hard to focus, his head buzzing with the amount of alcohol he’d drank.

The colors on the TV are dizzying, the rich red of their uniforms set against the stark white contrast of the ice. He struggles to keep up with the small black whizzing dot that is the puck while trying to listen to Chuck at the same time, but it’s hard, and he’s soon very easily distracted. The game they’re watching is Cas’ first game back since he got the cast off, and Dean will never grow tired of seeing the incredible things Cas can do with his stick. It seems even more impressive on TV.

“Hey!” he says, hitting Cas, “Didja see that, Cas? That was awesome, man. So fucking awesome. How’d you do that? It was like,” he mimes holding a stick and moving it quickly back and forth, “And then goooooooal!”

“You sound like a bloody football announcer.”

“Soccer,” Harry hiccups.

There’s a buzzing noise Dean is certain is still just his head, until Cas gets up and heads over to the intercom by the door. Dean’s side feels cold as soon as he leaves. “Yes?”

“Your cabs are here, Mr. Winchester,” the doorman says smoothly.

“Who the hell called cabs?” Benny asks, disgruntled.

“Me,” Sam haves himself off the couch. “We got practice tomorrow, we gotta go.”

There’s a lot of grumbling and swearing as everyone picks themselves up from wherever they were sitting, leaving empty glasses of alcohol in their place. Dean gets up as well, because Cas hasn’t come back and he’s pretty sure he’s not going to, now that everyone is leaving.

“Almost forgot,” Benny mutters, rummaging through his pocket and pulling out a pack of cards neatly wrapped in tin foil. “Twenty fourteen rookie cards are out.”

“Maybe you’ll be in these,” Dean grins, accepting them. Benny’d been called up late in his first season, after the cards for his year were already out – he’d never truly been a rookie, and Dean took every chance to tease him about all the perks he missed, like rookie of the year, and especially rookie trading cards.

His apartment is eerily quiet after being so full all day, and even the dog looks exhausted, flopped out on the couch and not moving. Dean surveys the mess that is his TV room and kitchen, filled to the brim with alcohol and food, and decides he’s too drunk to launch any sort of effective clean up.

“You coming?” Dean asks Chekov, but the dog just stares at him, so he shrugs and heads off into his bedroom.

They’d watched three games tonight, and hopefully that would satisfy Bobby for the time being. They were part of the Winter Classic this year, a game that took place outdoors on New Years’ Day, and Dean knew Bobby really wanted to win. Especially since they were playing LA.

Hell, Dean wanted to win too. Maybe that’ll be his Christmas wish this year.

*Your Christmas wish should be to have Cas suck you dry* his brain helpfully supplies.
Shut up, Dean tells it. I don’t want that.

Yeah you do. You want it more than you want pie. And burgers. And that Game of Thrones throne made out of hockey sticks.

Except, Dean reasons, I’m not gay.

You want it anyway.

Dean scowls deeply and drops onto the bed, ripping open the packet of trading cards in his hand. Anything to get his brain to calm the fuck down so he can sleep. Boring stats of guys in the league he hasn’t even heard of yet should do that.

He flips through them with ease, having spent a lot of his childhood trying to get through a new pack Bobby bought before Sam so he could pick out the good ones (even though he usually just ended up giving them to Sam anyway). Zeke Brown, eight goals and ten assists, Isaac Yerzov, six goals and twelve assists, Bartholomew Latt, four….

He pauses and stares down at the next card. Decked out in red and black, caught mid-fist pump with his knee raised as he celebrates a goal, is Cas. Castiel Krushnic, eleven goals and thirteen assists. Those are fucking good stats. It’s not like Dean is paying attention to how each guy on the team is doing individually, just on how they’re working together, and their record so far proves they’re working together well. But…damn. Cas scores a lot. More-than-he-does a lot.

Why the fuck is this so appealing? Is this what those girls are after when they’re following them around in bars, when they insist all they want is one night, just one night and you damn well won’t regret it? Dean never has regretted it, but he’s never really considered that maybe those girls are coming after him because he’s talented, not just because he’s attractive, but because it’s a fucking rush that he’s so dominant…based on his fucking stats, essentially.

What the hell would it feel like to be on the receiving end of that?

Dean’s eyes are starting to glaze over from staring too long at the card without blinking, and his train of thought coupled with his inebriated and loose body has already led him down the road to an interested half mast.

Aw, Fuck it.

He hasn’t cleared the pipes in a long time, a combination of unusual disinterest and a little fear over where his thoughts might lead him, but now…fuck it. And fuck it again. It needs to happen.

Not gay, he reasons again as he pulls down his pants andsettles back on the bed. It’s not real.

He can easily imagine a scenario in which he goes after Cas, a nobody in the face of a somebody, a somebody who clearly loves what he does with every fiber of his being, and dominates at doing it. Jesus. His eyes closed, he runs a slow hand over his cock and shivers slightly.

It wouldn’t be hard to get Cas back to his place. Dean’s never actually seen Cas hit on anybody, or even show interest in anybody, but he knows the guy well enough by now that he’s pretty confident he could do it with ease. Not like he picks up girls either. Girls, Dean works up to, with a conversation and innuendo and charm.

With Cas, it’d be easy. A brush of the arm, an easy smile, a “hey, want to get out of here?” spoken lowly enough so only Cas would hear.
And Cas’ eyes would darken from that bright clear blue to an inky, cloudy dark, like a sky just before it gets black enough to storm; meeting Dean’s eyes in a dead stare he’d growl, “Yes.”

Fuck. Dean squeezes his already shut eyes even tighter as he circles the end of his cock with his thumb, flicking the slit before running back down the shaft. He’s completely erect now, in that full achey way that feels so fucking good.

He wouldn’t even have to do anything else. Just let Cas into the apartment, and Cas would ignore the dog for once, in favor of Dean. To slam him against the wall as he wrestled him out of his shirt, to aggressively lick into his mouth and bite and kiss until Dean’s lips were swollen and he couldn’t breathe. Then for Cas to use those god damned steady hands of his to get his jeans open in one smooth motion, never breaking contact with Dean, lips pressed to his and arm gripping his bicep so hard it’ll bruise. Tripping him backwards down the hallway until Dean’s calves hit his bed and he goes down, Cas crawling after him with his shirt hanging open where Dean had barely managed to begin unbuttoning it.

Dean groans and cups his balls, heavy in his hand and begins fondling them, imagining Cas looming over him with the predatory look he gets when he’s heading straight down the ice with the puck and is determined to score, no matter what. He’s so ready at this point he doesn’t care what Cas does to him, just needs him to do something, and imaginary Cas doesn’t disappoint, glancing over him spread out and waiting, licking his lips one last time before lowering himself to Dean’s crotch and blowing out slowly.

Dean’s dick twitches as his hand runs its way back up to the shaft and takes hold, spreading the precum leaking from the tip until his hand is slick and wet and warm and Cas is hollowing his cheeks and swallowing him whole. And Dean is fucking into Cas’ mouth and he knows he’s babbling, knows he’s repeating Cas’ name, but all he can feel is tight heat and Cas’ hair in his hand and good, so good, so, so fucking good…

He comes yelling Cas’ name one last time, thick spurts of cum getting all over his comforter as the dog barks from the TV room."Fuck,” he swears loudly, knocking his head back and hitting the wall with a loud thump. “Fuck.”

Fuck. What the hell was he doing? Jacking off to a guy. A fucking teammate. A fucking teammate who lived a few floors below him will he imagined his chapped pink lips wrapped around his cock.

The Cas in his head, his Cas (not any different from the one you know, his traitor brain whispers) chuckles, god damn fucking chuckles, and Dean cannot believe that his fucking dick twitches again.

“We’re done,” he tells it firmly, awkwardly rolling off the bed in an attempt to keep the mess as contained as possible. He hobbles to the bathroom and wipes himself down with a wet washcloth, pulling off his shirt. He’s too lazy to get into PJs now, and the alcohol is wearing off just enough that he’s beginning to hurt, physically and mentally.

He pulls the soiled comforter off the bed and leaves it crumpled on the floor, falling on top of his sheets.

At least, he thinks before he drifts off, he got that out of his damn system. No more thinking about Cas.

And when Dean drags his ass out of bed at five in the morning, he’s still not thinking about Cas. He’s not thinking about Cas as he furiously scrubs the reminders of his little fantasy off in the shower, and he doesn’t think about him when he dumps his comforter into the washer.
So perfect, Winchester. It worked. Whoop dee doo for you.

He used to be better at lying to himself.

He’s leaning against the counter sipping moodily at his coffee and watching Chekov eat breakfast when there’s a knock on his door. Knock on his door in the early morning can only mean Cas, and no way does Dean’s heart jump at the thought.

“What, you need a ride to practice?” Dean asks as he opens the door, and he’s hit with the sudden realization that he and Cas have been going to the same place every day in two different cars. Jesus is he an asshole.

“Hey, uh,” he says awkwardly, and Cas, whose mouth was open and ready to respond, squints his eyes at Dean instead. Dean feels like an idiot. “I can drive you to practice. Every morning. If you want.”

Yeah, just gather more images for your sick fantasies, Winchester. Cas in the Impala before practice. Nice.

What the hell is wrong with him?

“I would like that,” Cas replies, smiling a little. “But I came to tell you practice is canceled. Coach Singer said you would not answer your phone.”

“Oh.” Dean looks around like that’s gonna make his phone appear, then realizes the vibrating he’s felt in his pants for the last half hour were not, in fact, remnants of his fucking perverted imagination. He pulls it out and stares hard at the texts, trying to take his mind off what he did last night, because it’s wrong, and weird, and Cas is standing right here.

There are a couple of missed calls from Bobby, and a text from Sam that makes Dean groan.

“Are you alright?”

Dean looks up to see that Cas finally seems to be comfortable with just coming into his apartment, since he’s now about two inches from Dean. This really isn’t helping him. “Uh, yeah,” he replies. “Just Sammy wanting to go Christmas shopping.” The next words are out of his mouth before he even has a chance to reel them in. “Wanna come?”

Cas bites his lip, something Dean’s never seen him do before and a gesture that does nothing to help his flashbacks. “I would like to,” he says, actually sounding regretful. “But I must do something else today.”

“Hey, that’s cool. Maybe some other time.”

“Yes,” Cas agrees immediately. “It would be nice to see how you celebrate Christmas.”

Dean blinks at him. He forgot that this was Cas’ first Christmas in Chicago. Hell, his first Christmas in America. His phone buzzes again in his hand and he shoves it back into his pocket, reaching around Cas to shut the door. “C’mon man,” he says roughly.

“Where?” Cas asks curiously, but he’s already following him into the kitchen anyway, and he sits as soon as Dean pulls a stool at the breakfast bar out for him.

Dean leans on the counter and studies Cas. Breakfast is his favorite thing to make, and he’s usually pretty good at guessing what someone will like. He’d really like to make Cas some apple fritter
French toast, but he usually only makes it on special occasions.

“Why are you staring at me?”

Dean grins, kind of thrilled that he’s finally managed to out stare Cas. “Pancakes.”

“I don’t need pancakes,” Cas’ brow furrows in confusion.

Dean ignores him and pulls out his skillet. “So you tell me about your Christmas, Cas,” he says conversationally. “And then I can tell you what goes on here.”

Cas hesitates and Dean sees his eyes flick to the coffee pot. He grabs a mug and fills it before sliding it to Cas and going back to gathering ingredients. Dude’ll start talking if he wants to.

“We would spend many hours at church services,” Cas ventures. “And we would have a very large meal.”

“With your family?”

“When I was very young,” Cas says, taking a large drink of coffee. “I do not remember. The school would take us to mass, if we didn’t have practice that night.”

Dean purses his lips and doesn’t turn from mixing his batter. The more he hears about Cas’ life in Russia, the more he hates it. Cas never expresses any open dislike for it, but Dean can tell. Maybe he wasn’t miserable, but he didn’t have a family and his entire life was work.

Dean wonders if Cas ever had a girlfriend, or got to do anything fun, ever.

It sounded shitty.

“You can go to church here if you want,” he says, forcing his voice to sound as normal as possible. “I can help you find a place. But Sammy and me never really went as kids. We kinda dropped it.”

“What do you do?”

“Oh man,” Dean flashes Cas a grin over his shoulder and catches his eyes over the rim of his coffee cup. “There’s lots of shit to do here in Chicago, Cas. You got the German market and the Macy’s windows, and if we feel like it we can go and make assholes out of ourselves on the ice rink at Millennium. And present shopping. Then on Christmas Eve Sammy comes over here and opens a present, and on Christmas Day Bobby, Ellen and Jo show up.”

Cas looks confused. “You don’t do Christmas at Bobby’s?”

“Nah,” Dean snorts and tosses some bacon on the stove. “Bobby’s always bitching about people tracking pine needles all over his house. ‘Course he’s got no problem doing it in my apartment when he moves all the god damned ornaments on the tree because they’re in the wrong place. Oh,” he brightens, “Shit, and we gotta pick out a tree and decorate it.”

“These are the things you do with Sam,” Cas states, tracing his finger around the rim of the mug. He looks like he understands something, and Dean’s not sure what he thinks he’s figured out as he drains the bacon and begins crumbling it into his batter. He tosses another piece to Chekov, who’s been hanging around by his feet since he began banging pans around.

“Well, yeah, and now with you.”

“I am invited?”
“What kind of stupid question is that?” Dean asks stiffly, refusing to turn from his pancakes again. It’s not even a big deal. Christmas happens every year, who cares if Cas spends it with them? Stop making it a big deal, Winchester.

“I guess it is,” Cas pauses before saying slowly. “Redundant.”

Dean rounds on him and points the spatula in his direction. “Stop letting Sam teach you English,” he says. “It’s gonna ruin you.”

Cas is forming a small shit eating grin before Dean can even think to take it back. “I can assure you, Dean,” he says, and Dean swears his voice is getting deeper as his accent grows more prominent, “As long as I am distracted I cannot do so well.”

“What, and you think I distract you?”

“All the time,” Cas says solemnly.

Dean turns back to the stove and flips his pancakes before his brain starts agreeing with his dick and decides it doesn’t care anymore.

Five minutes later there’s a stack of pancakes on the table, and Dean is still just as intent on avoiding the new problem he’s apparently developed over night.

Dean watches intently as Cas tries his first bite of pancake, which Dean had had to forcibly pour maple syrup over because the idiot was about to go in dry.

Huh. Going in dry. Wouldn’t that--?

Jesus. Shut up, Winchester.

Dean shakes himself back to reality just as Cas emits the most obscene groan he’s ever heard in his life, and he instantly regrets not continuing to contemplate a going in dry scenario. This is way, way worse.

“You put bacon in here,” Cas says with awe, like nobody’s ever fucking suggested to him that stuffing good food inside of other good food makes amazing food. They probably never had. Because no one ever took care of Cas and fed him and now Dean has to fucking take care of him.

He needed to get a grip.

“Gee, Cas,” he smirks, leaning closer. “Noise like that, you’d think I went and buttered your biscuits for you.”

Cas casually takes another bite and side eyes him. “I am very good at spreading butter.”

Dean leans back and shoves a bite of pancake into his mouth to prevent a response.

Chekov perks up from where he’s been laying on the floor and takes off just as Dean hears the front door open. “Dean?” Sam yells from the hallway. “Why aren’t you answering my texts?”

He’s making way too much noise to be alone, and Dean’s suspicions are confirmed when he hears Gabriel say, “C’mon guys, I thought we’d rehearsed this so we didn’t sound like needy girlfriends.”

“You rehearsed it by singing Prince the entire damn taxi ride over,” Benny grumbles.

“I guess we won’t be buttering anything,” Cas murmurs.
Dean’s mouth is already full, but he manages to stuff more pancake in there anyway.

“Shit, pancakes!” Gabriel appears in the doorway and makes a beeline for the plate, grabbing one with his bare hands and biting into it. “You’re a saint, Deano.”

“They weren’t for you.”

“Sorry.” Sam says sheepishly, glancing at Cas. “I didn’t know we were interrupting. I thought you were still asleep.”

“Dunno if I’d have put my money on a six AM breakfast date,” Benny says casually, leaning against the wall.

The tips of Dean’s ears heat up and he scowls at Benny. “I’m classy as fuck.”

“Dean was telling me about Christmas,” Cas speaks up. His plate is empty. “I was not aware that I was invited, Sam, thank you.”

“Oh,” other than the slight eyebrow raise, Sam doesn’t react. “Of course, Cas. You coming shopping with us too?”

“Unfortunately I have other things to do today,” Cas shrugs, standing up. “But Dean has promised to do many other things with me. Thank you for the breakfast, Dean.”

“Uh, yeah, no problem,” Dean says awkwardly. Cas shoots him a small smile and brushes past Benny.

“Promised to do many other things, huh?” Benny asks. “Bobby shoulda appointed you the team Girl Scout when he gave you that Captaincy.”

“Hey, Deano’s always ready to roll out the welcome wagon for the ladies,” Gabriel sniggers. “And now Castiel.”

“Yeah, keep being assholes,” Dean grumbles, standing up and dumping his and Cas’ plate in the sink. “Cas is my friend. You two act like I never did shit with you when you were new to the team.”

“You’re not wrong there, brother,” Benny nods sagely. “But I get the feeling I don’t get the same VIP experience as Cas anymore.”

Dean has no idea what the fuck that means, because he definitely remembers working extra hard to make Benny feel welcome on the team. He’s about to ask when Sam coughs loudly and they all turn to look at him. “Sorry,” he says. “Should we get going?”

‘Course, no where around here is open at fucking six in the morning, so Benny calls Sam early to the finish line and Sam goes off to sulk with the dog, leaving Dean in the company of Gabriel and Benny long enough that somehow Gabriel manages to invite Balthazar over, and then Dean has to watch them all eat Cas’ pancakes.

He eats a couple more too, because they’re fucking delicious even when cold. And he’s not pouting or anything. Nah, he’s hungry, see?

“Woah,” Gabriel says when Dean rips into another pancake. “Did that thing tell you the hot girl you just kissed is actually your sister?”

“Dibs,” Balthazar speaks up. Dean ignores both of them and rips another pancake apart.
Sam reappears around eight, apparently having decided to forgive Benny or whatever the fuck those two do in order to tolerate one another. Benny shoots him a lazy smile that Sam luckily doesn’t see, or Dean’s sure a day of bitch facing would have been imminent. “We gotta go now to get to the store before it opens.”

Dean’s so eager to get out of here he’s already standing up, even as Gabriel says, “Why we gotta go anywhere early?”

“I, uh,” Sam goes slightly red, “I want to get Jess my jersey, and the store said we should show up before opening to avoid getting mobbed.”

That gets Sam teased all the way down to the car, and Dean tries to distract himself with it instead of frowning at the little light that indicates they’re going past Cas’ floor on the elevator.

The Cavs store is on Michigan where all the other tourist stuff is, and Dean watches as Gabriel and Balthazar run upstairs to do rude things to the team pictures hanging on the back wall while both Benny and Sam wander off to get something for their significant others. Since Dean doesn’t have one of those, not even an insignificant other, he ends up near the team jerseys, staring at one with ‘Krushnic’ splashed across the back above a giant number 18.

“We always end up here, don’t we?” he mutters, staring at the damn thing. Because this is it, isn’t it? After years and years of girl after countless girl, of passing off noticing a good looking guy as a mistake or tiredness because ‘hockey players are tough men’ and ‘men go after female tail, Dean,’ this was it. He’d reached the end of the line.

Maybe not the absolute end. Yeah, his dick sure seemed to like everything Cas had to offer, and Dean himself did too, in the sense that Cas is his buddy. But he’s not in love with the guy, and that would never happen anyway, because even if Dean has to maybe start facing the fact that he’s a little gay, he’s not full on gay. He doesn’t want a relationship. Just a little naked touching or whatever.

Like those women who are always going on about how they experimented in college. If they’re allowed, why shouldn’t he be? Doing it once will probably get whatever the fuck this is out of his system, right? And then he can comfort himself with the fact that no, he’s not even a little gay, just naturally curious about shit.

“Were you looking for a particular size, Mr. Winchester?”

Dean starts and glances at the employee standing next to him. “Nah, I got it,” he says, reaching out and grabbing the first jersey on the rack just so it looks like he wasn’t standing there jerking off to the damn things in his mind.

“Do you need help finding anything else?”

“Just…” Dean fishes for something to say, for some reason his lips not wanting to form the word no. “Just my jersey. Then I’m good.”

The guy rummages in a rack close to him and hands Dean a jersey with his name and number on the back. He lifts his hand in an awkward half kind of acknowledgement before heading off to find Sam. He has no idea what he’s going to do with either one of these, but whatever. He can probably pass them off to Jo and Charlie if worse comes to worse.

They walk over to the Water Tower, and as usual split up as soon as they’re inside the mall. Dean doesn’t get how people Christmas shop together. If you like them enough to endure this kind of hell with them, chances are they’re getting a present from you and can’t be around anyway, right?
His family is easy, they’ve always been easy. Sam gets the newest of those damn Supernatural books to open on Christmas Eve, and Dean finds a place that does custom watch engravings so Sam can’t have an excuse anymore for why he’s not on time for shit.

Dean buys Bobby his usual bottle of Johnnie Walker and a new Cavs hat he doubts his uncle will wear, since he’s been wearing the same ratty ‘#1 Coach’ hat Sam and Dean got him when they were kids for over a decade now. For Ellen he grabs one of those beer taps you can put in your fridge at home, since she’s always bitching about not getting a decent brew outside of the Roadhouse. He finds Jo that new ridiculously expensive stick she’s been wanting, and for good measure since he’s pretty sure Charlie is going to be joining them, he grabs the new Fallout video game he’s been wanting to try.

Maybe he can get Charlie to play it with him.

Gabriel’s probably the easiest out of all of them – Dean just finds a candy store and asks them for the sweetest or most outrageous candy they have. Balthazar gets good fucking movies, like The Big Lebowski and Office Space, because the guy thinks shit like Inception is the height of cinema. Benny gets a new golf club and a day out golfing with Dean like he always does. They both pretend to hate it and then do their best to kick each other’s asses anyway. It’s a good time.

Dean has no idea what to get for Cas, or even if he should get anything for Cas. Probably, since he’s coming over now. What the hell are you supposed to get your best friend turned unwanted sex fantasy for Christmas?

Maybe a dildo, he thinks wryly. Bobby’d love seeing Cas open that on Christmas morning.

He’s walking through one of those specialty shops no one ever goes to on purpose when he spots a tuft of black fur that vaguely reminds him of Cas’ hair. It turns out to one of those winter hats, the ones with the ear flaps Dean thinks no one in their right mind would wear outside of the tundra. Except all he can picture is the black fur framing Cas’ face and how ridiculously blue it’d make his eyes.

He buys it without a second thought.

None of them ever actually plan to meet up somewhere for lunch, but they all end up at Harry Carey’s Pub anyway. Dean throws his bags into the corner where Gabriel’s sitting and drops heavily into the chair next to him. “You all finished?”

“Yup!” Gabriel says cheerfully, pawing through Dean’s bags behind him. “What’d you get me?

Dean slaps his hand away. “Get the fuck outta there, Gabe, or I’m giving your present to Sam.”

“Can Sam fit in a size small thong?” Balthazar asks with interest.

“A small?” Gabriel snorts. “You that desperate to see my bratwurst, Balthazar?”

“Unlikely, since I doubt it’s high grade.”

“Real glad we have these little lunch dates so we can talk about Gabe’s dick,” Dean says dryly.

“Jesus, we doing that again?” Benny drops into the chair next to Dean as Sam appears at the same time and pulls out the one across from him, carefully maneuvering around all the bags in his hands. “With how much ya talk about your dick, Gabriel, you’re startin’ to make me wonder if you even have one.”
Gabriel flashes him a leer. “That my invitation to begin the show part of the show n’ tell?”

“God no,” Sam says quickly, making a face. “No one needs to see that.”

“Your insert-a-female-family-member-here wasn’t complaining last night,” Gabriel shoots back. “Isn’t it about time you Winchesters added some veggies to you meat-stuffed sandwich?”

“I gotta remember to hire you to write all my press conference answers,” Benny says. “You gotta way with words, Gabe.”

“What, I’m not pretty enough for you to have sex with?” Dean asks doing his best to look affronted while at the same time wondering if he actually cares. Cut it the fuck out brain.

“Objectively speaking from my incredibly straight view as a heterosexual male,” Balthazar says, and Dean’s surprised to hear what he’s pretty sure is sarcasm. “I think Gabriel would come before you even got your pants off, Winchester.”

“What a fucking insult,” Gabriel says, sounding insulted. “I’d make it to the socks, at least.”

Benny laughs. “Good thing Dean’s only directing his energy towards woman, or I got the feeling a lot more of the world would be in trouble.”

Sam’s staring at him. Dean tries to will his chair to fall over or something, because even if Sam doesn’t know what Dean’s thinking, he’s starting to annoy him with all his know it all looks like he thinks he does anyway.

Sam can’t know what Dean’s thinking because Dean doesn’t even know what the hell he’s thinking.

“You never know, Gabriel could be on his Dirty Laundry List,” Balthazar’s saying.

“What the hell is that?”

“Your dirty laundry list?” Balthazar raises an eyebrow. “It’s your same sex exceptions, dear innocent captain.”

“Everyone has one,” Gabriel nods sagely.

“Is that even allowed?” Dean asks as at the same time, Benny goes, “I don’t have one.”

“Sure,” Sam mutters.

Benny rounds on him. “Something you wanna say?”

“I have one,” Sam says, louder. “You probably don’t realize it, but you do too. Sexual preference is pretty fluid.”

Dean is way more interested in this than he should be, and he tries his damndest to keep it out of his voice when he says, “So, wanting to have sex with like one guy – that’s normal?”

Gabriel out right laughs. “Sure it is Deano. You can’t always be happy with ham sandwiches your whole life, even if every ham sandwich you eat is delicious and moist.”

“Do you always have to compare women to food?” Sam asks, looking pained.

“I fucking worship food. I fucking worship women,” he shrugs. “Both are fucking great.”
“I think we’ll all have to assume Gabriel’s comparisons come from his simple needs and not a place of sexism,” Balthazar nods.

“Wait,” Dean says, unwilling to let this go because he’s finally getting somewhere with something. “So say you wanted to do sex stuff with a guy, just get it out of your system or...you know. That’s fine? It’s not gay.”

“If it keeps happening, you’re probably gay, Deano,” Gabriel says seriously. “But let’s not all sit here and pretend my straight ass hasn’t had fingers inside Balthy a couple of times.”

“I’m not even sure that makes you two gay,” Benny grunts, leaning back in his chair. “Just a coupla fucking weirdos.”

Sam’s squinting at Dean again, but Dean’s finding it easier to ignore him this time. This is the greatest break he’s caught since Cas started distracting him with his stupid attractiveness. He’s not broken. It’s normal to get caught on a guy, apparently, even for hockey players like his dad. All he has to do is flush it out of his system and he’ll be good and back to normal.

So. Having sex with Cas, basically.

The only reason he’s this excited is because it’s been so long since he last had sex. Has to be.

Of course the next few times he sees Cas are practice and games, and it’s not like he can proposition the guy right there in the locker room. He has no indication Cas wants to be propositioned, in the first place, and second of all, the team would explode if they knew what Dean wanted. Gordon alone would make enough money leaking that story to the press to retire.

Yeah, even if Cas wants nothing to do with it, Dean has to keep this a secret, or it’s gonna get fucking messy real fast.

‘Course, focusing on that kind of stuff takes his mind away from the fact that Cas probably doesn’t want to have anything to do with him in that way in the first place.

Whichever way you slice it, the team locker room is probably not the greatest place to ask your teammate if maybe he wanted to come over and suck cock later.

So Dean’s doing his best to ignore Cas altogether, but Cas is incredibly talkative today, all of it aimed at Dean, and Dean can’t find the willpower to tell him to fuck off.

“Hello Dean. I haven’t talked to you much since we had practice. Did you enjoy your shopping?”

“Yeah, got it all done,” Dean says shortly. “How about you? How was your, uh...what were you doing that day anyway?”

“I had lunch with someone,” Cas shrugs into his shoulder pads. “She was very nice. I had a good time.”

Dean’s brain screeches to a halt at the same time as his body as he stops tying up his laces. “Lunch?”
he asks blankly. “You mean like a date?”

“I suppose,” Cas answers, eyebrows scrunching a little in that confused by everything look he has. “I paid for her meal.”

Right. So date. Dean can already feel the slow sluggish trail of jealousy winding through his body and wrapping around his brain, even though he doubts he was the first and certainly shouldn’t have expected to be the last person to go grab a fucking bite to eat with Cas. Chill out Winchester, it was only one date. That won’t stop the guy from fooling around with you if he wants to.

Unless she was the hottest girl on earth. One of those really glamorous, kind of cold girls that never really let you know how they feel. Cas could land one of them, easy, and they’d love him and his accent.

Dean feels a little sick now. He doesn’t really want to talk to Cas anymore.

“Pipe down!” Bobby’s gruff voice cuts above the usual locker room chatter, and as it begins to fade he says again, “Quiet, ya idjits, I got something important to say.”

“No practice?” Chuck says hopefully.


“Shut up,” Bobby says, and Dean notices he actually looks a bit put out. That only means one thing.

“You forget a publicity thing again, Bobby?”

Bobby glares at him. “We got a Make-A-Wish kid coming in today, so it damn well better be a best behavior day today. Concentrate on practice and making the kid have a nice time. I don’t wanna catch anybody mooning a camera.”

“An act we’re not even positive was carried out by someone on this team,” Balthazar points out.

“The jig is up, Balthy,” Gabriel sighs loudly. “We all know you’re the only one here who shaves his ass.”

“This is the kind of shit I don’t want,” Bobby announces loudly, and Dean knows it’s time to stand up and get all the assholes in order before the vein in Bobby’s forehead gets any bigger.

“Who’s the kid’s favorite?”

“Gabriel,” Bobby replies sourly as Gabriel whoops and jumps off the bench as best he can in all his goalie gear. “I mean it Gabe…”

“Hey, I like the kids,” Gabriel says defensively. “Life’s already been a giant dickwad to them, I don’t add to that.”

“Go get ‘im,’ Dean tells him. “Rest of you, on the ice, c’mon.”

They’ve had visits like this before, from people who are down on their luck in life and consider hockey and the team one of the happiest things about it. The kids are especially great, in their brand new ill fitting jerseys and wide eyed excitement at every single thing they see.

He’s starting to feel happier, getting excited about being able to help make a kid’s day as he heads out onto the ice, when Cas catches up to him. “What is Make-A-Wish?”
Apparently just hearing Cas’ voice is enough for his stomach to sour again. “Program that helps sick kids get their wishes,” he says as shortly as possible. “Sometimes they wanna see us.”

“Why?”

“I dunno, Cas, Jesus, go ask Sam.”

He regrets it the second Cas actually does fall back, and for a second he can’t believe he actually listened. Then Dean decides he doesn’t care. Let Cas tell Sam about his date. He doesn’t want to hear it.

He’s skating around waiting for Bobby to figure out how to officially start practice without swearing when Gabriel brings the kid onto the ice. He’s older than the ones Dean usually sees, closer to teenaged years. The cameras are setting up in the bleachers, with a group of people that must be the kid’s family.

The rules for how this plays out are pretty simple. You don’t want to overwhelm the kid, so there’s no official introduction of the entire team. Dean’s told them to just meet the kid when they meet him, and that usually works. They’re usually pretty good at treating him just like another teammate too, something Dean knows they like, since he was always floored whenever his dad’s team treated him like one of the guys when he was younger.

Gabriel’s getting into net, and the kid is following with Benny, so Dean guesses they’re doing some kind of pass and shoot drill. He’s still hanging back on the far end of the ice, reluctant to head over when he can see number 18 hovering around number 2, when he catches sight of a girl climbing over the bleachers behind him.

Frowning, he skates over and leans over the side of the boards. “What are you doing?”

“Finding someplace to sit,” she says, tone annoyed. “What does it look like I’m doing?”

“Still doesn’t tell me what you’re doing here, kid.”

She glances up sharply, her eyes as dark as her hair. “I’m not a kid,” she says. “And I’m allowed to be here.”

Dean glances back at his team. Most everyone is preoccupied with shooting, except for Sam, who’s staring straight at him with a puzzled look on his face. Dean mentally flips him off and clambers over the boards and up into the bleacher to settle next to the girl.

“What are you doing?” she yelps, scooting away from him, but he ignores her and thrusts his stick over so he can take off his gloves.

“What’s your name? I’m Dean.”

“I know who you are. I watch your dumb games every week.”

Dean grins a little against his will. “They are kinda dumb, aren’t they? When I was real young my dad would take me to his beer league games. It’s the most bored I’ve ever been in my life.”

The girl shoots him a suspicious look. “Why are you sitting with me?”

“Maybe practice is kind of boring too,” Dean shrugs. He’s not really sure why he’s sitting here. Partly to avoid Sam’s questions and whatever wounded look Cas wants to give him, partly because he’s in a bad mood and doesn’t want to ruin it for the kid out there trying to have a good day. And
this girl seemed to be in just as bad a mood as he is. “So, you just wander over to the bad part of
town and decide to come into Crowley’s? Weird choice.”

“I didn’t,” she scowled, jerking her head towards the other end of the ice. “I’m here with Aidan.”

“Ah,” Dean’s beginning to see why she’s got such an attitude. “He your brother?”

“No,” she glares out at the ice. “He’s my bunkmate. I didn’t want the dumb Make-A-Wish, so I gave
it to him. The hospital made me come anyway.”

Fuck. Dean wonders what’s wrong with her, but he’s not gonna ask. After all, he’d hate it if anyone
asked him, and whatever’s going on with him isn’t even close to what this girl is going through.

She reminds him a little of Sam when he was a preteen, in a way. Sam was always sullen too, didn’t
want to talk much and got mad if you tried to make him smile. So of course, Dean always tried to
make him smile, and when that didn’t work, he teased him into things.

He sits in silence with her for a few moments, the girl shifting occasionally next to him and fiddling
with his stick. The team’s starting to use this part of the ice now, so he knows they’ve all seen him
and are wondering what the fuck they’re doing. He doesn’t care. He’s not sure what he’s doing here
either, but he wants to do something.

“You don’t have to sit here with me,” she speaks up suddenly. “I don’t need your pity. If my dad
wasn’t working, I’d be here with him.”

“Yeah, I get that,” Dean nods. “You ain’t getting any pity from me, kid. I got my own issues.”

She snorts disbelievingly. “Like what?”

Dean grins wryly at her. “I don’t wanna ruin your day, kiddo.”

“Stop calling me kid.”

“Look kid, ‘less you give me a name, I’m gonna keep calling ya kid. We might even move on to
buddy, if I like you enough.”

“Ew,” she makes a face. “My name’s Krissy. Will you go away now?”

“Sure,” Dean stands up and pulls on his gloves before taking his stick back from her, saying
thoughtfully, “Probably a good thing you don’t wanna play. You’d only get hurt.”

Krissy’s head shoots up and she glares at him. “I could skate circles around your ass, old man.”

“Too bad you can’t prove it,” he calls, clambering over the boards and almost immediately running
into Cas. “Personal space, Cas!”

Cas just squints at him. “Are you upset with me because I went on a date?”

“No,” Dean lies, glancing back at Krissy.

“That is what Sam said it must be, and I couldn’t think of anything else I might have done.”

Dean swears. “Sam needs to keep his abnormal huge nose out of other people’s business.”

“I asked for Sam’s assistance, Dean, there is no need—,”
“Hey, you’re Castiel Krushnic.”

Both of them turn to look at Krissy, Dean with complete surprise and Cas with this kind of disinterested politeness. “Yes.”

“This is Krissy,” Dean offers up. “She’s Aidan’s friend.”

Krissy shoots him a grateful look Dean can only imagine is for not ratting her out as sick, and Cas’ face instantly softens. “Hello,” he says. “Aidan is fairly good at hockey. I’m sure he is excited to have you here.”

“He’s not as good as me,” Krissy says, pursing her lips. “I want to skate so I can kick Dean’s ass.”

Cas doesn’t even look taken aback. “We can arrange that,” he says easily, holding out his hand. “If you let me help you across the ice, I believe our equipment manager might have some skates.”

Dean watches Cas lead Krissy carefully across the ice, looking about three times bigger than her in all of his gear.

Fuck him.

He finally meets Aidan, a nice enough kid with the same maturity level as Gabriel, so Dean can see why he idolizes him. It looks like Bobby’s just going to have them shoot all day with the kids and cameras here and he actually manages to get in a couple of good shots off before Sam catches up to him.

“Why are you mad at Cas?”

“Didn’t know it was time for my Cosmo subscription to arrive.”

“Dean’s mad at Cas?” Kevin says from beside them.

“Yeah, Dean really upset him earlier,” Sam says with his ‘you’ve disappointed me look’ and tone to match.

“I’m not mad at Cas,” Dean says sharply. “I was just in a bad mood earlier.”

He’s really not mad at Cas either. It’s none of his fucking business who Cas goes to eat food with, and if this means whatever opening Dean had to make a move was closed, well, at least he avoided making a dick of himself.

He only wanted sex anyway. Maybe just knowing Cas was unavailable would make all this shit stop. Yeah, Dean’s brain apparently no longer cares that Cas had a penis, but he knows for a fact he draws a line at cheating. Too many guys in the league do it for him to like anything about it.

“Thank God,” Kevin says with relief, and Dean doesn’t have any time to ask what the hell he means by that before Bobby is blowing his whistle and yelling at them to keep moving.

Krissy comes out a moment later on skates to Aidan’s delight, and Dean’s surprised to see that she’s not half bad. Her first shot goes past Gabriel easily, and as she skates back to the line she shoots Dean a smug look. “Told you.”

“Much better than Dean’s shots,” Cas says from over his shoulder, startling him.

“Yeah?” Dean turns his head slightly. “Like you could do better.”
Cas is beating him five shots to three when Dean decides he’s had enough of this shit. Cameras are here, so Bobby can’t get too mad, and they’re supposed to be having fun, right?

He takes a running start and falls to a belly slide on the ice, poking the puck in with his stick like he’s playing pool, right between Gabriel’s legs.

Krissy is the first one to laugh.

After that they’re all taking increasingly awkward or idiotic shots, trying to get the most laughs until eventually Balthazar is able to skate behind the net without Gabriel noticing and dump the water bottle over his head. Benny is able to score since Gabriel has taken off after Balthazar, and Dean can’t breathe from laughing over how ridiculous it looks to see Gabriel try to move quickly with all his goalie shit on.

They’re still laughing when Bobby calls an end to practice a few minutes later.

Dean’s not totally sure where the kids are sent after practice, if the organization gives them goodie bags of shit or sends them other places or what. But for all he knows, they could be heading back to the hospital. He makes a point of sitting between Aidan and Krissy as they take off their gear.

He’s got his first skate off when Krissy speaks up. “I like Cas.”

“Yeah?” Dean says. “Most people do, for some reason.”

“Don’t pretend you don’t either.”

“I ain’t pretending nothing,” Dean says cheerfully, straightening up. “Cas is my friend.”

Krissy looks up in exasperation from fumbling her laces, so Dean leans down again and begins to work at the knot for her. “Is he one of your issues?”

“My what?” Dean asks, beginning to work on the other skate.

“You said you had issues.”

Yeah, he’s a fucking big issue. But no way was he telling the kid that. “Cas is his own issue.” He pulls off her skates and stands up, studying her for a minute. “You have a good time?”

“It was alright,” she says grudgingly.

“Good. Hey, you got a phone?”

“We share a phone,” Aidan pipes up. “Between our beds.”

Krissy glares at him, but Dean shoots him a grin and reaches into his duffle bag for one of those stupid business cards Bobby made them that no one on the team has ever used. There’s a pen in there too, with the cap missing, and he scribbles until ink comes out and he’s able to write his cell number on two cards. “You two call if you need shit, alright? I can drive and everything, won’t be that hard to visit if you want.”


Krissy is silent, but she stuffs the card into her back pocket anyway.

They leave not long after that, Dean mouthing ‘call me’ at Krissy so he can get the Death Stare one last time.
Somebody smacks him over the head, but everyone’s still undressing so Dean knows not to swear too colorfully. Sure enough, it’s Bobby. “Stop torturing the girl,” he says, tossing the envelope he must have used to hit Dean into his lap. “Some idiot fan sent mail to the stadium addressed to you.”

“Don’t be jealous, Bobby,” Dean says, but Bobby’s already back in his office, so he rips the envelope open and pulls out a sheet of paper and a photo.

All the sheet of paper says is, “You guys looked so cute, I figured you’d want to see it!” in a loopy handwriting Dean doesn’t recognize, but when he looks at the picture, he knows exactly who it’s from.

They’re at the mall in New York, Cas leaning over the toddler in Dean’s lap with a concentrated look on his face as he signs the puck, tongue sticking out slightly between his teeth. And Dean staring over the top of the toddler’s head at Cas like…

He has no idea what that look on his face is. Idiotic, maybe.

“I apologize for confronting you earlier.”

Dean stuffs the photo inside his jacket and stands up quickly. “You’re fine,” he tells Cas. “I was being an asshole.”

Cas smiles slightly at him. “Yes, you were.”

“You don’t have to agree with me,” Dean says, giving him a fake scowl. “That just makes you the asshole. Hey,” he doesn’t know why he’s asking, he knows the answer, but suddenly he’s worried, “You still coming to Christmas?”

Cas frowns. “I’m sure I can find something else to do.”

Dean mirrors his frown, unsure. “What? No way man. You got something to do with us.”

“I was unsure if your invitation last week was sincere. I don’t want to intrude.”

“Christmas alone sucks,” Dean says. He should know. “All you gotta do is come upstairs. Not that hard, right?”

Cas, god knows why, still looks slightly stubborn. “I’ve done it before.”

“Jesus Cas, I’m not questioning your ability to be a martyr,” he explodes, jabbing a finger at him. “Maybe I want to see you at Christmas for my own stupid fucking selfish reasons. Got it?”

Cas’ eyes soften but his mouth remains hard, and he stays silent long enough that Dean’s starting to get uncomfortable about what he said and where he said it (not that anybody seems to have heard them). “Only if you let me buy your dinner tonight.”

“Fucking done,” Dean says, grabbing his duffle bag. They’ll just end up ordering Chinese and watching Dr. Sexy like they always do, but it’s something. And Cas is coming to Christmas. And Dean doesn’t even want the sex anymore, so fucking ha.

Eat your heart out, mystery woman. He gets dinner without wanting the sex.

God dammit he hates her.
So Dean manages to spend the week leading up to Christmas not freaking out about whether or not Cas is going to show up. He really does. Because freaking out about it would mean questioning why he’s freaking out about it, when he really shouldn’t care at all, and that’s just not something Dean wants to explore.

He even manages not to freak out the two hours he’s alone on Christmas Eve when Sammy is off at Jess’ giving her his jersey and eternal devotion or whatever. And then when Sam gets back, Dean says, “Did you kiss her yet?” and Sam calls him a jerk and they watch Die Hard and open presents and Dean manages to get Sam to put the fucking Supernatural book he got him down so he has someone to play his new video game with.

And the entire time, he doesn’t think about Cas once. He swears.

“When do you think Cas is gonna get here?” he asks Sam the next morning.

Sam turns towards him, toothbrush hanging from his mouth. “Wha?”

“When do you think Cas is gonna get here?” Dean repeats. “Bobby and Ellen and Jo are gonna be here any minute.”

Sam pulls the toothbrush from his mouth. “How the hell should I know? You invited him.”

He frowns. “Maybe I should go grab him.”

“Why? He said he was coming.”

“Get dressed Sammy,” Dean calls, already heading for the door. He’d known he was going to go grab Cas the minute he woke up anyway, if only to assure himself that the guy was definitely coming. If Cas didn’t drag his ass up here, he’d be alone all day, and then Dean would have to feel guilty about it.

He’s knocking on Cas’ door before he even really gets a chance to reconsider, and it swings open almost immediately. Cas looks like he hasn’t slept all night, his shirt askew and hair ruffled as he regards Dean with an air of surprise.

“Uh, hey,” Dean frowns uncertainly. Maybe Cas actually wasn’t planning on coming up. Shit.

“Thought I’d come get you.”

Recognition quickly dawns on Cas’ face, wiping away the exhaustion. “I apologize, Dean,” he says. “I got distracted.”

“Distracted?” Dean doesn’t like the sound of that. In fact, the picture he’s forming in his head as a result of Cas’ tiredness and his distraction is not a pretty one at all.

“May I tell you upstairs?” Cas asks, and Dean is so relieved Cas is coming upstairs with him at all that he doesn’t ask questions, just follows him back up the stairs.

“Hey Cas!” Sam calls as soon as they walk in the door. He’s sitting in front of the tree with his book,
the dog lying nearby. Dean shoots him a suspicious look.

“No peeking.”

“I wasn’t!” Sam protests. Unconvincingly.

“That is a beautiful tree,” Cas says admiringly.

Dean grins. “Yeah, man. Sucks you couldn’t help decorate it.”

“No,” Cas says, and suddenly he’s serious again. “Dean, my sister showed up the other day.”

“Anna?”

“Yes,” he nods. “She was waiting outside my apartment after our last game. She wanted to…” he pauses for a brief moment before continuing. “Talk.”

Dean’s not totally sure how to feel about this. On the one hand, Cas would be ecstatic if the only family member he actually liked started talking to him again. On the other, Dean can only imagine what the hell he’s gonna have to say to her if Anna just decides to dig a deeper wound. “How’d that go?”

Cas shrugs. “We are not much talkers,” he says by way of explanation, crossing his arms.

Dean watches the movement and frowns slightly. “Are you cold?”

“I should go back downstairs and change.”

“Nah, just go grab a sweatshirt from my closet.” Dean says, jerking his head towards the door. “You’re in perfect Christmas morning clothes.”

The Winchesters have never had formal Christmas celebrations. He and Sam are wearing sweats, and Dean knows Bobby and the rest will show up in just as relaxed clothing, proven to him a minute later when Bobby stomps through the door growling about having to carry all the presents.

“Quit yer whining.” Ellen orders as he head over to the tree. “Hey Dean, Sam. You got the kitchen all ready for me?”

“Only you get to touch Christmas dinner,” Dean says, kissing her on the cheek. Ellen may be a short order cook at heart, but her ham is the best Dean has ever had.

“Hey Cas,” he hears Jo say. “Is that Dean’s jersey?”

Dean whips around to look. Sure enough, Cas somehow managed to find the jersey he’d bought on a whim a couple of weeks ago and had stuffed in a drawer and forgotten about. It’s the same jersey Cas wears practically every single day, but somehow just knowing it’s his name and number on the back is making it hard for Dean to look away from him.

“Is this alright?” Cas asks, misinterpreting the stare. “I could not find anything warmer.”

“I didn’t know you had a jersey here, Dean,” Sam says, emerging from his spot on the floor to kiss Ellen on the cheek as well.

“It’s fine,” Dean tells Cas.

“You better not be bringing your shit home, boy,” Bobby calls from under the tree.
“I’m not!” Dean protests.

“Were you gonna give it to someone?” Sam presses, gesturing at the sleeve, “You still got the tags there, Cas.”

Cas looks down and frowns deeply. “I’m sorry, Dean, I didn’t realize—”

“It’s fine,” Dean repeats loudly. “I just had an extra lying around from somewhere, okay? It’s fine Cas, keep it, wear it, whatever you want.”

There’s an awkward silence as Cas tugs the tags off and Sam stares at him. After what feels like ages but was probably only seconds, Ellen claps her hands together. “Ham in the fridge?”

“I’ll show you,” Sam volunteers, leading her away and leaving Dean with Jo and, he’s just noticing, a slightly wide eyed Charlie.

“Merry Christmas Charlie, Joanna Beth.”

“Shut up.”

“Your apartment is huge,” Charlie informs him, sounding awed. “I think I could fit where I live into this room.”

“It is large for one person,” Cas agrees, nodding. “I am often lonely downstairs.”

“Maybe Dean needs a roommate,” Jo suggests slyly.

Dean sends her a sharp look, but he’s pretty sure she’s just messing with him. “What’d you guys bring?”

Charlie grins excitedly. “Ginger bread cookies! I found these awesome directions for making Star Trek themed ones.”

“Can we make a Chekov?” Cas asks with interest. The dog barks from his place by the tree and Bobby shushes him before turning on the TV. Dean knows they’ve lost him to reruns of A Christmas Story until dinner, so her gestures for them to all follow him.

“C’mon, this will be easier on the dining room table.”

Dean has to admit as he helps Charlie lay out the precut gingerbread cookies, icing and candy that he gets a lot more excited about decorating when he realizes that this is Cas’ first Christmas activity ever. Sam appears just as they’re starting their first cookies and, giant nerd that he is, eagerly jumps in without question, even though he protests loudly about the subject matter the entire time.

“I mean, Star Trek is pretty good, but you guys have to agree Star Wars was just done better, story-wise, right?”

Charlie shoots Dean an appalled look. “That’s related to you?”

“Look, I asked my mom and dad for a smart brother.”

Sam launches a gumdrop in Dean’s direction and Dean ducks, letting it hit Cas instead, who is taking his gingerbread man way too seriously. “Hey, Cas, you know we’re just gonna eat these, right?”

“I want it to look nice,” Cas says without looking away from his meticulous outline of Captain Kirk’s hair.
“Don’t be offended, Cas, Dean just doesn’t appreciate art.”

“Apparently not even awesome art,” Charlie exclaims, sliding her Uhra cookie next to Cas’. “Look at these two bad ass bitches!”

“I like them,” Cas says, regarding them. “They are very nice.”

“Finish your Spock so Kirk can have him, Dean.”

“What do you mean so he can ‘have him’?” Dean asks, putting two sprinkles in place of Spock’s ears.

“Charlie ships them.”

“Ships?”

“She thinks Kirk and Spock should be in a relationship,” Sam says. “I finished Bones.”

Dean stares at his brother. “How the hell do you know that?”

“I don’t treat the internet like it’s gonna bite me?”

“Dean does?” Charlie asks as Jo laughs.

“Oh yeah. Dean had me make him a Facebook page. Which he never uses.”

“You assholes are the only people I talk to anyway,” Dean counters in a grumble, glancing at their finished cookies. “You wanna get those in the fridge before they melt, Sam? Unless you’re gonna eat them now.”

“Please,” Jo says, picking her Sulu up. “We can’t eat them without hot chocolate.”

“I’ll show you where to put them,” Sam volunteers. “I bet Ellen needs our help anyway.”

“I doubt mom needs your help,” Jo counters as they follow him into the kitchen.

“Is it true you set a pot of water on fire, Sam?” Charlie asks.

“You wanna put your in the fridge too?” Dean asks Cas.

“It’s not finished yet.”

Dean shrugs and starts to gather up all the sweets and shit Charlie and Jo had brought, popping a piece of candy cane in his mouth. He’s got everything in neat piles in a few minutes, and Cas still hasn’t looked up from piping his blue shirt.

“You going for gingerbread boy of the year there, Cas?”

“I do not want to mess this up.”

“Hard to mess up something so delicious,” Dean says, slightly sarcastic. “I’ll eat it if it’s too ugly.”

“I meant this day, Dean. I do not want to mess up my first Christmas here.”

Dean’s ready response dries up in his mouth and he looks away, rubs a hand over his mouth. He’s not sure what to say to that that doesn’t sound ridiculously stupid, or mushy, or embarrassing. Finally he blurts out the first thing that comes to mind, “You can’t fuck it up, I wanted you here.”
He immediately knows that was exactly the kind of corny shit that didn’t need to be said out loud for his own safety, and before Cas can even think about it he goes, “So, you still dating that girl or what?”

“Girl?” Cas’ brow furrows in confusion. “The one I had lunch with?”

“Yeah,” Dean agrees, and he can feel slow building jealousy bringing his feelings back under control. “You see her again?”

“No,” Cas says simply and leans over his cookie again, presenting Dean with his back. Where ‘Winchester’ and the number twenty-four are proudly displayed, like this huge fucking sign screaming that he’s Dean’s.

The jealousy he’d been building immediately vanishes, and before Dean can help himself he reaches out and traces a hand down the stitching on the number four.

“Dean?”

“Sorry,” Dean quickly bends over the table in the guise of looking at Cas’ gingerbread, but it really only brings their faces closer. Not that he minds. He should, but he doesn’t. “S’good number.”

“It’s yours.”

“Yeah,” Dean glances at Cas’ profile. “It’s mine, yeah.”

Cas’ turns his head so he can meet Dean’s eyes, rewarding him with a full blast of intense blue. “How did you choose your number?” he asks quietly.

“My birthday.” Dean feels like he’s in a bubble, not even really connected to the rest of the world as he watches Cas’ mouth turn up in a slight smile.

“My number is also my birthday.”

And fuck. Fuck. Cas never smiles. Well he does, but barely, but he always smiles at Dean. All the time, it feels like, which makes no sense since he never smiles, but fuck. And Dean swears he smiles differently at him than he does at other people, if they can manage to get him to smile at all, and jesus, every time Dean manages it it’s like this whole huge accomplishment he feels like he needs to hang up next to all the shit he’s ever won for hockey. He loves Cas’ smile, he always wants to see it. And he’s still in that bubble, and he wants to know what that smile would feel like on his lips, and they’re so close, getting even closer, and Cas’ eyes are getting darker and he’s got this look on his face, and he smells like everything good ever, like cold air and rubber and whatever detergent the equipment guys use to wash their jerseys after every game is...

“Damn it, Dean!” Ellen yells from the kitchen. “How the hell do you work the damn microwave?”

Dean jerks back so abruptly he slams his knee into the dining room table. “Fuck!”

“Language!” Ellen yells from the kitchen.

So Dean ends up in charge of the microwave in his own fucking kitchen, and Cas somehow gets coerced into chopping carrots. Then Sam manages to drop two pounds of potatoes on the floor and Ellen kicks all three of them out.

They end up in the TV room watching A Christmas Story with Bobby, Sam and Dean laughing before the jokes are even said, Dean explaining patiently that, “Yeah Cas, fragile isn’t an Italian
word, that’s why it’s funny,” until eventually Cas is chuckling along with them, and Bobby is giving them all fond looks thinly disguised as grumpiness.

Ellen gets food out on the table around three, ham and potatoes and corn and those little biscuits Dean can never manage to make without burning. They don’t take as long to eat as they did at Thanksgiving, with less food on the table, and Jo’s only just starting to put more food on Sam’s plate when he isn’t looking when the doorbell rings.

“This is what happens when you don’t have a chimney,” Jo says.

“Or maybe he’s just making sure he’s getting all the coal to the right place,” Dean returns, pushing his chair back.

“Make sure you ask him where he gets his costume made,” Charlie adds.

Chekov’s already at the door when Dean makes it over there, and Dean gently nudges him out of the way with his foot before pulling it open. He stares at surprise at Anna, who looks just as surprised to see him, even though it’s his apartment.

“Dean,” she says. “It is nice to see you again.”

Dean fights the urge to push out in the hallway, close the door, and ask her what the fuck she’s doing here. Because this is Cas’s sister, and it’s fucking Christmas, he’ll try not to. “Anna. You need Cas?”

She nods and he opens the door wider, allowing her to come in without actually inviting her.

Bobby’s bitching about Ellen taking the last of the potatoes when Dean leads Anna into the dining room, and the bickering stops almost as soon as they see her, Cas immediately rising to his feet.

“Anna?”

“Hello,” Anna says, glancing around. Dean thinks she might be uncomfortable, but he can’t tell as she continues coolly, “I apologize for interrupting your meal.”

“Do you need me to come back downstairs?” Cas asks.

“What?” Dean breaks in. “No way, Cas, you’re spending the day here.”

“Sorry my nephew’s bein’ rude. I know that’s not entirely how he was raised,” Ellen says sternly, shooting Dean a look. “I’m Ellen, and this is Bobby and Jo and Charlie.”

“I apologize, Ellen,” Cas says, turning to her. “This is my sister, Anna. She is an unexpected visit.”

“You left your sister downstairs while you came up here to eat?” Bobby asks incredulously.

“Unfortunately,” Cas says stiffly. “I was not able to prepare for her visit.”

Dean’s still standing awkwardly next to Anna, and thank god for Sammy, who says brightly, “I didn’t know you had a sister, Cas. She’s welcome to hang out up here if she wants.”

“Come sit by me,” Charlie pipes up. “Then I won’t have to feel so awkward about being the only redhead in the room.”

“You’re a redhead?” Jo asks in mock surprise. “What the hell else have you been keeping from me?”

That manages to break the floodgates. Anna hesitantly sits in the chair Charlie offered and Ellen fixes a new plate of food to hand down to her. Cas sits down silently and doesn’t say much for the rest of
dinner, and Dean doesn’t comment on or allow himself to read too much into the knee he chooses to press against Dean’s leg the rest of the meal.

Anna turns out to be kinda cool, if Dean can ignore how much she’s hurt Cas. Turns out she’s an artist, but she wants to be a psychologist who helps people heal through art, a topic Charlie and Sam seem fascinated by. Anna only brings up Cas once in conversation, when she’s explaining how she managed to get into the University of Chicago, and the only indication of Cas’ feelings Dean gets is that his knee presses a little harder into Dean’s own during that part of the talk.

Dean doesn’t say a word to Anna all through dinner, even though he wants to, and somehow, to his luck, he ends up washing dishes with her while everybody else heads out to the tree to eat dessert. He’s not totally sure how to start the conversation either, but Anna does that for him as well. “Why is it you don’t like me very much?”

“You want the long answer or the short one?”

He swears he sees Anna smile out of the corner of his eye. “I would like the truth.”

“You hurt Cas’ feelings, and you left him alone,” Dean says, scrubbing harder at a dish. “As his friend, that kinda pisses me off.”

“Interesting,” Anna remarks. “It seems a bit much, for a friend.”

“You guys must not care much about your friends then.”

“No, I suppose we don’t,” Anna agrees. She passes him another plate and dips her hand into the soapy water. “I sense that he cares very deeply for you.”

Dean’s stomach jumps and he shifts. “Yeah, well. Like I said, friends.”

“Perhaps more than that,” she muses. “May I tell you a secret, Dean?”

“I’m not really a secrets guy.”

“I will tell you anyway,” she shrugs. “Castiel was always an outcast in our family, and I missed him very much growing up. I also did not have a good relationship with my parents. However, that did not stop me from hearing what happened to Castiel while he was away at hockey. He was beaten, many times. There were many hospital visits. I do not think it was uncommon for the players to fight, both teammates and during games, but I believe Castiel was picked on more than most.”

Dean stares at her. Her face is completely serious, but Dean can’t for the life of him imagine Cas letting some asshole meat heads beat on him constantly without doing something about it. Except maybe he can, a little. Cas sticking up for himself but refusing to throw a punch for stupid reasons. Cas ending up in the hospital bruised and battered again and again, so many times that he began to hate hospitals.

“Why are you telling me this?”

“Eventually it stopped,” Anna frowned. “He must have done something. And then he learned that my parents were trying to marry me off, and he searched and fought for the opportunity to come here, so he could bring me. I made it very clear to Castiel that I did not want him to do that,” her voice lowers. “I thought, starting over with new players, it might happen to him all over again.”
Dean winces. He didn’t exactly beat Cas up, but was telling him he didn’t belong and that he didn’t matter really any better?

“I realize getting angry at him was not deserved,” Anna shrugs and puts down the last dry plate. “But despite being siblings, we do not know one another very well, and I was upset that he would do such a thing. I realized in the hospital that I had no reason to think he would be treated in such a way again.”

“You didn’t even go in to see him.”

“This is true, but I met you, and that was quite enough.” She dries her hands on a towel and throws it back onto the counter. “Would you mind if I stayed? I am fine with no presents, but I would like to see Castiel open his.”

“That’s fine,” Dean mutters. He’s not sure what Anna means that meeting him was enough, but it doesn’t sound like she’s going to ignore Cas anymore, which is all he really cares about. As long as Cas is happy, and he’s not always alone outside of practice or games anymore, Dean’s fine with it.

“This is your piece of pie,” Cas says when they get into the TV room, handing Dean a large slice of pecan pie.

“Dude, I love you,” Dean exclaims happily, flopping onto the couch next to him and gratefully shoving a bite of cake into his mouth.

Cas blinks at him and Sam snorts. “He’ll love anyone who gives him pie Cas, don’t take it personally.”

“Oh. I see.” Cas nods decisively. “Come sit down Anna.” He looks mildly surprised when Anna comes to sit by him.

“How does this work?” Anna asks curiously. “Do you all rip into them at once? This is what I see on TV.”

“We go person by person,” Jo explains, probably mostly for Charlie’s benefit. “That way we all get to see our gifts opened.”

Bobby plays Santa, like he always does, and Sam puts up a hell of a fight to get him into the Santa hat, like he always does. Dean’s surprised and weirdly touched when Cas ends up with gifts from everyone, and it was probably only because Sam had the brains to tell them that he was going to be here.

Dean’s happy Cas and Charlie are here, because he’s never surprised by anyone’s gifts anymore. Sam gets books, Bobby gets booze, Ellen gets kitchen shit that is sometimes related to booze, and Jo always ends up with more hockey gear than one person should have, even if they do play professionally. At least Charlie gets video games and movies, and a key shaped necklace from Jo that earns a loud squeal and an even longer kiss.

Dean’s a bit comforted to see that he raked in his usual too. Sam got him the newest season of Doctor Sexy that he carefully pretends to hate, and a new toy he lets Chekov take wherever the new toys disappear to. Bobby got him booze in return (“you’re only allowed to drink this for the next year,” he warns), Ellen tells him the two pies still in the fridge are his, and Jo and Charlie chipped in to buy him a bunch of glasses with the team logo engraved on them. “What, do I have to get married now too or something?” he asks.

“You drink out of plastic cups with Mickey Mouse on them,” Charlie grins.
“Besides, I don’t think a mail order bride would get here before you break them all,” Jo says innocently.

“You guys are the sweetest girls,” Dean says, grabbing his present from Cas.

“Besides which,” Anna speaks up for the first time, “I do not believe Dean would need the post office for a bride.”

“Thank you,” Dean grins triumphantly, ripping open the present to reveal a box. He has no idea what Cas could have gotten him, so it’s with a bit of trepidation that he opens the box and pulls out a beautifully carved wooden hockey player.

“You got him a bogorodsk?” Anna asks.

“Yes,” Cas says, and Dean notices he sounds defensive for some reason. “I think he would like it.”

“I do,” Dean says, and he’s not even lying. The thing is badass. It kind of even looks like him. He’s not sure anyone has gotten him something like this before, kind of like art.

“It moves,” Cas tells him, like he’s still trying to sell it. “It is very common in Russia. Many people like them.”

“This is awesome Cas.” He wiggles the little hockey stick back and forth. “No seriously, this is fucking cool.”

Cas regards him closely for a second before he nods. “I am glad.”

Cas just seems overwhelmed by his presents. Sam got him a book, no surprise there, and it’s not really a surprise either that Bobby, Ellen, and Jo all got him hockey related shit. Charlie was the only one to differ, giving him the two reboot Star Trek movies. He opens Dean’s present next, and Dean knows it’s a hit instantly when his face lights up and he jams the hat onto his head, untying the flaps and letting them fall down over his ears.

Anna laughs loudly. “I have never seen you wear a ushanka!”

“You will see me wear this one,” Cas says, and then he follows with something in Russian that makes Anna laugh even harder. Dean finds his eyes fixed on Cas, in his jersey and the hat he gave him, sitting on his couch and speaking happily to his sister.

His stomach’s warm, like he just drank a full cup of coffee, and his heart is beating faster than normal. He shifts and clears his throat. “So. You guys ready for some carols or somethin’?”

“I’ll set up the stereo,” Sam volunteers, pulling himself off the ground.

Cas starts to lean towards Dean, close enough that Dean’s heart begins to beat faster before Cas seems to think better of whatever the hell he was going for and he places a hand on Dean’s arm. “Thank you, Dean,” he says quietly.

For the hat, Dean thinks. He means the hat.

They end the night with the damn Christmas songs Dean’s been sick of since December third and Arnold Schwarzenegger’s Jingle All the Way, which Sam and Dean had decided long ago was the cheesiest Christmas movie ever, and which Charlie had somehow never seen and almost died laughing over.
Cas doesn’t take his hat off for the rest of the night, and leaves with Dean’s jersey on, and Dean can’t help but think in the last, final, barely coherent moments between sleep and consciousness, that he might need more than just one fuck to get all this shit he’s feeling to go away.
“How the fuck are you doing that?” Dean demands, jabbing a finger at the A button on the controller in his hands.

“How the fuck are you doing that?” Dean demands, jabbing a finger at the A button on the controller in his hands. “Doing what?” Cas asks, eyes fixed intently on the screen. “I still do not understand the point of this game, Dean.”

“We’re astronauts killing zombies, Cas, how the fuck are you so good at it?”

“Your fingers must be slow,” Cas says, and Dean glances at him. The asshole is smirking. “Like your shot.”

“Like my shot, huh?” Dean reaches over and slaps at Cas’ controller, moving his character right in the way of some crossfire and killing him. “Who’s slow now?”

Cas glances down at Dean’s hand still wrapped around his wrist and says, “You shouldn’t have done that.”

“What are ya gonna—” Dean’s words are cut off as Cas elbows him swiftly and knocks him off the couch. By instinct Dean reaches out and grabs his arm, dragging Cas down into the space between the couch and the coffee table with him. Cas lands solidly on top of him, knee barely managing to land between his legs, eyes wide with surprise.

Dean stares up at him, breathing heavily. He can feel Cas’ heart beating in time with his own, his knee brushing lightly against the crotch of his pants, and has to shut his eyes quickly in order to get some control over himself.

“Thought you didn’t fight?” he says tightly.

“Did I hurt you?” Cas asks with concern, shifting like he’s trying to find something wrong with him. “What happened? Dean?”

“Cas,” Dean squirms, but that only makes it worse. “Cas, stop.” Great. He’s horny and ticklish.

“Cas,” Dean barks out, a laugh escaping. “Cas man, stop, you’re killing me.” He opens his eyes and sees a look of understanding dawning on Cas’ face.

“You are, uh, you laugh when you are touched,” Cas grins. “I do not know the word.”

“S’ticklish,” Dean says, trying to buck him off (which just presents a whole new set of problems). “Don’t do it.”

“I’m not doing anything, Dean,” Cas says, shifting again and brushing against his side.

“Cas, Jesus – just quit – holy fuck, stop–”

“Um. Guys?”

Dean stops struggling and tilts his head back. Sam is standing behind the couch, looking down at them with this weird look on his face, like he’s not sure if he should smile. “Hello Sam,” Cas says calmly.

“Hey.” Sam raises an eyebrow. “So, uh. What are you doing?”
“Cas was being a dick—,”

“I was winning the astronaut game,” Cas interrupted.

“It’s called Doom,” Dean says louder. “Anyway. Asshole knocked me off the couch, and now he’s torturing me.”

“You deserve it,” Cas says matter-of-factly, looking down at him and smirking. “I will do it again when it needs to be done.”

Dean needed Cas off of him before this pent up sexual tension decided he didn’t care that Sam was standing right there. “Alright, up and attem, Cas.” He manages to get Cas off of him, scooting away and hunching forward in an act of rubbing his temples. Sam usually stays at his apartment during the week between Christmas and New Years’ and Dean loves having the brother time. He’s just never had the problem of a downstairs neighbor who visits all the time whom he reluctantly wants to have sex with but can’t for various reasons. Turns out having your brother around makes the whole situation even harder. “What did you need, Sammy?”

“You guys still want to grab lunch?” Sam asks. Dean can hear the raised eyebrow. “You remember that, right?”

He’s calmed down, is pretending he can’t smell Cas anymore even though he totally can, but whatever, so he lifts his face to give Sam a sarcastic look. “I remember lunch. It’s that meal you eat in the middle of the day, right?”

“Can Anna come?” Cas asks.

“What?”

“Anna wants to come to lunch.”

“Oh,” Dean says. He didn’t even know Anna was still staying with Cas. “Yeah, she can come.”

Turns out Cas wasn’t exaggerating for their sakes – Anna really did want to come to lunch, that much was obvious by how much she talked in the car ride to the Roadhouse, the most Dean had ever heard her speak. Apparently Cas had told her a lot about Dean and Sam and his team over the course of the week, and she had even been to one of their recent games. While Dean was dying to know what Cas had said about him, Anna wasn’t really saying, and he stopped thinking about it when he realized he was counting how many times she looked at him over Sam as a clue to how much Cas talked about him.

He lived a pathetic life. A pathetic, sexless, confused life.

The Roadhouse is never busy at lunch time, and Dean leads them over to his and Sam’s favorite corner booth without even waiting for one of the waitstaff to show up.

“This place,” Anna says, glancing around as she settles next to Sam, “Is very…American.”

“America is good, Anna,” Cas says, a slight warning to his tone as he picks up a menu.

Anna grins straight at Dean. “It’s very easy to exasperate him, yes?”

Dean has no idea why this statement is aimed at him, but he nods anyway, because he can see Cas glaring out of the corner of his eye, and that’s funny.
“So Anna,” Sam says, “Are you having a good time staying with Cas?”

“That’s Sammy’s polite way of asking if you two love each other now,” Dean informs them. Sam kicks him under the table.

“Of course I always love Castiel,” Anna shrugs. “We are becoming friends. This is how you start.”

“Anna showed me her room at her university,” Cas says. “And I met her friend.”

As far as Dean’s concerned, that means they’ve made up. Cas has always been a good brother, proven with how he got Anna the hell out of dodge, and obviously Anna loves him enough to be afraid that he risked something to do that. What they’re doing now is building twenty plus years of missed memories, and that’s the fun part.

He’s kind of relieved, in a way. Now Cas has real family that he knows cares about him. If he wanted, he could leave the team behind and still be fine.

“You okay, Dean?” Sam asks, sounding slightly concerned.

“What?” Dean looks up sharply. “Course I am.”

“You got kind of pale,” is all Sam says before he asks Anna what classes she’s taking next semester.

Dean feels a warm hand on his thigh and looks down in surprise. Cas has been doing this lately, touching him more and more. And it’s only him, because Dean has sure as hell been looking out for it when he interacts with other people. He kind of hopes it has something to do with Cas maybe… being able to read him a little, but he highly doubts it. Cas has always had issues with getting too close to Dean, the touching is probably just an extension of that. “Dean,” Cas says louder, and Dean’s pretty sure this isn’t the first time he’s said his name. “I have to go to the bathroom.”

“Oh, right.” He awkwardly slides out of the booth and lets Cas pass, feeling the uncomfortably cool spot on his leg where his hand had been.

“Hey guys,” Charlie says from behind him. “I didn’t know you were coming in today.”

Dean turns to grin at her. “Guess who beat your high score in Doom?” he asks proudly.

“Was that before or after Cas kicked your ass in multiplayer?” Sam snickers.

“Real big talk coming from the guy who let an eight year old beat him in hallway hockey the other day.”

“You told Ben to punch me!”

“Are siblings always like this?” Anna asks Charlie.

“Based on these two? You’d think so,” she shakes her head. “Where’d you two get an eight year old named Ben?”

“She’s our friend Lisa’s kid,” Dean explains. “Jess was watching him the other day and brought him over when she came to see Sam.”

“He thinks Dean is the greatest hockey player to walk the earth,” Sam rolls his eyes.

“Hey, I can’t help being this awesome.”
“I’m sure it doesn’t feed your ego at all,” Charlie jokes, getting a giggle out of Anna.

She gets their drink orders (Cas still isn’t back yet, so Dean orders him an ice tea and steadfastly ignores Sam’s stupid comments). At the last second, he follows Charlie, saying he’ll help her.

Jo is in the kitchen washing dishes, and her only acknowledgement of Dean is to spray him with water. He retaliates by hugging her from behind in his sopping wet shirt, not letting go until she manages to sock him in the stomach.

“We are not appealing to Jo because he is our common interest.” Charlie says from the soda machine.

“No ma’am. I’m here to help, honest.” He goes about looking for the iced tea fixings, wondering if Cas would like lemon or raspberry better.

“Are you seriously having trouble choosing a drink flavor?” Jo asks from the sink.

“Nice way to treat a guy who’s only stalling to spend more time with you.”

“Let him experiment, Jo,” Charlie says, and there’s something about the tone of her voice, the way that she says it, that makes Dean pause. Maybe it’s because Cas reconnecting with Anna is making this feel more urgent, with the realization that he doesn’t really depend on Dean for anything anymore, or maybe it’s because he’s been wanting to ask for a while but couldn’t figure out how. Whatever the reason, he does it.

“You think it’s ok to experiment? With iced tea?”


“That’s the only way you’ll know if you like it.”

Dean hesitates before saying carefully, “What if there’s only one kind I want to try?”

Charlie’s eyebrows fly up questioningly, an expression Dean takes comfort in because It means his boner for Cas isn’t glaringly obvious. “I’d probably approach it like I’d approach any other iced tea, Dean.”

So not really helpful, because no way is Dean approaching Cas like he would a chick without knowing with one hundred percent certainty that Cas is gonna return the favor. And since Cas has never given any indication of liking guys, that wasn’t gonna happen.

It’s not like you have either, his brain points out as they head back to the table with the drinks. But that was different, because Dean still wasn’t sold on the idea that he was anything but straight. He just really wanted to have sex with Cas, who happened to be male. And the odds of Cas wanting the same thing probably weren’t high.

Cas is back at the table, so Charlie takes their orders before heading back to the kitchen again. There’s a newspaper on the table that hadn’t been there before. “What’s that?”

“I found it in the bathroom,” Cas says, squinting at the paper. “What is Boystown?”

“What?” Cas asking about Chicago’s gay neighborhood right after he was just coming to terms with the fact that he’d never get some sort of sign that Cas was into that kind of thing had to be a coincidence, right? “Why?”
“The paper is very interested that you were there.”

“What?” Dean asks again. Sam snatches the paper before he does, and from the front cover he sees with a slight bit of relief that it’s a gossip rag, not a major paper.

“There’s not even a picture,” Sam says with disapproval, setting the paper back down. “Just reports that you were then and then a bunch of shit about what it means.”

“There’s no picture because I wasn’t there,” Dean snaps. “I’m not a fucking idiot. If I had the urge to pick up a dude I wouldn’t go there.”

“I am confused,” Anna speaks up. “What is this Boystown?”

“It’s the LGBT area of the city,” Sam explains to her. “The paper’s trying to hint that Dean is gay.”

Dean snorts. The paper. It seems like Gordon is upping his game.

“Are you afraid of prosecution?”

“They don’t do that here, Anna,” Cas says quietly.

Prosecution doesn’t sound good. Sam must interpret the look on his face. “There are serious laws about being a homosexual in Russia, Dean.”

“I know there are no laws here,” Anna frowns. “But if not, why does it worry you?”

Dean’s not really sure how to explain it. Cas is regarding him curiously too, but he’s kind of at loss for words. He could try telling them what he had been repeating to himself the past few weeks – hockey players just aren’t gay. Hockey players were real men, real men had sex with women. Sex with another man was emasculating, weak, your opponents could sense it on the ice and suddenly when they called you a faggot, the worst insult you could throw at a guy, it would be true and they would know and then it’d be all over, no one would ever take you seriously again. You’d get beat to hell, a career closed with injuries and chants of ‘Deanna Winchester’ to escort you off the ice forever.

He could tell them that, but it’s not very coherent, and he’s not sure they’d understand. Hell, he’s not even sure he can explain it to himself, not when he’s managed to pretzel his brain into believing one instance of sex with Cas was not gay, so none of that bad shit was gonna happen. Because after that one sexual experience, he’d be back to normal. Just an experiment to prove he didn’t like it.

Cas and Anna are still looking at him, and even Sam seems like he’s waiting for an answer. But he’s the first one to realize it isn’t coming. “Basically, it could still ruin his reputation,” Sam says. “A lot of hockey players rely on the tough guy image, and even if you don’t, a lot of other players consider themselves tough guys. Dean’ll get some shit over the next couple of weeks.”

“It’s fine,” Dean says quickly to Cas’ look of alarm. “I’ll just beat a guy up at the game tomorrow and it’ll be fixed.”

Cas purses his lips. “I don’t want you to.”

“It will be all right, big brother,” Anna says lightly. “Your Dean seems very strong.”

Dean ignores the stupid thrill at being called ‘his Dean’ and they move on to other topics, though Cas stays pretty moody until their food arrives and the subject has turned to New Years’.

“There’s always a party,” Sam says, “After the game. We all go out together to one of the bars in the
city. It’s the only time a year Bobby lets us get drunk.”

“Not like I need the encouragement,” Dean smiles wryly. “You’ll like it, Cas. Always a lot of drunk chicks looking for a guy to kiss at midnight.”

Anna make a noise of disapproval and Dean smiles seductively at her. “You’re invited.”

“Anna is going back to school tomorrow,” Cas tells him. “I’m sure she has something planned with her friends.”

Anna tilts her head at Cas, and she looks like Sammy does whenever he’s trying to beam something into Dean’s brain. They must come to some sort of agreement, because Anna’s nodding. “I have other things to do.”

“You should definitely come hang out with us again,” Sam says earnestly. “My girlfriend, Jess, would really like you.”

“Gee, Sammy, I forgot you had a girlfriend named Jess,” Dean says with feigned surprise. “What else can you tell me about her?”

“Shut up,” Sam scowls.

Cas leans closer to Dean and says softly, “I don’t know if you recall, Dean, but Sam is currently in a relationship with Jessica, our friend.”

Dean knows enough about Cas by now to realize he’s being a shit, and if it were anyone else, he’d call them out. But Cas’ breath was warm on his neck, and he doesn’t look like he’s gonna be moving away anytime soon, so Dean lets it be. He’ll take what he can get.

They have a game New Year’s Eve against Florida, and they win so easily Dean’s pretty sure by the second intermission the team is more focused on the clubs than the game. Balthazar yells out the name of the club they’re supposed to be heading to, and Bobby barely has time to threaten them all with bodily harm if he heard about any misbehavior before people start pushing out of the locker room.

Dean’s on his way too when he realizes Cas is taking his sweet ass time getting his shit together, so he sighs and hangs back, waiting.

“Winchester.”

He’s pretty sure this is the first time Gordon has talked to him in weeks. “Walker,” he returns, not even bothering to turn towards him. “You need somethin’?”

“What, you got some kind of claim over Krushnic or something?” he sneers.

Hell yeah he does. More claim than Gordon. But he’ll be fucked if a quote like that ends up in some paper. “Are you even going to the bar?”
“No,” Gordon’s lip curls. “You think I want a front row seat to the disgusting shit I see in the locker room every day?”

“Look, Gabriel asked if any of us cared that he doesn’t wear underwear, and you didn’t speak up then.”

“Your type think you’re so funny, don’t you?”

“My type?” Dean raises an eyebrow. “The funny people? Yeah, sometimes we admit it. Don’t tell anyone though.”

Gordon’s face screws up in disgust and he takes a step back, shaking his head. “I thought better of you, Winchester. I figured sending those idiots after you in New York would have been enough.”

Dean’s body stiffens. He’d completely forgotten about that. “You told those assholes I was gay?” he asks incredulously.

“From what I’ve seen the past few months, it ain’t too far from the truth. You’re traveling a dark road, Winchester.”

Dean can’t believe this is happening to him when he hasn’t even acted on the stuff he wants to do to Cas. He knows it’s wrong, but Gordon telling him the same thing is really pissing him off. “I’m not traveling a road,” he snaps, “An’ even if I was, stay out of my fucking business.”

“You’re not even gonna defend it, are you?” Gordon smirks. “You’re disgusted by it too.”

Dean doesn’t know how to answer that. He’s not. He has no problem with gay people. He loves Jo and Charlie, wishes he had a relationship like them. He just knows it’s wrong for him. It’s unnatural. He wasn’t fucking raised to be thinking about Cas the way he has, and he’s always squashed any urges to stare at other guys easily enough. For some reason he can’t stop this time, but it’s still not right.

Gordon must take his silence as some kind of victory, because he smiles nastily. “Don’t be the little girl daddy never wanted, Winchester.”

Dean’s never hated anybody more than he hates Gordon right now, and he knows he’s gonna punch him, would have knocked him on his ass and kicked his face in if Cas hadn’t appeared right that moment and said, “ready to go?”

“Yeah, c’mon,” Dean says quickly, and to speed Cas up he grabs his stick from his hands and starts walking.

Gordon laughs. “You bend over backwards, don’t you Winchester?”

“You’re bringing your stick home?” Dean asks loudly, focusing on Cas as they walk away from Gordon.

Cas looks a little surprised by the attention, but his mouth sets in that stubborn line of his. “I need it. What was that about?”

“Nothing,” Dean shakes his head. Cas, thank god, isn’t like Sam. He drops it, even though Dean can tell he’s still thinking about it, thinking Dean’s upset, when they hail a cab and climb in.

“Hey,” Dean says gruffly, steadily ignoring Cas squirming and rubbing against him as he tries to maneuver himself and his bag inside. “Can you bring us down to the Loop? West side.”
“Yeah, sure buddy.” The driver glances in the mirror. “You two just come out of the stadium?”

“Yes,” Cas says, trying to take his stick back from Dean. Dean holds onto it, tapping him on the head and messing up his hair. “Stop it, Dean.”

“You hawkey players?” The driver’s got the thickest Chicago accent Dean has ever heard.

“Sometimes,” Dean grins as Cas swats the stick away and thumps it against the roof of the cab. “Tonight we’re drinking.” To forget Gordon, maybe to wake up next to some girl in the morning, magically cured of his desire to see Cas naked. A guy can dream, right?

“Well if you’re on da Chicawgo team, ya deserve it,” he nods sagely. “I hear you kids are good this year.”

“You got the reason for it sitting in the back of your cab,” Dean says, tapping the top of Cas’ head with the stick again. “Guy’s so good at hockey he makes the other teams cry.”

“I do not,” Cas says with annoyance, finally managing to get the stick from Dean and smacking him with the butt end.

The taxi driver, laughs, a full body laugh that surprises Dean so much he stops struggling with the stick, allowing Cas to whack him in the shoulder again. “Ow! Son of a bitch, Cas—”

“You were hitting me first, Dean.”

“Trust me, Cas,” Dean murmurs, leaning closer without even thinking about it. “You’d know if I hit on you first.”

Cas doesn’t turn his face towards him right away, but when he does Dean realizes how close they are, how he has to practically cross his eyes to see Cas’ tongue flick across his lips before he replies, “I believe this.”

Before Dean’s able to fully register that he just accidentally flirted, never mind that Cas just fucking flirted back, the taxi makes a sputtering grinding noise that makes the driver swear loudly and pull over to the side of the road.

“You kidding me?” the driver swears loudly once again and slams out of the car to pop the hood.

“What is wrong?” Cas asks, and Dean vaguely registers disappointment as he pulls away to peer through the divider and out the windshield.

“Sounds like the car’s fucked up,” Dean replies, shifting his hockey bag off his lap and pushing the door open. “Hang on, I’ll see what’s up.”

“Be careful,” he’s pretty sure he hears Cas say, but he has no idea what he’s worrying about as he slams the door shut and heads around to the front of the car.

“You need any help, man?”

“Probably, probably,” the driver mutters as he stares down into the depths of the car. “I dunno what any of this shit is.”

Dean smiles slightly. “I know a little. Mind if I take a look?”

“Hey, be my guest,” he shrugs. “Unless you want to wait for the tow truck. I’m sure you two have a big fancy party to go to, being hawkey players and all that.”
“Bet you want to get off the side of the road too, huh?” Dean asks, pulling his gloves off and stuffing them into his coat pocket. It’s freezing out here, and his breath fogs the cold air as he leans over the hood of the car. “You working all night?”

“Ta midnight,” the guy shrugs, watching him. “You’d think I’d know how to fix my own car.”

Dean’s silent as he scans over the inner mechanics of the car in the light of the highway lamp. His hands are greasy by the time he finds the problem, and he resists wiping his hands over his pants, remembering they’re not his ratty jeans. “You got a tool kit or somethin’?”

“Oh yeah, I got plenty.” The driver uncrosses his arms and heads for the trunk, moving slightly out of the way as the side door swings open and Cas gets out of the taxi, watching him warily before heading over to Dean.

“What’s happening?” he asks. Dean notices he’s only got a thin workout jacket on and, despite him not looking cold, Dean pulls out his gloves and hands them over anyway. Cas puts them on without comment.

“Spark plugs went out,” he explains, flexing his fingers in an effort to warm them. “Why’re you out of the car? S’cold.”

Cas sets his jaw in that stubborn way of his and shifts from foot to foot in a way that clearly tells Dean he’s not getting an answer. Whatever. Cagey bastard. The driver returns with a toolbox and hands it over to Dean, who balances it on top of the taxi and flips it open, rummaging through it until he manages to find an extra pair of spark plugs.

He feels kind of weird prying the old ones out and installing the new ones with both Cas and the taxi driver watching, kind of like he’s on exhibition or something, and that leads to the thought that if the taxi driver weren’t here he might be sticking his ass out a little more, putting on more of a show.

It’s way too fucking cold for this shit.

He finishes installing the new plugs just as his hands are beginning to grow stiff, and he slams the hood with a bang before stepping back. “All set,” he announces. “Should work now.”

“You’re kidding,” the driver says, peering at the hood like he doesn’t really trust that Dean did anything. “Just like that?”

“If I did it right,” Dean says wryly.

“It’s fixed,” Cas speaks up firmly. Dean raises an eyebrow at him, but he’s already opening the door to climb back into the taxi.

“You’re a good guy,” the driver announces. “Hell of a hawkey playa.”

“Glad I could help,” Dean says before following Cas back into the car. It starts up again easily enough when the key is turned, and the driver continues chatting happily about those hockey guys who know how to do things and what a great thing for the city.

Dean tries to tune him out. Not that he’s not flattered or anything but geez. All he did was install some spark plugs.

It takes a few minutes of staring out the window and steadily not listening to the taxi driver to realize that Cas is staring at him. “What?”
“I did not know you could do that,” he says. “With cars.”

Dean grins. “I’m pretty good with my hands.”

“It must take skill,” Cas continues, and though Dean could continue in the flirty vein if he wanted to, Cas is being completely serious, staring at Dean with something a little like awe.

He shifts uncomfortably. “It’s just a car, Cas,” he says. “Not a big deal. Know where all the parts go and it’s easy to fix.”

Cas shakes his head. “I do not think it is this easy,” he decides. “You gave yourself up.”

“Gave myself up, huh?”

Cas quirks a smile. “You are very smart, Dean.”

“Ha,” Dean barks out before he can stop himself.

Cas’ eyes narrow and Dean can practically see the fight building behind his eyes. “You are.”

He wonders why Cas cares so much as he searches his face, running his eyes over the stubborn set of his jaw before nodding slowly. Then Cas blinks and he mentally shakes himself.

“Alright, alright,” Dean holds up his hands, completely unconvincing in his acceptance. He has no idea why Cas has decided to equate fucking around with an engine with intelligence. “It’s just a thing I can do, Cas. You got things you can do, right?”

Cas thinks for a minute. “I am very good at remembering.”

“Remembering?”

Dean’s not sure what he expected, but it wasn’t for Cas to bust out a bunch of Russian. He listens carefully, though as hard as he tries he can’t pick out individual words, can only appreciate them as the rumble through Cas’ throat and come out smooth and practiced, soft somehow even though his voice is still as deep and rough as ever. “What was that?” he asks when he finishes.

“A poem,” Cas replies. “I remember them.”

“Can you say it in English?” Dean asks. Poetry’s not really his thing at all, but damn if he’s not curious about what kind of things Cas thinks are worth remembering.

“No,” the word cuts sharp and quick. “It is difficult.”

“Fine,” he smiles slightly. “But for all I know you just told me to go fuck myself.”

“Trust me, I would not ask you to do that alone,” Cas mutters.

“What?”

“I can also make shapes with my tongue.”

Dean feels like he’s got whiplash and is still trying to process what Cas had said before. “What?”

And then it doesn’t matter, because Cas is sticking his tongue out, and Dean is instantly riveted. He watches as the tongue twists, folds into a flower shape, then rolls back on itself. It should be fucking weird, but he’s distracted by what that flexible tongue would feel like in his mouth, working over his
body, dipping into other places Dean’s not totally sure he’s even comfortable expressing in his head. Who the fuck is he kidding. For the first time ever, he’s curious about what something would feel like in his ass, especially something as talented as Cas’ tongue.

“Hey guy, we’re here!”

Dean practically throws himself out of the cab, almost falling onto the curb in the process. “How much do I owe you?” he calls as he tugs his duffle bag out after him, hoping that hadn’t looked as dumb as he felt.

“Ya kiddin’ me?” the driver snorts. “Ya fixed my cab, guy. No pay.”

“You sure?” Dean says doubtfully. “You took us all the way from Madison.”

The driver gives a loud snort Dean takes as a wave off, so he quirks an eyebrow and calls out a thanks again. Surprisingly Cas didn’t wait for him and is heading for the long line at the door, so Dean quickly catches up to him, grabbing his bicep. “Dude. We don’t have to wait in line.”

The bar they’re at is probably more like a club, although Dean refuses to acknowledge that. Whatever kind of place it is, it’s always been real popular for New Years’ Eve, with lines out the door. Benny knows the bouncer, so anybody on the team gets in on sight, and Dean nods at him as he pushes through the crowded door, hand still gripped around Cas’ bicep.

“Why is there a line if we don’t have to wait?”

“Because we’re special snowflakes,” Dean says, wrestling his duffle bag from him and handing them both over to coat check. “C’mon, Sammy’s ‘round here somewhere.”

His hand had slipped and is now circling Cas’ wrist. He can’t bring himself to care unless Cas has something to say about it, and the guy’s got no complaints. Instead he’s scanning the bar, taking it in, and, weirdly enough, Dean can tell he’s cataloging escape routes, exactly like he would do. Seems neither of them are that into this type of scene.

The room is dominated by a large square bar, with about five bartenders bustling behind it, a huge column in the middle straining under the weight of every type of booze imaginable. There are small tables scattered all over the place and large booths tucked into corners. A roped off, platformed area marks the VIP section, where Dean knows he’s supposed to go as someone “famous” but will avoid as long as possible. Towards the back is a large space for dancing, already teeming with people dancing to the current DJ, who is blasting a type of music Dean’s not familiar with and would be happy not to hear again.

The lighting is dim, but Dean still knows Cas’ eyes are narrowed. “This is where you like to come?” he asks.

“If I find the right girl,” Dean smirks, but he knows the comment has gone over Cas’ head. “I don’t really hang out here. This is more Gabriel and Balthazar’s thing. It’s a cool place for a party, though.”

Cas looks at him and if possible his eyes narrow more. Dean’s about to ask him what the fuck he’s staring at when, to his surprise, Cas reaches up and brushes a finger over the cut of Dean’s cheekbone, once, twice.

Dean stands there dumbly and lets Cas basically fondle him because he has no idea what’s going on. And Cas’ hand is weirdly gentle, for a hockey player.
This looks so gay, standing here in the middle of a bar. He knows it does, and it’s that thought that forces words out of his mouth. “What the hell are you doing?”

Cas wordlessly shows him his fingers, blackened with grease, before absentmindedly rubbing them together. “It is hard for you not to look nice, but I didn’t think you wanted the oil on your face anyway.”

“You don’t tell a dude he looks nice while he’s holding onto your wrist, Cas. He’ll get the wrong idea.”

“So let go,” Cas says pointedly.

Dean opens his mouth to retort that there’s no way in hell he’s letting go now when he’s stopped by Gabriel, who makes his appearance known by shoving a beer bottle into Dean’s mouth.

“FUCK Gabriel,” Dean snatches the beer away from him. “You really gonna make my first broken tooth be because of a beer bottle?”

“Die like you lived, bucko,” Gabriel grins. He’s holding some garishly purple drink in a large, almost bubble like glass, and he uses this to point at Dean’s hand around Cas’ wrist, “Did I miss the memo about the light role play? I want a cabana boy.”

Dean drops Cas’ wrist like it’s on fire and takes a pull of the beer. The sooner he finishes this, the sooner he can go for the hard stuff.

“I believe Dean was worried I would get lost.”

“In that case,” Gabriel grins widely, and suddenly the purple drink is gone (where the fuck did he stash it) and he’s grabbing both their wrists. “Come with me, children, to a world of pure imagination, booze, and sex.”

Dean’s a little worried Gabriel is going to lead them into some back room and is relieved to realize that he’s only heading towards one of the booths off to the side of the bar. As they draw closer he can see that Balthazar, Benny, Kevin, Sam and Jess are already there, and he relaxes even more.

“I see our fearless leader has finally arrived,” Balthazar calls cheerfully. The table is already littered with empty bottles and glasses. “Take a trip somewhere, boys?”

“Cab trouble,” Dean grunts, shoving into the booth next to a happy looking Sam. There’s probably more room to follow Gabriel into the other side, but Cas comes right after him, pressing his body to Dean’s from shoulder to knee.

“Is that a euphemism?” Kevin asks curiously.

“Deano needed to clear out a tailpipe,” Gabriel cackles.

“Bite me.”

“You can bite a mozzarella stick,” Jessica says cheerfully, pointing to a plate in the middle of the table. “Sam insisted you’d be hungry.”

“What, no beef?”

Dean, who’d just picked up a stick, throws it at Gabriel. “You lookin’ for sex or something tonight, Gabe?”
“Ask him when his boner isn’t pressing into my thigh,” Balthazar says dryly.

Dean hands a mozzarella stick to Cas and looks to his brother. “You’re awfully quiet.”

Sam looks pained. “What? No I’m not.”

“Don’t interrupt his hand job,” Gabriel sniffs, picking up his drink.

Dean turns his head to look incredulously at his brother, whose face has gone beet red. “Seriously?”

Jess just smiles sweetly at him, and Sam goes even redder.

“What’s happening?” Cas asks, trying to look under the table. Unfortunately that just gets his head closer and closer to Dean’s crotch. And it’s not like he wants Cas to see his little brother’s balls being fondled anyway.

Dean nudges him. “Let’s get a drink,” he says roughly, and reluctantly Cas stands up. They head over to the bar, and Dean leans over the edge, trying to catch the attention of a bartender over the loud music. He feels a body crowding up into his back and stiffens, because what the hell, Cas…

“Order the Purple Nurple!” Gabriel shouts.

Dean throws his elbow out and forces Gabriel off his ass. Turns out Cas is next to him, looking quietly amused. “What do you want, Gabe?”

“You think I wanna watch your brother get off?” Gabriel snorts, taking a large slurp out of his drink. “I don’t want to step on your toes there, Deano.”

“You’re sick, man,” Dean makes a face. “Kevin and Balthazar still over there?”

“Don’t think little Kev has figured it out yet. And you know Balthazar.”

“Great,” he mutters. “Benny?”

“Around here somewhere with his lady.”

He rolls his eyes. “How ‘bout you go find a lady, Gabe?”

“Why do you think I’m hanging around the two studliest guys in the bar?” Gabe retorts. “It’s too early to pick up chicks, Deano. You know witching hour starts right before the ball drops.”

“We would like Purple Nurples,” Dean hears Cas say loudly and carefully next to him. He turns to see that a bartender had finally wandered close enough for Cas to catch her attention. She’s pretty enough, with dark eyes and dark skin, but the look of slight disdain on her face isn’t doing anything for him. Gabriel, on the other hand, perks right up.

“How many?” she asks in a bored tone of voice.

“Six,” Dean says quickly. Cas looks disgruntles, so he adds, “Add a Jack and Coke and a White Russian, will ya?” he quickly pulls out his card and hands it over. Might as well start a tab.

“Anything else?” she asks, a hint of sarcasm entering her tone.

“Yeah,” Gabriel drawls, “how about you and I—,”

Dean kicks his ankle, hard, and Gabriel yelps loudly, letting the bartender roll her eyes and walk
away.

“Can you wait to be creepy until after she’s done handling our drinks?”

“Perhaps Gabriel also wanted to be handled,” Cas suggests, glancing at Dean. “The bartender looked more than capable.”

“Ha,” Gabriel says triumphantly. “Cassie gets it.”

“Cassie’s being a smartass,” Dean mutters, causing Cas to glare at him. Dean’s surprised when the bartender comes back with their drinks and Gabriel keeps his mouth shut, but the reason why becomes apparent when they’re standing at one of the small tables scattered around the room.

“She was pretty, wasn’t she Cassie boy?”

Cas, sipping on his White Russian, looks unimpressed, but then he usually does. “Who?”

“The bartender,” Gabriel grins lasciviously and jerks his thumb back towards the bar. “Damn, I’d love to have her boss me around. But I’m a gracious host.”

Dean knows where this is going, and he doesn’t like it. But he’s not supposed to not like it. They’re teammates, they help one another pick up girls all the time, playing one another’s wing man like it’s second nature. Cas has never been a lady’s man, it’s only natural that Gabriel would try to help him out on New Years’.

“You’re his roommate,” Gabriel turns his attention on Dean when Cas doesn’t say anything. “He some kind of secret Casanova?”

Usually after a game, they order pizza and put on a movie. Somehow Dean ends up gravitating onto Cas’ bed. Half the time he jerks awake to find Cas reading one of those stupid Supernatural books Sam got him into, his hand resting on Cas’ leg and the credits rolling softly in the background because the considerate asshole had turned down the volume.

He’s not telling Gabriel that.

“She reminded me a little of the women in Russia.”

“Now we’re getting somewhere!” Gabriel crows. “Tell us about those Russian women, Cassie, we’ll find something you like.”

“They were very cold,” Cas continues, glancing at Dean. “I did not know what they were thinking. A woman who was interested in me acted much the same as a woman who was not interested.”

“So what’d you do?” Dean asks despite himself.

He shrugs. “You know. I did not date.”

Dean picks up one of the shots and throws it back.

“They were very nice about kissing with me, though.”

The alcohol fucking burns.

“We are gonna get you laid,” Gabriel says seriously, staring at Cas. “We are gonna get you laid so hard by a nice all American lady.”
“Well hey,” Dean quickly takes another shot, swallows. “We really gotta do that, Gabe? Maybe Cas just wants to have a good time and…not do that.”

Cas frowns at him. “I thought I needed to kiss someone at midnight? Is this not a tradition?”

“That’s the spirit!” Gabriel laughs, clapping Cas on the back. “First the midnight kiss, then a New Years’ bang, Cassie. What’re ya looking for?” he pushes a shot towards Castiel. “Drink this.”

Cas obediently throws the shot back and screws his face up, maybe at the taste, maybe at Gabe’s question. “What do you mean?”

“He wants to know what kind of girl you like,” Dean says, because this is happening. It’s happening and he should let it, but that doesn’t mean he has to work hard at it.

Get Cas a knock out who’ll keep him company for the night. It’ll make him feel a little less guilty, and no harm done. Not like he’s gonna find his wife somewhere in the bar.

Cas seems to be considering the question very seriously, and in the meantime Gabriel pushes him another shot. “I like freckles,” he says finally.

“Like Deano’s got?” Gabriel asks, slurping hard at his second drink. Dean stares hard into his empty glass. He needs another. In the meantime he grabs his last Purple Nurple.

“Yes,” Cas says, more firmly. “And I like when they smile.”

“I’m gonna go get another drink,” Dean announces, and, not waiting for an answer, he heads back to the bar. It takes him a lot longer to grab a bartender than it did Cas (something he’s choosing not to read into) but finally he manages to get a guy’s attention, leaning over the bar so he’s able to hear him. “You got any good whiskey back there?”

“Finally, a guy after my own heart,” the guy’s big, bearded, kinda reminds him of Benny, and Dean takes an instant liking to him.

He laughs. “Tough crowd tonight, huh?”

“You’re telling me,” the guy says, pulling out a bottle and sloshing some whiskey into a glass. “Everyone here wants a Long Island or some damn drink I never heard of in unnatural colors.”

“Sounds like my teammate.”

“Your teammate, huh?” the guy raises an eyebrow and passes over the drink, looks like he’s in no rush to leave Dean. “You on some kind of team?”

“I play for the Cavalry,” Dean shrugs, because it’s really not a big deal here, on New Years’ Eve, when he’s sure Vince Vaughn is probably somewhere in the bar as well. Shouldn’t be a big deal anyway, but at least for the night everybody else will see it that way too.

The guy squints at him, smiles a little and holds out his hand. “Name’s Eli.”

“Dean,” Dean replies, shaking his hand. “You having a good night?”

“A busy one, at least,” Eli grins, “Can’t complain about the company.”

“Neither can my buddies,” Dean glances back at Gabriel and Castiel for the first time since he walked over to the bar. Gabriel’s managed to attract a group of women, three of them, and while two were exactly the supermodel type he’d come to expect from the goalie, the girl hanging around Cas
She’s pretty. In a really plain, unassuming way, standing close to Cas but not hanging all over him, speaking earnestly. Cas is listening intently, like he always does, but suddenly the girl breaks into a laugh at whatever was being said. And Cas smiles.

Dean’s stomach drops and his hand clenches around the glass in it. That’s his smile.

“How’s it going, Dean?”

“Sorry,” Dean quickly turns his attention back to Eli. “You got anything stronger than this?”

Eli raises an eyebrow at his still half full glass, and Dean quickly gulps it down, the burn barely even registering. “C’mon, man. Gotta ring in the New Year right.”

Eli pours Dean a glass of something, he’s not sure what, but a few of them do the trick. At least, a few of them do the trick when he stops looking back at Cas. Every time he looks, the girl is getting closer and closer, and Cas is smiling more and more. Dean drinks more. His stomach feels empty, gotta fill it somehow.

“You,” Eli declares when he gets back from serving another customer, “drink like a man dying in the desert.”

This is the funniest joke Dean’s heard in a while, and he must be really appreciative, because Eli looks surprised before his big bearded face breaks into a grin. “You are gone, brother.”

Maybe it’s the brother that does it. Only Benny has ever called him that. Maybe it’s the alcohol. He’s had a lot. Maybe it’s Cas and this girl he gives Dean’s smile too. Whatever. He feels completely comfortable saying, “Jesus, you’re pretty.”

Eli’s eyebrow raises, and this is where Dean should feel that pure flash of panic. But he doesn’t. Just thinks miserably about Cas, who apparently is interested in other people, more than he’s interested in Dean. Which is fucking stupid. Dean is awesome.

He laughs. He thinks it’s out loud. Still lying to himself, even when drunk. Cas deserves pretty freckled girls, not broken asshole hockey players.

“That’s flatterin’,” Eli says, and Dean struggles to focus back on him. “But I think you’re a little drunk there, Dean.”


“Who’s Cas?”

“Buddy of mine,” he nods back towards Cas and almost falls off the stool.

He thinks Eli sees, because he nods and says, “I see what you mean,” and Dean knows he must be talking about Cas, ‘cause no one else was attractive enough for him to ‘see what you mean’. Eli leans closer and smiles slightly at Dean. “Prettier than me, though? Not sure about that one.”

“Oh yeah,” Dean squints at him and waves a vague hand. “You got...you got nice eyes. But Cas has got blue eyes.” He frowns. “You’re bigger ‘an Cas, though. I gotta be the big one.”

“Makes sense,” Eli nods. “But I bet I’m a better kisser.”
“Dunno,” Dean says truthfully, focusing on Eli’s lips. They’re alright, from what he can tell behind all that beard. He’s not sure if he could kiss a guy with a beard. It’d feel weird, wouldn’t it?

He barely realizes that’s he’s leaning forward, practically halfway over the bar, when there’s a hand on his shoulder so familiar to him he almost hates himself for knowing the shape and weight of that hand. Almost.

“Dean?” Cas says. “Are you alright?”

“M’fine,” Dean grumbles, shrugging Cas’ hand off his shoulder. “Where’s the girl?”

“Girl?”

“You want a drink?” Eli interrupts. Cas looks up in surprise, and Dean watches as he shifts a little, putting a shoulder between him and Dean.

“Sure,” he sounds out slowly. “What is going on over here?”

“I’m Eli,” Eli grins and slides him a drink. “Dean here was just telling me how pretty I was.”

Cas glances at Dean like he’s waiting for his cue to laugh, but Dean is distracted by the dark hair curling right behind his ear and only gives a distracted, “Yeah.”

“Yeah?” Cas repeats, tuning back to Eli. Dean can’t see the look Cas is giving him, mostly because that curl is brushing the tip of his ear and Dean wants to touch it, badly, but he does catch Eli’s grin back at Cas. “Come back to the table, Dean.”

“No,” Dean says stubbornly, totally aware of how bitter he sounds. “You’re busy.”

“Here’s an idea,” Eli suggests, “How about you both stick around here for a bit and drink. I’ll take care of ya.” He pushes another glass each at Dean and Cas, then heads off to fill someone else’s drink order.

Dean watches Cas glare at the glass of alcohol like it offended his sister before grabbing it and swallowing it all done in one go. Which is fucking badass. Probably not fair though. Dean’s pretty sure Russian kids are given vodka in their bottles.

“How long you been drinkin’?”

“You were flirting,” Cas accuses gruffly.

“Wha’?” Dean’s stomach jolts again. “Fuck you. I’m drunk.”

“I don’t believe that works as an excuse.”

“You don’t work as an excuse,” Dean grumbles. He’s starting to have trouble staying on his stool, although he’s pretty sure he wasn’t moving. Luckily this warm wall at his side is keeping him steady.

Ah. Cas’ shoulder. Whatever.

“Castiel?”

Dean groans internally at the soft feminine voice, but it must not be internal as he thinks because Cas bucks him off his shoulder and sends him wobbling. Luckily the bar catches him next, and he slumps there. The pretty girl is here, smiling at Cas. “Did you get your drink?”
“Yes, thank you,” Cas nods. “I’ll be back shortly.”

“Great!” she touches his arm, a blink and you’d miss it touch, but Dean sees. Dean sees and his stomach roils, and there’s a feeling in his chest and creeping up his throat that he doesn’t like at all. He feels like he does right before he’s going to fight during a game, but not the fun, show offy fights, the fights where the only thing that matters is the primal urge to fuck up the guy in front of you, to make sure he’d think three times before pulling shit again.

He knows he’s glaring sullenly after some innocent woman as she walks away, but he can’t really bring himself to care. Cas is his…friend, or whatever. He’s allowed to be protective.

“I don’t like her,” he announces. He’s not sure he’s saying it to anyone in particular, just knows he wants to say it, but Cas scowls darkly at him.

“Why not?”

“She called you Castiel,” Dean says, the name slipping out like the dirtiest word imaginable.

“That is my name, Dean.”

“No,” he mutters. “It’s Cas.” The nickname he gave him. His Cas.

“You’re being impossible,” Cas growls. Eli must have come by without Dean noticing, because there’s a line of shots between them now, and Cas grabs one. Dean wonders how much he’s had to drink. He seems fine, even though Dean knows it must be a substantial amount.

“Know what?” Dean says, using the bar to push himself off his stool. He’s taller than Cas. He’s not sure how he forgot that. “ Doesn’t matter anyways. You dunno what to do.”

“I don’t know what to do,” he states flatly.

“Yeah.” Dean leans forward, until his nose is nudging Cas’, and Cas eyes are so wide trying to see what Dean is doing that Dean is drowning in blue. “You dunno what to do Cas.”

His lips are catching slightly on Cas’, dry rasping on dry, and he longs to surge forward, to lick and fucking actually feel them. But that’d be kissing. He’s pretty drunk, not drunk enough for that. But then Cas’ eyes flutter closed and Dean feels his eyelashes brush against his own cheeks, and he lets out a short huff and pulls back.

Cas’ eyes open slowly and he regards Dean hotly. “I know what to do, Dean.”

Dean bites his lip and managed to mumble something about going to find Sam before leaving, quickly, because he actually cannot handle the way Cas was looking at him.

Cas was looking at him like he wanted Dean to press his lips to his own. Like he was daring him. Dean’s too drunk to know what to do with that, other than to do it.

Not in a crowded bar, the sane part of his brain says.

He finds Sam with Benny closer to the dance floor, figures out why a second later when he realizes Jess is dancing with a dark haired woman he knows is Andrea. “You guys are pervs,” he snorts.

Benny takes one look at him and smirks. “You’re drunk, Dean.”

“So?” Dean retorts. “I’m not the one watching my wife dance with my teammate’s girlfriend.”
“What were you doing with Cas?” Sam shoots back immediately, and Dean shuts up and takes the beer Sam is holding.

“Nothing,” he says darkly, taking a large swig of the beer. He’s so drunk it tastes like water,

“Dude,” Sam says, peering closer, “You’re really drunk, aren’t you? You’re so grumpy you’re almost back at sober.”

Dean scowls at him. Sam’s right. He’s at the stage of drunk where he knows exactly what’s going on but doesn’t care. At all. “Cas and Gabe got girlfriends, so I came over here. You two assholes seemed like a good idea at the time.”

“Cas got a girlfriend?” Sam asks, looking funny. Some kind of stare exchange that goes over Dean’s head is passed between Benny and Sam, and then Benny is handing him another beer and Sam is talking to him about basketball, which Dean isn’t interested in but finds himself listening intently to anyway.

He loses the next few hours to alcohol and talking to Sam and Benny. He remembers Benny having him in a headlock at some point, he remembers pouring a beer down Sam’s back. He remembers dancing with some girl who’s no longer anywhere in sight. Soon he realizes he’s in the VIP section and that somehow Gabriel and the group of girls he’s collected, along with Balthazar, are surrounding him again.

“Grab a lady!” Balthazar calls, but Dean has spotted Cas making his way up onto the platform and, miracle of fucking miracles, he’s unsteady. Cas is drunk, not that Dean is aware enough to appreciate it, but still.

“Cas!” he calls, and Cas spots him immediately, making his way over to the booth. Dean tries to move over and create enough room, but he doesn’t make it in time, and Cas must not care, because he drops onto Dean’s lap without hesitation. Dean automatically wraps an arm around his waist and hauls him closer, burying his face in Cas’ hair.

That cold smell that Dean loves so much clings to Cas, along with something else he can’t out a name to, and Dean breaths in it, feeling the most comfortable he has all night. Suddenly he’s tired. “Where’s the girl?” he asks, nudging closer to Cas’ ear so he can hear him.

“I do not know,” Cas sounds out slowly, trying to twist to look at Dean. But Dean just pulls him closer, back to chest. He really doesn’t want to let go.

“Stop squirmin’.”

“Am…am I on your lap?”

“You sat here first,” Dean says defensively, and he waits for Cas to jump up in disgust. But he doesn’t, just seems to relax more.

“Where were you?” he murmurs lowly, turning his head again and bumping Dean’s nose with his cheek. Stubble rasps along his face and his grip involuntarily tightens again.

“I was here. Where were you?”

“At the bar.” Cas hiccups a little, Dean can feel his stomach jump under his arm, and he has to close his eyes to stop a stupid smile from forming. He’s not sure he manages.

“Eli got you drunk,” he sings softly.
“Deano!” Gabriel yells in his ear, and Dean snaps his head back, worried for a split second that Gabriel is gonna…well. Cas is on his lap. But Gabriel is wearing stupid looking ‘2015’ glasses and has a top hat on, so he’s probably not holding much leverage. “Five minutes!”

“Five minutes to what?” he calls back stupidly, but Gabriel just grins sloppily and wiggles his glasses at him, and sluggishly his brain clicks it all together. Five minutes to midnight.

He’s gotta piss.

“Up and attem, Cas,” he says, shifting his legs a little, and he thinks Cas gets up a little reluctantly, but that might have been the alcohol. The bathrooms are in the far back, past the dance floor, and Dean does his best to stumble and push past everybody and into the room.

The noise level in here is a shocking contrast to the one out in the bar area, and there’s only one other guy at a urinal as Dean heads over to lean his arm against the wall and get rid of the past three hours of alcohol.

“Hey,” the guy slurs next to him, and Dean peers over his outstretched arm at him. “Dean Winchester?”

“Yeah,” Dean nods, and usually he’d say more, but he’s in a bathroom, and on top of it he’s not really interested in welcoming the New Year over a urinal. “Come find me in the bar man, I’ll be here.”

The guy nods at him, glassy eyed, and Dean doubts he’ll remember, but he zips up and claps the guy on his back anyway.

The bathroom is at the end of a long dark hallway that leads back into the main area. Fumbling with his phone proves it to be 11:59, and Dean’s pretty sure he’s not gonna make it back to anybody he knows. Dim shadows and certain noises prove that the hallway is definitely the place you want to be to end the year with a bang, though, so maybe there’s some chick nearby who wouldn’t mind kissing him for the hell of it.

It’s hard to navigate because of all the couples, and from what Dean can tell he’s pretty sure his paying more attention to his feet then to what’s in front of him is why he gets slammed back into the wall.

“Sorry,” a familiar rough voice says earnestly, and Dean’s body responds without his brain’s permission, grabbing Cas’ hips to steady himself.

“Cas? What are you doing?”

“Dean,” Cas says, sounding relieved. “I couldn’t find you.”

“M’right here,” Dean says, squeezing his hips. “M’looking for someone to kiss.”

“TEN,” someone chants loudly near them. And Dean swears loudly. He sees Cas’ eyes widen in the dark.

“What?”

“Too late.” He swears again.

“EIGHT, SEVEN, SIX…”
“You need a kiss,” Cas states, tilting his head.

“Yeah, it’s tradition.”

Dean’s eyes have adjusted and he can see Cas clearly now. His hair is mussed like he’s been running a hand through it all night, slightly damp with the sweat of living among so many people for the past few hours, and his eyes are wider than usual, probably from all the alcohol.

He slides his gaze down to Cas’ lips, which are still somehow chapped, and like Cas has read his mind, he slips his tongue out to wet them.

“THREE, TWO…”

Dean doesn’t hear the one. With a jerk at the sound of the word two, Cas had him pressed hard into the wall, and Dean only has a second to register the knee shoved firmly between his legs and that Cas has somehow got his hands under Dean’s shirt and pressed against his skin before there’s warm tongue licking tentatively at his lips.

Dean makes a noise of surprise and opens his mouth automatically, and that’s all Cas needs to tilt his head, slot their lips more carefully together.

He loves this. In his drunken haze he’s scared of how much he loves this, how right it feels as his grip around Cas’ hips tightens enough to bruise. He feels Cas jump slightly at the pressure, pressing just hard enough against Dean’s cock for him to groan into his mouth, a groan Cas eagerly swallows down as he surges closer. This is the only incentive Dean needs to get more aggressive, even though he’s the one pressed against the wall, and he bites down on Cas’ lip, slides a hand up his back to Cas’ neck to shove a hand into his hair and direct his movement.

This is the hardest he’s gotten from just kissing since he was a teenager, surprising since he’s drunk, though Cas definitely isn’t slacking with the rocking movement of his knee, forcing the friction of denim against Dean’s groin. Why the fuck hadn’t he done this sooner? He could have been kissing Cas for months now, pulling him onto the couch and on top of him and holding that perfect ass in his hands as Cas ground down onto his dick – and suddenly Dean is fucking angry, because he wants this and there’s some niggle feeling in the back of his brain whispering no, and that pisses him the fuck off. Cas seems to get the shift in mood. A throaty groan rumbles through his chest and he slides a hand just inside Dean’s waistband, caressing his hipbone with his thumb, and Dean breaks their kiss, breathing heavily.

“How the fuck is this, an all star party in the hallway?”

Somehow Gabriel has found them, and he drags them back into the main room while managing to shove shots at them at the same time. “Drink, assholes!” he encourages. “It’s 2015!”
Dean’s pretty sure he drinks until the night ends.

Dean feels like shit. He feels like shit and he knows the sheets under his cheek aren’t his, because he has a memory foam mattress and this mattress definitely doesn’t remember him. In all honesty, the mattress is being difficult on purpose.

There’s something warm pressed against his back, and even though this isn’t his mattress he figures it must be the dog. But Chekov is squirming and has some kind of weird, ‘Dean doesn’t want to be woken up radar,’ which is definitely the case at the moment, and whatever’s in bed with him ain’t moving.

He cracks an eye, swears gruffly when he realizes he has a splitting headache and the light is going to try and kill him. This thought is immediately chased from his head when he realizes he’s looking at a tuft of dark hair, and that his hand is actually shoved under Cas’ stomach.

He doesn’t know why he keeps doing that.

He scrambles into sitting position, looking around, disoriented. The good news is they’re in Cas’ room, so at least he got home alright and he’s not lying face down in the gutter. The bad news – he’s in bed with Cas.

Fuck. Fuck.

His boxer shorts are still on. That’s a good sign, right?

“Dean,” Cas groans into the pillow. “Stop moving the bed.”

Cas is not a morning person, Dean found that out a long time ago, and he’s pretty amused by how grumpy Cas can get when Dean tries to talk to him before noon. Right now though, it’s more matter of making sure what he thinks happened didn’t fucking happen.

He can’t believe this. He did not have sex with Cas. There’s no fucking way.

“What happened?” he asks, and his voice sounds weird to his own ears.

“What?” Cas says grumpily. He cracks one brilliant blue eye to stare at Dean. And fuck it if Dean doesn’t want to kiss him again.

Jesus. That’s right. They fucking kissed. The second he thinks of it it all comes flooding back to him, his chest tightens in fear and he can’t breathe. “What the fuck did we do?”

“Kissed,” he grunts. “You wanted to. For the new year.”

“I didn’t want to kiss you!” Dean snaps, pushing off the bed and shoving a hand into his hair.

“You’re supposed to kiss some girl drunk off her ass and then never speak to her again!”

Cas rolls over and props himself up on an elbow to regard Dean steadily. Dean tries to ignore the shirt riding up to reveal bare, muscled stomach. “It’s not a very big deal, Dean.”
“How is it not a big deal?” Dean asks frantically. “I kissed a fucking teammate? A guy! Jesus, we didn’t do anything else, did we?”

“No,” Cas sets his jaw. “We did not. It is not a big deal.”

“How?” he insists, because he really does need an explanation for how this doesn’t change his entire world. Yeah, he fucking wanted to have sex with Cas, but that hadn’t happened, had it? Worse than that, they’d finally done something, they’d kissed, and Dean still wanted to have sex with him.

Somehow, just kissing was fucking worse. Way worse.

Why was he so attracted to Cas, god dammit, he is not fucking gay.

“Men who are friends kiss all the time in Russia,” Cas shrugs casually, but his eyes are serious and watching him carefully. “Is no big deal.”

“They do?” Dean asks doubtfully.

“Dean,” Cas says seriously. “Please do not worry. I’m not romantically attracted to you. We are friends, correct?”

Oh. Okay.

Dean rubs a hand over his face and nods, because right. Nothing to worry about. Cas wasn’t attracted to him.

Fucking great news. This was good.

“Good,” he says out loud, and he laughs, the only way he knows how to keep whatever emotion showing on his face. “’Cause lemme tell you man, that’d be messed up.”

“Messed up,” Cas repeats, raising an eyebrow. His eyes are kind of weird – Dean’d never really noticed how warm they usually are, whenever he sees them. Now they’re flat, regarding Dean with a steady coolness, and he’s not sure why. He doesn’t like it, though.

“Yeah,” Dean shrugs awkwardly. “Because we’re friends, and teammates, and you know…guys. It’d be kind of weird, don’t you think?”

Cas rolls off the bed and stretches his hands above his head, drawing Dean’s attention to the taut muscles of his abdomen, his boxer shorts sliding low enough that the sharp hip bones that fit so perfectly into Dean’s hands are on full display. “Rest assured,” he says shortly. “In my country it is not ‘weird’ to show such affection for a friend.”

He heads off to the bathroom and closes the door sharply behind him, and Dean is left feeling embarrassed over ogling the guy right after he’d clearly called Dean a friend and the vague sense that he upset Cas, somehow. So he gathers up his clothes, shoving his jeans on and heading out of the apartment and upstairs to his own before Cas gets out of the shower.

Maybe slinking away isn’t the best idea. But he’s not really slinking, is he? He’s just…he’s pretty sure Cas doesn’t want him around. And he doesn’t really feel like being around Cas right now either.

His phone rings almost as soon as he’s shut the front door, and he answers without thinking, surprised to hear Cas’ voice on the other end. “Did you run away?” he asks, a note of incredulity to his tone.
“Are you calling me from downstairs?” Dean shoots back defensively.

Cas snorts and says whatever, which he definitely learned from Sam, and then he mumbles something Dean hears but doesn’t really believe. “What?”

“I said,” Cas growls, “That I should have known you would not be mature enough for this.”

“Oh, fuck you, Cas,” Dean snaps. “Mature enough for what? Mature enough for you to get all handsy and then tell me I’m not attractive, it’s just some friends thing? What the hell is that?”

“Do you want me to find you attractive?”

“Not…no, not like that!” Dean sputters. Except he does, he totally does. “Jesus. Just don’t kiss me again!”

“I told you,” Cas says stubbornly. “I only kissed you because you wanted me to.”

“Bullshit, Cas. You wanted to kiss me too.”

“No,” he counters. “I didn’t. And since it seems you didn’t want to either, this conversation is pointless.”

“Fine,” he says in frustration and hangs up the phone before Cas can get the last word in. He’s pissed, mostly because he can’t figure out why the hell there’s a hard knot of anger sitting in his stomach. He fucking didn’t want Cas to kiss him or find him attractive, but at the same damn time, what a fucking great thing to know, that Cas didn’t find him attractive. And now that Dean has successfully pushed him away, he should be happy, shouldn’t he? Cas gets the rules now. The rules mean no sex. Not that Cas ever wanted any damn sex, anyway, apparently.

Dean falls on top of his comforter and attempts to go back to sleep, jeans be damned.

Turns out his brain isn’t going to let him sleep though, despite the splitting headache that came roaring back the second he wasn’t distracted with yelling at Castiel. So he swallows some Advil dry and sits sullenly on the couch with the TV on mute, one hand grudgingly buried in Chekov’s fur. ‘Least the dog still seemed to think he was a decent human being.

Two hours later and he’s still struggling to figure out why the hell he’s so mad a guy he doesn’t want attracted to him doesn’t find him attractive when he hears the front door open and Chekov bolts off the couch.

“Dean?” Sam calls, and Dean glances down at himself, still shirtless and in last night’s jeans. The View is on TV. At least his headache’s not so bad anymore, but it’s not like he’s eaten yet today. Or done anything, really. It’s gonna take Sammy two seconds to—

“What’s wrong?” Sam asks, brow furrowed as Chekov bounces around his feet, demanding attention.

“Nothing,” Dean says casually, training his eyes to the TV. Rosie O’Donnell is getting heated about something. “Just hungover.”

“Uh huh,” Sam says slowly. “Did you get home okay last night?”

Dean shoots his brother a look and Sam returns with a bitch face. “Maybe you got mugged on the way home, Dean, it’s not like you tell me anything anymore.”
“What the hell is that supposed to mean?”

“It means you’ve been acting strange lately,” Sam shoots back. “Benny’s noticed too, so have Gabe and Balthazar. You’re not as subtle as you think you are.”

Dean shakes his head, because he knows none of them have been able to guess that he’s been playing will I won’t I about having sex with Cas since before Christmas, and nothing Sam says will make him spill those beans. “You guys need a hobby. There’s gotta be stuff you’re interested in other than me.”

Sam rolls his eyes. “Now you’re deflecting.”

“Here’s a thought,” Dean looks at him, raising an eyebrow. “How about you make breakfast or get the hell out of my apartment?”

Sam huffs off into the kitchen and Dean hauls himself off the couch the second he hears a pan clang on the stove top, a mixture of fear and guilt forcing him to shoulder Sam out of the way and continue the process of making omelets on his own. Sam is uncharacteristically quiet while Dean cooks, seemingly content to give the dog all of his attention instead.

Dean stares down at the mess of egg, vegetable and meat in the pan. Sure, he can admit it. It hurts his pride that Cas didn’t want to kiss him. He’d wanted to have sex with the guy, after all, and that looked like it was out of the cards now. Cas didn’t find him attractive, so he’d probably have to live the rest of his life with ‘what if’ scenario popping up whenever he ran out of any spank bank material.

Except. That kiss had been good. Amazing. Dean’s a good kisser, and he’s done it a lot. He knows what sexual chemistry is, what it means to click and fit with someone, when all the tabs lock in and the gears whirl and the alarm that says ‘sex needs to happen immediately’ begins to blare. It was like one of those kisses. Yeah, a little different, for some reason lacking the usual urgency Dean always felt to get away from kissing and into the fun stuff, but still, he felt it.

Cas had to have felt it too, even as inexperienced as the guy was. Which means…Cas really didn’t like him in that way. At all. And the kiss was just a dumb kiss.

“Dean!” Sam says with alarm, and Dean flips the omelet off the pan just in time to save it, quickly transferring it to a plate and sliding it over to Sam. He manages to make his much faster, trying hard not to think about Cas, but the intent glare Sam’s giving him says that’s not working.

“Dude,” is all he says.

Dean has no idea when that became the magic word. Or maybe it’s that word coupled with the concerned vibes rolling of Sammy in waves. He doesn’t know, but he blurs out, “Is it normal to kiss other guys?” before shoving half his omelet into his mouth.

Sam blinks and sits back in his stool, clearly not expecting the question at all, which actually affords Dean a little relief. But then he says, “Is this about the crush you had on Benny?” and Dean’s immediately tensing up again.

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“I didn’t have a crush on Benny!” he says, scandalized.

“Yeah you did,” Sam nods. “Maybe it wasn’t like, sexual or anything, but you pulled out all the stops when he first joined the team a few years back. The whole posturing, I’m the captain, let me show you the ropes fascination thing. I thought you were actually gonna open up a little, but then you guys settled into this really intense friendship and it kind of got sidelined.”
Dean stares at his brother. He remembers Benny joining the team, and yeah, he’d thought he was cool and pretty fucking strong. Dean’d always admired enforcers. But he’d never had the type of problems he’s having with Cas with Benny. “I’m not gay, Sam.”

“Bisexual,” his brother shrugs. “Or incidental. I always figured you were a little further along on the Kinsey scale. Like a two?”

Dean ignores everything his brother just said in favor of the one thing. “I’m not bi either, Jesus, Sam.”

He frowns. “Then why are you asking me about kissing guys?”

“Because you’re supposed to be the smart one!”

Sam looks confused and says, “Of course it’s normal to kiss other guys.”

“For gay men,” Dean says, pointing his fork at him. “It’s normal for gay men to kiss other guys. Can straight guys kiss? That normal?”

“Dean,” he says slowly, hesitantly, “if you…if you’re having trouble coming to terms with something you’ve done…”

“No, no, no,” Dean interrupts loudly. “No, Sam. You know, like Europeans do weird touchy feely shit all the time! The guys kiss each other, right? And it doesn’t mean shit.”

“Oh,” Sam’s expression clears and he takes a bite of his food. “Yeah, they kiss sometimes. In greeting or to say thanks, or whatever. And no, it’s not weird and it’s not gay.” He wrinkles his nose. “Why’re you asking?”

“Just checkin’ on something Cas said.”

Dean’s trying not to think too hard about how apparently Cas wasn’t lying. ‘Cause that means Cas isn’t actually attracted to him, which leaves Dean feeling way more empty than he should be over a little missed opportunity at sex. Sex with another man, at that, something he’s not even sure he likes.

He would have liked it with Cas, he’s pretty sure.

“Did Cas kiss you?” Sam asks with a funny look on his face.

“One of those European things, yeah,” Dean says as evenly as possible. “For the New Year, I guess.” He looks up and eyes his brother. “Don’t get any stupid ideas, Sam. You just said it was normal.”

“It is normal, it’s always normal for whatever reason,” Sam says indignantly, and Dean shrugs.

He doesn’t need Sam thinking he…he likes Cas, or something. He’d be stupid and wrong, and it’d bring up a bunch of problems Dean doesn’t really wanna have to deal with, like his brother’s need to fucking meddle. Sam’s probably already at the point where he’s planning Dean’s damn wedding in his head, so Dean says it again, more firmly. “I’m not gay, Sammy.”

He just wants to have sex with Cas. In a friends kind of way, because Cas is pretty damn awesome and attractive. Not gay.

“Okay, Dean,” Sam says. Dean wishes he wouldn’t roll his eyes.
Cas is mad at him, he’s pretty sure. That or he’s finally decided he doesn’t want to deal with Dean anymore, which, you know. Dean’s surprised he lasted that long. ‘Course, not like he can tell one way or another, because he’d decided to avoid Cas until things had calmed down a little.

The message doesn’t really get sent when Cas has the same idea as him though, so now Dean’s just not bothering because if Cas doesn’t want to talk to him, he ain’t trying.

“What if Cas is thinking the same thing?” Sam points out in exasperation. Dean ignores him.

It’s not even a big deal. Somehow their games don’t even suffer, although Dean’s finding it hard to be excited about the fact that the Cavs are currently ranked second in their division. He wonders if somebody’s told Cas, or if he even knows what that means.

Then Dean reminds himself he’s being stupid, because of course Cas knows. Dean’s talked about it to the whole team, as their captain. He just hasn’t talked to Cas.

He doesn’t like it.

He tries to figure out why he doesn’t like it, but it’s hard. The easiest answer is that sex is most definitely off the table now, and that’s frustrating his libido and his ego. It’d be easy to go find someone else to bang, hell, if his brain was so set on him trying out a dick just once he could even manage that, but the thought of trying to sleep with anyone else right now just tires him. And yeah it kind of hurts that Cas isn’t into him, but one of the ice girls told him that the other week, with a lot more swear words, and Dean’s not this cut up about her.

If Dean is being completely honest with himself, it’s the friendship he misses more than anything else. Sure Cas is six feet of dark Russian sex with ridiculous eyes and stubble Dean should really not find attractive, but he’s also Dean’s friend. His best friend, probably. Just this dorky guy with an accent, a guileless tendency to say whatever pops into his head and a stubborn streak a mile wide.

Dean misses Cas. But Dean fucked it up by being all weird about that kiss, and now Cas is pissed at him. And Dean still feels awkward.

He tries not to think about that kiss and how much he wants to do it again. He definitely stops short of trying to figure out what it means. Sure Cas had said it was a normal thing, and so had Sam but Dean’s not stupid. Cas kissed him.

Dammit. He just wants his friend back.

Benny puts him in an even worse mood when he asks Dean what he’s doing for his birthday. “If you try to pull an ‘I forgot’ like last year, I’m gonna do somethin’ about it,” he warns. “And I’ll be invitin’ Cas.”

“Family skate is on my birthday,” Dean points out triumphantly. Benny stops nagging him about it, so ha. Dean Winchester one, feelings blullcrap zero.

Whenever the NHL sets up an outdoor game they use the day before to let the players and their
families out on the ice. Most of the guys grew up playing on an outdoor pond in someone’s backyard, and even years later, on a baseball field converted into a temporary ice rink in the stadium, the feeling of nostalgia hits hard. Sharing it with your loved ones is even better.

Dean realizes, as he takes another turn around the ice of the stadium, that his loved ones are not like everyone else’s.

“DEAN!” he manages to catch a flash of blonde out of the corner of his eye as something comes hurtling at him, and then he’s on his backside as Jo straddles his hips, plucking the winter hat the team had provided them with off of his head. “Thanks for the new hat,” she beams.

Dean groans and squints his eyes into the bright sunlight. “Who invited you?”

“Please,” she scoffs. “Like we needed an invitation.” Dean notices Charlie behind her, a little wobbly on her skates but otherwise managing.

“Hey Dean!” she says cheerily. “Happy birthday!”

“Thanks,” he says, dumping Jo off of him and getting off the ice (like a fucking pro, not like a drunk giraffe, Jo) and giving Charlie a strained smile. “Thanks for showing up. You seen Sammy?”

Jo gestures vaguely to the other end of the ice, where Dean can make out Sam skating hand in hand with Jess. “I told you he didn’t like his birthday,” she says in a loud stage whisper to Charlie.

Dean, already grumpy over the prospect of now being twenty-eight (fucking hell) and definitely not grumpy that Cas has been here for over half an hour and hasn’t come anywhere near him (even though Dean doesn’t want him to) scowls darkly in response.

“What’s wrong with your birthday?” Charlie asks, then immediately seems to drop this question in favor of, “hey, where’s Cas?”

He doesn’t want to answer either one of those really, but Charlie is a new friend, and he really likes her, so he does his best. “Birthdays are stupid,” he grouses. Okay, so maybe not his best. “Dunno where Cas is.”

Jo peers at him, squinting. “Are you two fi——,”

Dean has never been happier for Sam’s giant lumbering body to come crashing into sight. Though he guesses he really has to give the kid credit for being as graceful as he is on skates despite the size of his body. “You guys came!” he says happily, totally oblivious (or ignoring) the tense set of Dean’s shoulders.

“I never miss a birthday party,” Charlie says cheerfully, grinning.

Sam glances at his brother, smiling. “Don’t call it that, Dean might get upset.”

“Fuck you,” Dean snaps, skating away from all of them. The cold wind whips around his now bare head and he shivers. But fuck, at least if one of his ears fall off from frostbite, he deserves it.

So maybe that was kind of a strong reaction, one Sam definitely didn’t deserve.

His birthday’s never been the greatest. It’s not a big deal at all, and Dean’s never really cared. In fact in recent years, the people he loves have been slowly introducing him to cake and presents and their forced company. So he really shouldn’t be reacting this way.
He just...he misses Cas.

It feels like a break up, which may be the dumbest thing he’s ever let his brain think. He hadn’t even gotten to have sex with Cas, much less date him. He didn’t want to date Cas. They were best friends. He wanted to hang out with him and grab dinner with him and yeah, there was that weird tingly feeling whenever he...

Fuck. It sounds like they were dating.

“Hey stranger. Don’t think I’ve seen you since the last time you came over to terrorize my kid.”

“Hey, Lise,” Dean throws a sideways look at her. Geez she looks good in the cold, cheeks all red and pretty and framed by her curly dark hair.

Weird, it’s not really doing anything for him.

“Happy birthday,” she smiles, and for some reason that doesn’t really bother him either.

Lisa skates around with him for awhile, and surprisingly enough talking to her puts Dean in a better mood then he has been in weeks. This stuff with Cas has been really grating on him, stuff he doesn’t really feel like he can talk to all the guys he hangs out with about (not that they haven’t tried) and the female presence is kind of nice. Not that he’s gonna talk about it with her either or anything, but he doesn’t feel like he needs to.

Being with Lisa has always been easy, even though they’ve never dated, and now he wonders why that hasn’t been something they’ve tried before either. Maybe they should. After all, he likes her a lot, she’s pretty, and he can’t imagine being as fucked up about her as he is over stuff currently going on in his life. Win-win.

Except that he can’t shake the feeling that somehow, in some way, she’d be some kind of rebound sex.

Jesus. It hits him all at once. He’s had enough of this shit. Clearly Cas has some kind of fucked up importance in his life, and he shouldn’t let a stupid kiss ruin that. If Cas says it meant nothing, then it meant nothing, and the attraction is just something Dean’s going to have to deal with on his own. It’ll fade eventually. His friendship with Cas is more important than that.

“You seen Cas?”

“Um...” Lisa looks cagey, and suddenly Dean realizes that the ice has emptied out quite a bit, with most people milling around at the home team bench.

“What’s going on?” he asks suspiciously.

Lisa just shrugs sheepishly and takes his hand, and for one very weird moment Dean thinks she’s making a move on him, a thought his brain does not react well to but one he luckily isn’t forced to dwell on to find out why since all she does is skate him over to everyone else.

“HAPPY BIRTHDAY!” Charlie is the first to squeal, and suddenly Dean is rushed with a wave of friends and family, hugging him, clapping him on the back. Bobby has pies that were obviously baked by Ellen, and he and Sam serve them out to everybody as Benny speaks loudly over them all trying to tell an embarrassing story about Dean and the time he used his birthday to hit on Carrie Underwood.

There are no presents. No one pays special attention to him. It’s loud and chaotic and unorganized
and it’s his family. Frankly, it’s the best birthday Dean has ever had.

“Did I finally do good?” Sam asks, grinning widely when he comes to collect Dean’s empty paper plate.

Dean throws it at his head and tried not to cry like a fucking girl.

People begin pouring back onto the ice when they finish eating, but Dean stays on the bench, happy to watch everybody he cares about skate by, laughing and enjoying a day that he’s never really given much of a shit about before.

“Dean,” a voice says quietly from behind him, and Dean turns slightly, watches as Cas clambers over the bench and settles down next to him. He’s wearing the hat Dean got him for Christmas, the ear flaps down and framing his face in a way that should look ridiculous but absolutely doesn’t. He looks gorgeous, and Dean would hate himself for using that word if it weren’t so accurate.

“Hey Cas,” he says cautiously.

The ache in his chest, the one that’s been a constant presence ever since New Years’, dulls slightly, but it sticks around, like it doesn’t trust Cas’ proximity anymore than Dean himself does.

“Dean,” Cas repeats again, leaning closer, and suddenly Dean is hit with the smell of Cas, and the ache throbs with something different this time, excitement, and he must look like a wide eyed idiot. “I wanted to apologize.”

“Apologize?” he repeats dumbly.

“I have not been happy these past few weeks,” Cas says vehemently, and for the first time Dean notices the slight bags under his eyes, like he’s tired. “I don’t like not talking to you.” He looks at Dean, blue eyes intense. “You’re my best friend, Dean. I very much regret that my actions have caused you to become upset with me.”

“What?” Dean chokes out in relief. “What? Cas, Jesus…” his arm acts without permission, pulling Cas into him, crushing him in a hug. “I thought you were mad at me!”

Cas, who’d stiffened (he’s never been good at hugs, Dean doesn’t mind) slowly relaxes in his arms. “Perhaps I was, initially,” he admits. “I think both of our egos were rather bruised that neither of us wanted to be kissing one another. Alcohol was not kind to us.”

“No,” Dean agrees, feeling a pang over the reminder that booze was the reason for their make out session. Fucking booze. He could do this though. He was determined to keep Cas as a friend, and that meant fucking was no longer on the table. On that note, he abruptly lets go of Cas.

It takes Cas a minute to realize Dean no longer has him locked to his chest, and when he does, he pulls away. “Dean,” he says slowly. “I think we are very good friends.”

“Well yeah,” he says immediately, confused. “Best friends.”

“I know you often make sexual innuendo with your friends,” Cas says, frowning slightly. “And I realize you are a very tactile person. I would prefer that we forget the whole incident, if that means things will remain the same.”

And…yeah, so maybe that was the best kiss Dean has ever had. And maybe it’ll keep a starring role in his fantasies for a while to come. But Dean can do that, if that’s what Cas wants.
Actually, he realizes as Cas stares at him. This might work better for him, if Cas thinks all his real honest to god flirting and touching is just friendship. Sure it’s a little underhanded, but it’s not hurting anybody, right?

“Well Cas,” he grins, leaning close again. “Guess that means I gotta keep my tongue to myself, huh?” Cas eyes him as he licks his lips, and Dean’s sure he’s gonna push him away or something.

Instead, Cas leans forward and brushes a soft kiss to his cheek. “Happy birthday, Dean,” he says, quiet and rough, before he pushes off the bench and makes his way back onto the ice.

Dean sits there in a bit of a daze, his brain still sorting through the sensation of the soft fur of Cas’ hat, stubble, and finally chapped lips brushing across his skin. Skin that’s still tingling.

Right. So maybe this isn’t going to work as well as he’d thought.
“Is this the best hotel we’ve been in or what?” Dean asks, dumping his bag off his shoulder and collapsing onto the bed. They’re in Winnipeg, and while the hotel rooms they usually get put up in are never anything to sneeze at, this one is insane. All huge and fancy with glass and shit. He’s pretty sure there’s a spa here. “They fucking do massages, Cas.”

“Dean.” Cas is looking at him funny. “They only gave us one bed.”

Dean looks around the room, and indeed, his ass is parked on one giant, king sized bed. “Huh,” he says intelligently.

Cas frowns at the thing like it’s personally offended him. “I’ll go inform the front desk.”

“Dude.”

Cas transfers the frown to Dean, but it’s more puzzled now. “I mean, uh, that’d be kind of a hassle, wouldn’t it?”

Cas purses his lips and Dean tries not to stare. “I guess,” he says hesitantly.

“I mean I don’t mind if you don’t mind,” Dean amends quickly. Because he’s a fucking glutton for punishment. Also, it’s almost two in the morning and he’s tired as hell, so sue him.

“No,” Cas says with a weird look on his face. “Why would I mind?”

Right. So. Dean has no response to that that doesn’t sound completely stupid or like he’s just finished watching P.S. I Love You. Not that he’s ever watched that movie, and whatever Sam has to say about it is a lie. He pulls his toiletry kit out of his bag and heads to the bathroom to brush his teeth, because flying always gives him a sour taste in his mouth, and when he comes back out Cas is sitting on the bed with the TV turned on to some nature documentary.

Dean manages to endure about two minutes of how bees pollinate before he makes a grab for the remote. To his surprise, Cas whips it out of his reach surprisingly quickly.

“What the hell?” Dean asks.

“I want to watch this,” Cas says defensively. “It’s interesting.”

“You’re interested in bees?” he asks incredulously. “C’mon Cas. Dr. Sexy is on.”

“I have watched every episode of Dr. Sexy with you,” Cas says stubbornly. “I want to watch the bees.”

Even if that’s true, Dean is feeling contrary, and his victory over the shared bed is probably making him more daring than he should be. He climbs onto the bed and reaches over Cas, making another grab for the remote.

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“Dean.” Cas sounds disgruntled as he stretches the hand holding the remote even further from Dean’s reach.

Dean ignores him, making another grab that catches him off balance. Luckily he catches himself on Cas, who gives a loud grunt at the impact of Dean’s elbow into his stomach.
“Dean.”

“Just gimme the remote,” Dean insists, moving to straddle Cas in an effort to actually reach the damn thing. Cas though, has had enough of him, or else he’s really opposed to Dean straddling his lap, because seconds later Dean has been flipped back onto the bed with Cas looming over him.

“We’re watching the bees,” he growls, a note of finality to his voice.

Dean remains on his back staring at the ceiling of the hotel room for a good minute after Cas pulls back. That tingly feeling is back again in full force, along with, Dean has begun to notice, this overwhelming sense of rightness that seems related to nothing but being in Cas’ presence.

“I didn’t hurt you, did I?”

Dean turns his head to look at Cas, who’s glancing down at him in concern.

“If I say yes, will you kiss it better?”

Cas’ facial expression does an interesting dance too subtle for Dean to follow, but it’s enough for him to worry he’s gone too far. He quickly schools his face into a carefree grin. “Just kidding, bud. I’m not that desperate.”

“Ouch,” Cas says emotionlessly.

Dean pats his leg comfortingly, turning his head onto his arm in order to prop it up a little and see the TV. The narrator is droning on about pollination, and Dean feels his eyes growing heavy, exhaustion from the flight finally catching up to him.

It seems like only minutes later that he feels fingers carding through his hair, smoothing over his scalp, and it feels so good he barely registers the confusion over the source of the touch, just buries deeper into the warmth beneath him with a small noise of content.

“Dean,” he thinks he hears Cas say. “We need to sleep.”

“I am asleep,” Dean mutters. The surface beneath him shifts, and Dean’s mind blearily realizes he’s somehow migrated so that his face is in Cas’ lap before its cruelly taken away from him. He thinks he whines. He’s not proud of it.

There’s the sound of running water in the bathroom, of someone going through their nightly routine, and then Cas is back, his voice shooting warm familiarity to Dean’s very core. “At least take your pants off.”

_That_ gets him to crack his eye open, and blearily he can make out Cas standing at the foot of the bed in his flannel pants and overly large T-shirt with something in Cyrillic printed on it. “If you want my pants off that badly,” Dean says, voice rough with sleep. “There are easier ways.”

Cas rolls his eyes as Dean wriggles out of his jeans, leaving him in boxer shorts and his own T-shirt. He hears Cas moving again, feels the covers being shifted out from under him, and he drifts off again as the warm weight of the comforter is settled around his shoulders.

The second time he wakes up, he can tell without opening his eyes that it’s not morning yet. He’s vaguely aware of the warm body pressed against his side, and when his arm spasms he knows he’s got it slung over Cas. His barely conscious brain doesn’t care at all though, and he finds himself shoving his cold nose deeper into the nape of Cas’ neck. Cas makes a sleepy noise of discontent, and Dean falls back asleep with an involuntary smile on his face.
There’s a loud pounding on the door. That’s the first thing Dean notices. The second thing he notices is that he’s ridiculously cold. Groaning he makes a grab for something to cover himself with, covers, anything. ‘Cept they’re all bunched down at his feet, and when he cracks his eyes open, Cas is nowhere in sight.

The pounding at his door has ceased, but Dean doesn’t believe it’s actually over for a second. Rather than let it start again, he drags himself over to the door and whips it open.

Sam sighs as soon as he sees him. “You’re not even dressed yet?”

Dean scowls at him, stupid up-at-the-crack-of-dawn giant. “What d’you want?”

“I need an excuse to come see my brother?” Sam says with a raised eyebrow.

“Usually,” Dean grumbles. “Hey, you seen Cas?”

“He slept with you, didn’t he?” Sam asks, pushing his way into the room. Dean can tell the second Sam notices the bed, because he pauses right in the middle of the room. “Wow. He really slept with you.”

“Ha ha,” Dean says, relieved his voice sounds fairly normal. It’s not unusual for them to fall asleep in one another’s beds. He and Sam used to do it all the time, and Dean knows he’s got a picture somewhere of Benny spooning with Gabriel, so he knows he’s just being teased. Except he’s never…it was so natural sleeping with Cas last night, and in a huge bed like that, he really shouldn’t have gravitated towards him like he did. Seems they both had an issue with personal apace though, and Dean was a little uneasy waking up without Cas here to know they were okay. He was a little paranoid, still on edge from their falling out. “Hotel screwed up, we were too tired to care.”

Sam makes a face, an ‘I’m proud of you for being so mature about sleeping in the same bed as another guy’ face, and Dean resists the urge to flip him off. “I’m glad you two aren’t being weird anymore.”

“ Weird?” Dean echoes, grabbing his jeans off the floor and slipping them on. “Who the hell said we were acting weird?”

“You’re seriously gonna act surprised that no one noticed you two avoiding each other and snapping at everyone?” Sam laughs. “You and Cas aren’t exactly subtle.”

“Jesus, you make us sound like a fighting couple.”

“Isn’t that what you are?” Sam mutters, and Dean all but pushes his brother out of the room, making sure the door is locked behind him. He hopes Cas has a key.

“You’re brain is a scary place, Sammy.”

Sam looks apprehensive for a minute, like he’s not sure if he wants to say the thing he’s thinking, and Dean can tell the moment he overrides whatever sense he has when they step into the elevator. “It’s not that much of a leap, Dean.”

“A leap to what?” Dean demands.

“I mean you’ve always…” Sam struggles for a minute, “Sometimes with a guy you’ll…” he bites his lip, looking almost comically furious that his words have failed him. “You’re really good at making friends, Dean.”
“Well gee,” Dean says sarcastically, “Thanks Sammy. You awarding me a medal?”

“Sometimes,” Sam plows ahead, ignoring him, “You get really, really close with people. Like Benny.”

Dean is suddenly extremely grateful that the elevator is empty.

“Not that I’m accusing you of anything,” he hurries to add. “I mean, it kind of tapered off, and I just assumed…but with Cas it’s kinda like you’re still there.”

“You wanna speak English, Sam?” Dean asks lowly.

Sam stares at him for a long moment. “Did you get that kiss thing figured out?” he asks finally.

The elevator dings and Dean practically shoots out into the hallway. He’s not totally sure where Sam had been heading, but he needs breakfast to handle any of this, so he veers into the area where the buffet is being served, not looking to see if Sam is following him and not really caring.

He really shouldn’t be surprised that Sam is curious about what happened with the whole kiss thing. If their roles were reversed Dean wouldn’t have shut up about it, so he’s really got to give Sam credit. It’s not every day your straight brother comes to you with some existential crisis over a European guy laying one on him. Then you gotta remember that he and Cas had been avoiding each other for a while after that…of course Sam wants to know what the hell is happening.

Dean really doesn’t want to tell him, though. Sam’s gonna want to bring feelings in where they don’t belong.

He doesn’t realize until a pang of disappointment hits him when he doesn’t see him that he was looking for Cas, and he wonders again where he went this morning and if Dean somehow fucked up again. He has no idea what position Cas found himself in when they woke up this morning, and Dean can only hope it was similar to the one he vaguely remembers from last night and he hadn’t migrated to practically lying on top of Cas.

Knowing his luck, that’s exactly what happened, and Cas is probably rethinking their friendship right this minute. Maybe he’ll pull back again, spend less time with Dean and implement a no touching rule. Maybe he won’t even want to be roommate’s anymore.

Dean stares down at the plate of bacon, eggs and toast in his hands, suddenly feeling too sick to even think of eating it.

“Think you got enough?” Sam nudges him.

“It wasn’t a European thing;” he blurs.

“Let’s get a table,” his brother says in response, and Dean follows him numbly over to a small table set against the wall, berating himself the entire way.

Idiot. Dumb fucking idiot. Was he really gonna tell Sam all of this?

Turns out he was.

They’ve barely sat down before Dean’s babbling, words tripping over his tongue as all the shit that’s been piling up with Cas since November comes spilling out without his permission. He tells Sam about how weird he feels whenever Cas is around, and how when he fucks around with him it feels more vivid and electric than it does when he fucks around with the other guys. He tells Sam about
how protective he gets when Cas is threatened, possessive in a way he doesn’t understand, how he can’t stop thinking of Cas in the fucking clothes Dean can’t seem to stop giving him. He stops short of telling Sam about the jerk off session he had imagining Cas blowing him, or the countless ones since, because some shit your brother does not need to know unless the opportunity to mentally scar him appears. “- and then I figured maybe I should have sex with him, because I’m not gay Sam, but you know how girls do that experimental shit in college? And Charlie said it was totally normal and I was fine and then I figured, you know, get it out of my system, ‘cept then Cas kissed me and it wasn’t a fucking European kiss, Sam, he fucking kissed me, I know what a kiss is. But we were drunk and he didn’t mean to and I figure, well, sex is down the damn tubes and now…” he frowns hard, searching for the words and finally settling on, “now it’s all Twilight Zone.”

Sam is frowning at his plate with a concentrated look on his face as he chews, and maybe it’s only a few seconds, but to Dean the silence stretches on for hours. “You gonna say something?”

“What’s so Twilight Zone about it?”

“What?” Dean lowers his arm, which apparently he’s been waving around in the air. Cool.

“What’s so Twilight Zone about it?” Sam repeats, squinting at his brother. “What are you freaking out about?”

“All of it Sam! Jesus,” Dean hisses and runs a hand through his hair. “You think any of this is normal?”

“Well…yeah?” he says, giving him an odd look. “It sounds like you have a crush.”

Dean opens his mouth, closes it. Opens it again, points at his brother. “You have a crush,” he says intelligently.

“Not on Castiel.”

Dean closes his eyes, massaging them with one hand. “Alright, let’s entertain this dumbass theory,” he mutters. “Let’s say I have a crush on Cas – what the hell am I supposed to do about it?”

“Tell him?” Sam suggests.

“Ha!” Dean bangs the table triumphantly, causing a piece of bacon to skitter off his plate. “See? Already fucked up. We’re not gay, and we’re not gonna date, so what’s the point in telling him?”

Sam sighs and looks him right in the eye. Dean gets the feeling he’s about to get some sort of lecture, although usually those are reserved for when he’s royally fucked up and as far as he knows this little feelings session should be making Sammy practically giddy. “You know there’s more than just gay or straight, right Dean?”

“-thought you were bisexual,” Sam’s saying.

“What?”

“I always thought you were bisexual,” his brother says again.
Without even thinking about it, Dean lets out a bitter laugh and replies, “Are you kiddin’ me, Sammy? Dad woulda murdered me.”

Too late he realizes it sounds like he’s admitting something, and he knows Sam thinks it too, because his eyes get all bright and he shifts forward like he’s ready to pull Dean into a hug and shower rainbows and glitter all over him. “Not,” Dean says quickly, pointing his fork at him, “That I am.”

Sam sits back abruptly, mouth set in a disappointed line. “Dad’s not here anymore,” he points out. “And if you’re attracted to Cas, maybe this is something you need to start thinking about.”

“I’m not attracted to him,” he complains, frustrated. “He’s just a friend I happen to want to have sex with.”

“That may be the dumbest sentence I’ve ever heard you say.”

“Yeah, well, gimme a minute.”

“Why are you always putting yourself down like that?” Sam asks, annoyed, like Dean is acting any different than he has the past twenty four years. “Cas and I were talking the other day—“

“Oh, you and Cas were talking huh? You know, I’m getting pretty sick of you two getting together and gossiping about me like old women in a nursing home.”

“Yeah, sometimes we talk about you,” Sam huffs, “and you know what, I think Cas—,”

Dean never gets to hear what Sam thinks about Cas, because two plates fuller than Dean’s (he was distracted, he’s not proud of it) are dropped on the table as Victor and Benny pull up two more chairs. Dean shoots Sam a look, one that so clearly reads shut up Sam that Sam is bitch facing at him before Dean’s even really focused on giving it to him.

“They not feed you at home, Vic?” he asks lightly, like Sam hadn’t just been trying to convince him not only that he was harboring some big gay crush on Cas, but that he needed to go tell him about it.

This is why he never tells Sam things. He spills his guts and never fucking gets anything out of it.

“They do, but it’s hard to choke down food without your ugly mug sitting across from me every morning,” Victor replies cheerfully, and that’s as much of a heartfelt hello as you’re gonna see here.

Sam looks disgruntled by the whole exchange, and Dean can’t help feeling a little vindictively satisfied over the total lack of Kodak moment he was just forced to witness in light of his recent attempt to Get Dean to Do the Feelings Thing.

“You two seen the paper?” Benny asks.

“You know the call girls here aren’t gonna be all that different from the ones in America, right Benny?”

“You say that like Benny isn’t whipped, Winchester.”

“And you say that like I should be ashamed,” Benny shoots back in a lazy drawl. “Fact remains I got a girl and you’re stuck with a wife.”

Dean watches in amusement as Victor grins widely at Benny, making no effort to hide the food in his mouth. Benny snags Victor’s coffee cup.

“What was in the paper?” Sam asks curiously.
“You assholes didn’t take care of Gordon at all, did you?” Victor furrows his brow. “I guess you haven’t been paying attention to the gossip rags, either. They’re saying all sorts of stuff about the Cavs. Problems in the locker room, guys sleeping with one another’s girlfriends…”

“Are you kidding me?” Dean asks incredulously.

“Saw it with my own eyes, brother,” Benny replies. “There was another story this morning.”

“About what?”

“Some fight you got going on with Cas,” Benny’s lip curls. “Thought you sorted that out.”

“Woah, they were fighting?” Victor turns to stare at Dean, his gaze way too intense for comfort. He tries not to think about how this is how Cas looks at him every second of the day and that doesn’t seem to bother him.

“Not anymore,” Dean says testily. “That story is a load of shit.”

“I’ve already talked to Bobby about it,” Sam says, somewhat placating. “I’ll go to Carver next. This isn’t good for the team’s image, and it’s damaging our ability to play correctly.”

“Know the man’s got a few screws loose and he hates your guts to boot,” Benny says. “But any idea why he’s riding you so hard?”

Dean thinks about his last encounter with Gordon and mutters at the table. “He thinks I got something weird going on with Cas.”

There’s a loud snort from across the table, and Dean sends every dirty thought he can imagine in Sam’s direction.

“Well that’d be reason enough for the bigot. Asshole,” Victor says. Amazingly enough, that’s the end of the conversation, and Dean spends the rest of breakfast wondering why the hell this supposed revelation was shocking to basically no one.

Victor heads off first to get back to his team, then Benny mentions calling Andrea and he’s off too. Dean’s left alone with Sam again, who’s cleared his throat at least three times on the way up to the elevator and clearly wants Dean to ask him what’s up.

Good luck with that.

The elevator doors close and Sam clears his throat again.

“What?” Dean snaps.

Sam shrugs. “I just wanted to say,” he says nonchalantly. “If you do get your head out of your ass and let whatever it is you’re doing with Cas play out, I’m not gonna think of you any differently. Well,” his face screws up and he amends, “I might like you better with a boyfriend. Wouldn’t know yet.”

“Jesus, Sam,” Dean says in a pained voice, and he finds himself looking around even though nobody is in the elevator with them. “Leave it alone, okay? S’not happening.”

“Okay,” he agrees way too easily, and Dean spends the rest of the elevator ride expecting to be accosted with more talking, except Sam keeps miraculously quiet.

The doors open on Dean’s floor, and he steps out, turning towards his brother. “Meet in the lobby at
noon to head down to the rink?”

“Sure,” Sam nods and then grins suddenly. “Hey Dean?”

“Yeah?”

“I get to be the best man, right?”

“Bite me, Sam.”

Winnipeg is in the same league as the Cavs, and only a few points behind them. They’re at the time of the year when every team is fighting for a spot up top, where every little game matters, and the tension is evident in the set of Rufus’ shoulders and the way Bobby drags Cas into the locker room like he just caught him keying his car.

Dean doesn’t have a chance to ask Cas where the hell he went before they get out on the ice, and Cas is doing a real good job of avoiding his eye too.

He feels the bundle of nerves that have gathered in his stomach over the game clench with something different.

Luckily he barely gets a chance to worry about Cas, since the second the puck drops he’s almost knocked on his ass by the player he’s facing. He watches in a slight daze as the puck gets hit down the ice towards Gabriel, and only snaps out of it when Benny yells at him to get his head out of his ass.

It doesn’t get much better from there.

Sam manages to fix his fuck up by making it to the puck before anybody else and successfully sending it out of their zone, where Benny picks it up. He passes it to Cas, who shoots quickly, and Dean has enough sense left in him to follow the puck all the way to the net, forcing the goalie to hold onto it and creating another puck drop.

“Dean,” Benny says lowly, skating around behind him, “Focus, brother.”

Dean shoots him a look and heads over to the face off dot, trying not to make his scowl too noticeable, or to glance over to his left at Cas too much. He was focused, damn it.

“Having boyfriend troubles, Winchester?” the player across from him snickers as Dean leans forward, stick resting on his knees. He ignores him, and the guy continues, “too bad his dick’s out of your ass, you could have used it as a second stick.”

The puck is dropped and Dean swipes it away towards Cas immediately, ramming his shoulder into the guy and sending him down to the ice in a move that is somehow miraculously not whistled. By the time he’s looking for the puck again, Cas has already lost it, and he needs to get off the ice before Balthazar blows a fucking artery from where he’s waiting on the bench.

“What’d he say to you?” Sam asks, all gangly limbs as he swings into the box behind Dean.
“Nothing.” Dean grabs a water bottle and a towel and inserts himself between Cas and Kevin despite the lack of room. Cas gives him a sullen glare and reluctantly scoots over. “Where have you been?” Dean asks accusingly.

“I was on a walk,” Cas says, and Dean doesn’t think he could have been any more obvious if he’d said ‘duh’ at the end of the sentence.

“Why?” Dean pushes. For some reason that just makes Cas glare harder, and Dean huffs and swipes the towel over his visor again, startling when Bobby barks, “Winchester! Pay attention damn it, back on the ice!”

He hops over the boards without a second thought, receiving the puck almost immediately from a frantic Garth. He loses track of everybody after that, his body on autopilot. So what, Cas woke up (in what position, Dean doesn’t fucking know, coulda been totally fine and platonic, then again, Dean could have had his leg totally shoved all up in Cas’ business – his sleeping body did not understand the concept of ‘buddies’) and decided to take a walk. And to not show up again until practically the last minute of one of the most important games of the season.

He’s not just being paranoid, right?

The sound of the goal horn nearly makes him jump out of his skin, and suddenly Sam’s ginormous body is slamming him into the boards as he babbles excitedly, “I didn’t know you could forehand backhand like that!” Benny piles on seconds later, slugging Dean in the shoulder, and though he’s slow on the uptake, Dean gathers he’s just scored some highlight reel worthy goal.

Cool, he’s a better hockey player when he’s not even paying attention.

He’s back on the bench, frowning up at the replay on the big screen – seriously, he couldn’t do this shit again if he tried – when Cas shoves in next to him and leans close. “That was amazing, Dean,” he says quietly.

Dean feels warmth bloom in his chest and rush to his cheeks and he carefully doesn’t look at Cas. Fucking sissy.

They leave the first period still up by one due to Dean’s stupidly lucky goal, and when Bobby praises him for it in the locker room Dean is careful to look like he actually meant to shoot the damn puck and not like he was skating around aimlessly wondering if Cas was mad at him.

He needs to get his god damn life together.

Bobby gruffly shouts a few more things at them, including a warning to keep it clean (Dean notices Balthazar shuffling next to Gabriel when Bobby says this and makes a mental note to watch him) before he releases them back onto the ice.

Turns out maybe Dean should have continued to not pay much attention to the game, since it becomes clear the second the puck drops that this period is going to go nowhere near as smooth as the first.

He shouldn’t have worried about Balthazar starting shit, mostly because not two minutes have gone by when one of Victor’s teammates heads after Chuck with the kind of focus usually reserved for suburban moms having a coupon catalog waved in front of them. Chuck, to his credit, manages to get out of the way despite his obvious horror, but he still catches the guy in the knee, somehow managing to stay upright even as the other guy’s momentum sends him down to the ice, hard.

Usually the look of miserable confusion he sends at the ref would melt any heart, but he still gets sent
to the box, and needless to say, the score is tied pretty quickly.

Dean doesn’t talk on the bench after that, and Sam knows not to try, instead sitting next to him in companionable silence. On his other side, Cas is leaning forward intently, elbows on his knees, and every time the puck gets too close, his finger twitches, like he’s itching to go after it. Dean works to actively ignore him after he catches himself with a smile on his face one too many times.

He’s just gotten off the ice when Victor goes shooting past their bench with the puck, and Dean’s gut barely has time to clench before Victor’s passed it off to a teammate behind the net, who in turn shoots it into the crease and allows it to be hit toward Gabriel. Gabriel makes a grab and flails, clearly having lost sight of the puck, and Dean knows it went in even as everyone on the ice rushes the net and a scrum breaks out.

Whistles start blowing and Dean finds himself on his feet with everyone else on the bench, leaning over the boards. He’s never sure about anyone else in situations like this, but whenever he’s not on the ice for a fight his body feels strained, like a tightened spring, and electric. He hates not being able to go out there and help, to grab control of the situation, and he’d be the first one over the boards if any real fight started.

Out of the corner of his eye he swears Cas is vibrating slightly, and he wonders if they feel the same way.

Balthazar is wrestling some guy over in the corner into submission, and it’s clear the fight needs to break up when Gabriel gets so pissed he yanks a stick out of some guy’s hand and throws it away, causing Kevin to have to go after the guy who tries to get near Gabriel.

The refs finally manage to pull everyone off of one another. No one gets sent to the box, but the goal is called, and it takes a few tugs of his jersey for Sam to get Dean to sit back down again.

So now they’re losing and Gabriel’s pissed off enough to be throwing sticks.

Dean tries to talk to him the few times he’s on the ice and there’s a stoppage of play, but Gabriel just glowers at him from behind his mask and finally resorts to throwing his water bottle at him, so all Dean can really do is hope he doesn’t get himself landed in prison by the end of the game.

They second period is almost over when Cas ties the game up so effortlessly Dean doesn’t even really see the goal or register it’s happened, just sees Sammy barreling towards Cas and rushes after him on instinct, thumping his friend on the chest and grinning widely. Cas catches his hand over his heart and lets go almost immediately afterwards, but Dean’s still too distracted to listen to anything Bobby says during the second intermission.

About five minutes into the third period, Ash does this weird spin thing Dean will never believe was intentional, but the puck somehow makes it to Balthazar, who slaps it into the net so nonchalantly you’d think the whole play was planned. Even though they’re in Winnipeg, they’ve got enough fans in the building for the crowd to go insane, and Dean figures it’s that kind of atmosphere that spurs the Forks. Going down a goal in the last period seems to make them desperate, and suddenly there are a lot of whistles being blown as the play gets faster and more and more guys are slammed into boards.

Dean himself gets hit a couple of times after warning some fuckface off of Sam’s ass, and the whispered taunts of, “Fairy boy,” and “You hit like a girl, Winchester,” do nothing to stop him from driving several assholes into the boards himself.

The refs probably aren’t too happy with them, but they can’t really do anything when all they’re
doing is playing hockey.

Dean’s always had this sixth sense about when a game is ending without looking at the clock. He can practically feel the energy in the room winding down even as the hype builds, like the stadium is preparing to empty but knows it needs one more push of insane cheering to finish the night. He’s bringing the puck down the ice along the far boards when he begins to get that feeling of time almost being out, so instead of taking the puck straight to the net like usual, he plays with it a little, trying to kill the clock.

He doesn’t see who hits him. He wasn’t ready for it either. All he feels is a hard body slamming into his side, plastering him to solid plastic and glass with enough force to shake a good portion of the wall. He hears his skull crack against the glass, hears it again when he can’t seem to move his hands fast enough to catch himself on the ice and he hits it once more. Dean’s pretty sure he doesn’t black out, but he knows there’s gotta be a whistle blowing right by him and the only one he can hear sounds like it’s at the other end of the ice.

Logically he knows the ice under his cheek should be cold, but it feels white hot, almost burning, the pain searing through his skull in little tendons that curl around his brain and squeeze.

“Dean!” he hears from far away. “Dean!” Someone is pawing at his jersey, trying to get him up, and Dean should open his eyes to see who it is and tell them to get the fuck offa him, but he feels like opening his eyes will hurt. Whatever. He does it, slowly, and must swear out loud, because suddenly Sam is in his face and sound comes rushing back to a normal decibel. “Dean?”

Dean pushes Sam away, trying to take in the chaos surrounding him. Chuck is grappling with a guy not too far from him. Gabriel’s out of his net and on this end of the ice, wrestling with the Forks’ goalie while Victor hovers around them like he can’t decide who he has a better chance of pulling away from the other. Dean wonders where the fuck the refs are when he spots them towards center ice.

Benny’s holding back at least two guys at once, using that intimidating tough guy look Dean always got weirdly excited to see on one while he holds back another, delivering the occasional punch. And Cas…

Cas has got some guy with at least fifty pounds on him in a headlock, wailing on him for all he’s worth. He’s got his helmet off and is delivering some pretty solid punches, and Dean can’t believe that Cas is managing to hold on while the guy thrashes wildly, skating this way and that. Suddenly he goes down, and this is the point where Cas should stop, should allow the refs to pull him away and send him off the ice.

Except he doesn’t, and that’s when all hell really breaks loose.

The yelling escalates as the sound of the crowd in the stadium swells to a deafening level. Benny loses track of one of the guys he’s holding off, and the player throws himself at Cas. Cas doesn’t seem to notice and continues to punch the man below him, a look of single minded determination on his face that Dean is only vaguely surprised his clouded brain finds hot.

Then a punch gets landed straight to Cas’ jaw, and Dean realizes Sam must have managed to stand him on his feet, because without realizing it he’s skating over to pull the guy on top of Cas into a headlock, yelping in surprise and pain when he’s grabbed in turn.

“Fuck, get offa me, you piece of shit!” he yells as loud as he can. He can hear Cas growling at the guy he’s straddling, who’s managed to get Cas’ jersey half over his head and is landing a punch to his gut. Dean twists enough to realize the man holding him is a ref, and that there’s two refs doing
their best to separate Cas from killing the guy pinned to the ice beneath him.

There’s a yell from his left as Benny manages to down the guy he’s been interlocked with and the ref abruptly lets go to deal with that, along with about half the guys on the ice who begin trying either to pull someone off of their teammate or to give a warning push to a player getting too close to them.

Dean turns his attention back to the guy he’s wrestled off Cas. “Fuck off,” he snarls, pushing him away and punching for good measure. The guy falls, but he catches Dean as he does, and Dean crashes to the ice once again.

He’s yanked to his feet almost immediately, and he doesn’t even need to look to know it’s Cas slinging Dean’s arm around his shoulder. “GET HIM OFF THE ICE,” Dean hears Bobby yelling at the top of his lungs from the bench, and he’s not really sure who he means but he takes it as his responsibility to get Cas into the locker room before he fucking gets kicked out of the NHL for good.

“Leaving so soon, Winchester?” the guy he’d just knocked over calls after them. “I was hoping you and your pretty, cocksucking lips would stick around a while.”

Dean feels Cas physically start under his arm and he clenches it around his neck, continuing to pull Cas with him. “Leave it,” he barks. He’s probably not too gentle. Now that the initial adrenaline from the fight has worn off, his head is really aching, and he finds himself pissed beyond belief at Cas.

Cas never fights, and now the dumb bastard is probably going to be suspended.

He’s not sure which one of them is really dragging the other as they climb off the ice, and he hears someone say something about Cas being ejected from the game, Bobby talking over them to repeat, “Damn it, you dumb fuck idjits, get to the trainer. So help me boy, if you don’t get checked for a concussion I’ll give you one myself, you morons…”

Dean waits until they’re in the tunnel, the double doors slamming behind them and effectively cutting off the sound of the stadium before he shrugs Cas off of him. “Dude, what the hell!” he snaps. His vision has gone kind of red, sharp, and he’s pretty sure it’s not from the hit on the head.

Cas’ nostrils flare and his eyes flash. He’s clearly peeved off too, which only serves to make Dean madder, because what the hell does he have to get his fucking panties in a twist about? “That was the dumbest thing I’ve ever seen you do!” Dean’s voice is escalating to a yell, even though it hurts his head. “Where the fuck do you think you get off, going after a guy twice your size?”

“He hit you,” Cas says icily, dragging Dean down the hallway. “You could have a concussion.”

“You could get kicked out of the fucking league!” Dean argues angrily, digging his heels in right outside the locker room. Cas makes a noise of derision and shoves him inside, forcing Dean against the nearest wall.

“Then the league will have much to deal with. Let me see your eyes.”

“No,” Dean snaps, twisting and pushing Cas away.

“Let me see your eyes, Dean!”

“You get kicked out, they’re gonna deport you, you stupid fuck!” And that’s the rub, isn’t it? There’s a very, very real chance Cas might be gone. Might be leaving him.

“Dean!” Cas shouts, and woah, Dean’s never heard him raise his voice before, “You were slammed
into the wall, Dean!” he grabs roughly at his chin and forces him to stare at him. “You think I care if I get deported?” he hisses, blue eyes flashing again, “Do you think I care after I heard your head hit the ice? That man deserved much more than what happened to him. Now,” his expression is stony and his voice has dropped at least two octaves. Dean’s lying if he says his dick doesn’t give an interested twitch, “Let me see your eyes, Dean.”

“It doesn’t matter, Cas!”

“It matters exceptionally, many hockey players find themselves with impaired mental facilities due to the increasing amount of unchecked concussions—,”

Dean laughs loudly over him, the sound so fake that Cas shuts up abruptly, his already squinted eyes narrowing even more dangerously. “So what, gonna take care of my head and then leave, is that it?” he asks incredulously. “Nice trade off, you for a brain that’s not even all that good at doing shit to begin with—hey!”

Cas had moved abruptly, pinning him back against the wall with his forearm, his eyes running over Dean’s face and peering into his own. “Ow,” Dean says, mostly out of annoyance.

Cas’ gaze focuses on him, that lazar focus shifting from searching for something in Dean’s eyes to looking at him. “I thought you weren’t hurt?”

Now Dean’s most likely concussed. He’s had enough of them to know what it feels like, and in a couple of hours he’s pretty sure he’ll be catatonic. But right now he’s not. Hell, he’s gone back into games with a concussion, so he’s not really all that surprised that the hard press of Cas’ body to his, even through the layers of protective gear they’re wearing, is making his downstairs really happy. Sure, it’s inconvenient, but he’s not surprised.

There’s also some part of his brain, while all this is going on, screaming wow this guy really cares about you in the back of his head, and that’s not something he’s really equipped to deal with. So all of this is really plenty of excuse for what happens next. “Fuck you,” he says, with feeling.

Cas pauses and regards him carefully. He losts his helmet somewhere along the way, Dean as well, and his hair’s fucked six ways to Sunday, with a bruise forming along his jaw bone. Dean knows he must look just as shit, if the dull pain shooting through his eye is anything to go by. He almost misses it when Cas, eyes still locked on Dean, slowly, deliberately licks his lips.

He’s not totally sure who makes a move first, all he knows is suddenly he’s surging forward, and Cas is there, and there’s nothing pretty about it. This isn’t some tender kiss, it’s pent up rage and frustration and you’re so stupid, it’s stupid that I care about you. Dean slots his mouth over Cas’ like a punishment, their teeth clacking as he entwines their tongues. Cas isn’t making it easy for him, scrabbling to find purchase on Dean’s shoulders as he drives him harder into the wall. They grapple with one another for a few minutes, Cas making a whine of protest when Dean pulls back to take a breath, dragging his teeth over Cas’ bottom lip.

His pupils are dark, blown wide with lust that means only a ring of that brilliant blue is visible, and Dean feels a sense of finality, even while Cas is tugging at the hem of his jersey with this petulant frown on his face like how dare it be in the fucking way. Dean wants to kiss that look right off of his face.

They’re doing this. It’s happening, and he can’t really believe it even as Cas growls, “Dean,” snapping him back into the moment.

Dean meets Cas’ eyes. The petulant frown is gone. He’s watching Dean carefully, and Dean can
swear there was a note of uncertainty in his voice, slight apprehension lurking in his eyes, and he
hates it, he hates it so much. So he digs his hand into Cas’ thick hair and tilts his head back, nuzzling
into the bolt of his jaw. “Stop thinking, Cas,” he murmurs, before he begins laving attention upon his
neck with his tongue.

Cas is on board immediately, and his stubble rasps against Dean’s as he begins to fumble at the
waistband of Dean’s shorts. Hockey gear, Dean is finding, is really not the best thing to be dressed in
when you want to have hot angry sex with your teammate against the wall, something Cas
apparently agrees with as he lets out a frustrated huff that turns into a moan when Dean bites at his
collarbone.

“Dean,” he says, “Please – I need – ,”

“I know what you need,” Dean agrees, sliding his hands into Cas’ shorts and cupping his ass briefly
before sliding them down. “I got ya, Cas.”

Cas crashes his lips to Dean’s again, and Dean gets distracted by the feel of him, the way he tastes
like winter air as he traces the inside of Dean’s mouth with his tongue. Dean loses focus for a brief
moment, preoccupied by the kiss, until Cas makes a noise of impatience and shoves again at Dean’s
pants, working them down around his hips despite his belt.

Dean moans, the sound swallowed by Cas as he tilts his head, grip hard and unyielding on Dean’s
hip as he used his other hand to start fumbling at Dean’s underwear. Dean is hard and heavy, his
normally comfortable cup digging painfully into his erection. He knows Cas must be the same, so he
tears away again, doing his best to ignore how Cas switches his attention to the nape of Dean’s neck
as he does his best to get rid of their jockstraps.

“Fucking equipment,” Dean grumbles under his breath, shoving the thing as far down his hips as he
can with his shin guards on.

Cas chuckles against his neck, his cool breath skittering across the damp patch he’s sucked into
Dean’s skin, making him shiver. “I’m very grateful for what it’s protecting,” he says quietly, and
Dean’s got Cas’ strap off even faster than he had his own.

He’s barely naked, his hockey pants shoved down to his knees and the hem of his jersey catching on
his erect cock, but jesus Cas is gorgeous. He lips are swollen and wet from Dean kissing him, his
hair is mussed from Dean shoving his hand through it. Dean reaches forward and hikes his jersey up,
the rough fabric brushing against his erection, and Cas makes a low noise deep in his throat, his hips
jerking forward involuntarily.

Cas is bigger than him, although he’s not as thick, a pearl of precome gathering at the tip, and Dean
reaches out to swipe his thumb over the head almost without thinking. Cas makes that wounded
animal noise again and this time his hips snap forward all the way, searching for the friction of
Dean’s hand.

“All right, then,” he says, and Dean’s not sure if it’s a prayer or a curse.

“I know, I know,” he says, shoving his own jersey up so his cock is free as well. He spits quickly
into his hand, and Cas pulls him closer by the hip as Dean takes both their cocks in his hand,
grinding his hips in an effort to get closer to Cas. “Fuck,” he swears as they slide together, and Cas
makes a noise of agreement before he begins kissing Dean again. Dean tries to concentrate on the
kissing, but there’s too much going on, their dicks sliding together as that familiar warm feeling
builds low in his belly and he moves faster to create more friction.
Cas has given up on kissing him now, his face buried in Dean’s neck as he jack knives back and forth into Dean’s hand. “Dean, Dean, I’m going to – I have –,”

“Come on Cas. Jesus, c’mon, let go, I wanna see, need to see you all over me—,”

Cas gasps something in Russian and bites down hard on the tendons of Dean’s neck, shooting hard all over Dean’s hand and onto his stomach. Dean isn’t too far behind, swearing heavily as he uses the come to pump their spent cocks one last time, dropping his face into Cas’ sweat dampened hair.

He feels their chests moving up and down in tandem with their breathing, Cas slumped into Dean and Dean propped up by the wall behind him. From a distance, he can hear a loud buzzing, and it takes a while for his fuzzy brain to catch up on what it is.

“Oh, fuck.”

By the time the rest of the team tramps in, chatting loudly and yelling about the win, Dean and Cas are at separate ends of the locker room, Dean already changed into his sweats.

“Hey,” Bobby barks as soon as he enters the locker room and sees him. “You see Frank yet?”

“Uh,” Dean says.

Bobby rolls his eyes. “Go see Frank, you damn idjit. I ain’t having you brain dead at forty.” Dean scowls and gets off the bench, but Bobby stops him with a hand on his shoulder. “You get bit?” he asks, staring at his neck.

Dean’s hand flies to where Cas had fucking chomped on him when he’d come all over Dean’s cock and nearly has a heart attack. “Yeah,” he says hoarsely. “Bastard bit me.”

Bobby’s eyes narrow. “Go see Frank.”

Dean’s never walked to the damn trainer so fast.

Dean struggles to consciousness, his foggy brain clearing just enough that the dull ache pushing at the back of his head and the base of his skull becomes more prominent, more searing. He groans softly and would bury his face if he weren’t so afraid moving it an inch would be the equivalent of being hit upside the head with a frying pan.

He hears a faint shuffling from somewhere, wherever here is, and croaks out, “Sam?” wincing immediately when his low, rough voice vibrates through his head like a jackhammer.

The shuffling stops, and then there are cool, gentle fingers on his brow, shifting through his hair. “Sleep, Dean,” the disembodied voice says, and well, Dean isn’t going to argue.

The next time he wakes up he’s hit with an overwhelming wave of nausea, and well, lucky it turns out he’s in his own apartment because otherwise he probably wouldn’t have made it to the toilet in
time. H hangs his head over the side of the bowl and retches, vision spinning and blotchy, and when he’s finished and breathing, heavy and shallow, he realizes there’s a hand running up and down his back, someone murmuring things Dean’s brain doesn’t fully have the function to grasp. Cas helps Dean back to bed, where he collapses, and Dean is awake long enough to see Castiel, shirtsleeves rolled up and bodily pushing Chekov back from the toilet as he scrubs it, before he falls into oblivion once again.

The third time he wakes up, his head doesn’t hurt as much anymore, and when he turns his head to his nightstand and sees the pill bottle and glass of water sitting there, he squints suspiciously. There’s a vague memory at the back of his brain, Frank saying something about the concussion hitting him hard once the adrenaline wore off, and he has a pretty good idea of why he feels like such shit.

Human skulls don’t really like it when you throw two hundred pounds of solid mass at them and stop the fall with immovable objects.

He’s still dizzy, but the dull ache in his head is bearable enough, even with his eyes open, so he sits up, swearing as the blood rushes and shifts and his head pounds, feeling heavy. He considers lying down and just going back to sleep, but he’s fucking hungry, so he slowly steps out of bed.

Someone managed to wrestle him into pajama pants and long sleeved tee. Dean wonders if it was Sam – it would explain why the dog isn’t currently trying to make his day even harder.

He opens the door to his room and steps into the hallway, the lighting confirming that it must be night, although it doesn’t feel that late. Dean frowns when he hears the quiet murmur of his TV from the family room, and instead of heading into the kitchen, he sticks his head in to thank Sam, or at least throw a pillow at him and tell him to go the fuck home.

Castiel is sprawled out on his couch. His hair is mussed, his one arm thrown over his head and the other resting atop Chekov, whose head lifts when he sees Dean, but surprisingly enough he doesn’t move. Dean treads a little closer, just enough to see that Castiel’s mouth is open slightly while he sleeps.

It makes for a sickeningly adorable and domestic picture.

Dean frowns and heads off to the kitchen, hears the jangle of Chekov’s collar as he jumps off the couch to follow him.

His head is woozy, his movements still jerky and unsteady, so Dean doesn’t really trust himself to make anything that involves a stove, or even the microwave. Instead he pulls out the loaf of bread, starts spreading peanut butter methodically and thickly onto the slices.

So. Cas was in his family room, had been there for who knows how long. Cas had probably brought him home and…had stayed?

He remembers the sex. He doesn’t think the concussion could have made him forget it even if he wanted to. And he doesn’t want to. The sex was…Jesus. He doesn’t even know how to describe it. And that’s remembering it through a haze of pain, he doesn’t think he could handle sex normally with Cas. The way he’d felt in Dean’s hand, the intensity of his stare, like he was stripping Dean down to his very soul, building him up again with kissing and stroking and the absolutely obscene way that he said his name. Dean’s slightly bothered that he wants again, wants it so badly, since this was supposed to be a one-time, get it out of your system deal.

He doesn’t think he’ll have to worry about it again, though. They were both angry, and Dean’s pretty sure it was a mistake. He’ll remember it, but it was a mistake.
After all, he thinks, staring down at the sandwiches in front of him, he’s not gay and hell, come to
think of it, who knows if Cas was? It was adrenaline, and Dean let those bad thoughts he’d been
having take over, dragged Cas down with him. His stomach twists painfully and the throbbing
behind his eyes seems like it’s making an audible thumping noise in his ears. This was all his fault.

Dean picks up the plate and heads back to the couch, nudging none too gently at Cas’ legs. “Move
over,” he says roughly, his throat still scratchy from disuse.

Cas must not have been all that asleep, because his eyes crack open and though it takes him a second
to figure out what’s going on, he brings his knees closer to his chest, sitting up. Dean drops the plate
on the table in front of him and grabs one of the sandwiches, turning his attention to the TV. Cas is
watching Dr. Sexy.

“How are you feeling?” Cas asks, and his voice is deepened and fucked over. Dean takes an almost
angry bite of his sandwich.

“How long I been out?” he asks, avoiding the question.

“Two, almost three days,” he answers, immediately misinterpreting the look on Dean’s face. “That is
not uncommon for a concussion, and Frank advised that you needed the rest anyway. Bobby made it
clear he would not let you back on the ice within the week.”

Dean stares down at his sandwich, his mind racing. It’s been three days and it sounds like Cas hasn’t
been to practice. Or at the game they were had last night. He wonders if Cas was just sticking around
to say goodbye before he had to get on a plane back to Russia.

The league must have dropped him, after the shit he pulled. The punches he threw because of Dean,
the mess Dean caused. And now Cas was going to have to leave, go back to a country where
nobody cared about him and Dean would never see him again.

Unless he was wrong, and maybe Cas is still playing. “You been here the whole time?” he asks.

Cas’ brow furrows and his mouth turns down in a moue. “Of course,” he says and grabs a sandwich.
He says it matter-of-factly, instantly, like he’s not sure why it’s a question in the first place.

Dean stares at him. He eats the rest of his sandwich.

The silence stretches on.

Christ. Does Dean know how to fuck up a friendship. Awkward, unwanted sex, check. Losing a
guy his job, check. Forcing same guy back to his native country, also check.

All he needs to do now is say something unforgivable and they’ll be all set to go.

He opens his mouth (and he has no idea what he was going to say, maybe something along the lines
of the unforgivable, maybe not) but Cas beats him to it, pointing at the screen. “Haven’t we seen Dr.
Sexy with this resident before?”

Dean follows his finger and nods slowly, stopping when that proves to be too much for his head.
“We’ve seen this one,” he agrees. He lets the awkward pause marinate a little before asking, “D’you
want to watch a movie?”

Cas’ face splits into a smile that almost rips Dean’s breath from his chest. “You promised to show me
Clint Eastwood.”
Dean waves a hand towards the shelves of his entertainment system. “Paint Your Wagon is in there somewhere.”

When Cas comes back to the couch, he hesitates for only a second. “Are you sure you should be watching a movie?”

“I’m the patient, you tell me.”

“Frank said you shouldn’t be doing anything to physically or mentally strain yourself.”

“Well,” Dean shoots him a sardonic grin. “I’m sittin’ on a couch, and the mental straining was never a factor to begin with.”

Cas continues to stand, although his face has taken on a strained, stubborn look, like he wants to say something but is holding himself back. Dean rolls his eyes and tugs him down onto the couch. “What’s your problem?”

“You’re not stupid, Dean,” he says quietly.

Dean laughs, even though it hurts. “Think the recent concussion just about fills the whole mindless goon persona, eh? And I couldn’t even do that right.”

Cas fixes a hard glare on him. “You have an intimate knowledge of pop culture and mechanics. You rattle of stats at the drop of a hat, and I’ve seen you calculate a corsi score more than once. You possess an astonishing ability to know exactly where every player is on the ice and to know where the puck must go and you must be to create the best possible outcome for success. You make calls that require fast paced thinking. You captain a hockey team. You are not stupid, Dean.”

He says it all with an air of practice, like he’s run these words over in his head, thought about them, has argued them to others. Dean’s not sure what to say.

“Huh,” he finally responds. “Couldn’t use big words to tell ya about hummingbird mating habits or anything though.”

“I wouldn’t want you to,” Cas says dryly.

The movie plays on, and Dean has a hard time paying attention to Clint. The flickering bright screen is highlighting Cas’ face in a way that really isn’t far, the dark bruise along his jaw only serving to make him more attractive. Rugged, almost. Cas shifts and Dean catches sight of another bruise on his collarbone and instantly flushes.

He moves nonchalantly as possible, bringing his knees close to his chest. The last thing he needs is to get hard sitting on his couch with Cas. Biggest mistake of his life, take two.

Also you’re not gay, his brain reminds him, although his body seems to be making it pretty clear that Cas is some sort of exception to the rule, and he’s pretty sure his brain needs little convincing. He’d be surprised if it took more than a kiss.

Somehow through the course of the movie, he finds Cas migrating closer and closer to him, and once he does notice, he doesn’t do much to stop it. It’s selfish of him, after all he’s done to Cas, but if this really is the last time he’ll be seeing him, so what? It doesn’t matter how much Cas resents him as long as he already does, and if he doesn’t notice, Dean won’t say shit. Plenty of time to hate himself in the morning.

Soon Cas is basically pressed against him, arm and arm, and he stiffens almost immediately. Cas


doesn’t seem to notice, so Dean resolutely keeps his eyes on the TV, moving his arm to the back of the couch when it begins to fall asleep.

When Cas’ head falls to his shoulder, Dean realizes with a kind of horrified fascination that they’re essentially cuddling.

He doesn’t know whether or not he should nudge Cas. Dean definitely doesn’t think he meant to do this, but the couch is comfortable, and Dean supposes he is as well, and he did wake Cas up. He has no idea how much sleep the other man had gotten over the past few days, and realizes with a kind of sickening guilt that with his looming deportation, probably not much.

So he lets Cas stay. And because he has slept for more than forty-eight straight hours, he gets to be wide awake.

“I fucked up,” he exhales softly. “What are we gonna do?”

“Mmm,” Cas rumbles into his shoulder, and Dean startles. “As I said, Bobby will allow you on the ice at the end of the week, and by then my suspension will be up.”

Dean blinks at the head of dark hair resting on his shoulder. “Suspension?” he repeats dumbly.

“Three games,” he agrees, like this explains everything. And it should, except Dean is an idiot, and instead of being relieved that Cas isn’t being kicked back to the motherland, never to be heard from again, he snaps, “I got you suspended for three games?”

“I got myself suspended for three games.”

“Yeah, because I let my head get slammed into a wall and apparently that made you go Rocky all over the guy!”

Cas’ head pops up and he squints at Dean. “Are you blaming yourself for your concussion?”

“Well, yeah!” he sputters, “I fucked up, didn’t I? And I don’t want you beatin’ people up for me anymore ‘neither Cas, you can’t risk that.”

“That’s what teammates are supposed to do.”

“Yeah, guys who aren’t gonna get themselves kicked out of the country or killed by men twice their size because they don’t know how to fight!”

“I know how to fight,” Cas says coldly, and his eyes flash so dangerously Dean finds himself backing away from that one, even as the look sends a worrying zing straight to his groin.

“Okay, fine, you know how to fight, doesn’t mean you hafta to do it for me. The team needs you.”

“You need me.”

Dean’s chest clenches at that, and there’s a slight flutter in his belly. He’s actually a little concerned about his reaction, doesn’t want to think too much about it, so he switches tracks again, like ripping off a bandaid, keep it moving so the words don’t hit you, not really. “We had sex,” he says bluntly.

That makes Cas pause, before he concedes carefully. “We did.”

Suddenly Dean doesn’t want to talk anymore. He’d regretted the words as soon as they’d slipped out, had said them to avoid the emotional wave threatening to crash down on him with Cas’ response, and had ended up running straight into a shitstorm. Cas is watching him warily, waiting for what
Dean will say next, but he has nothing. There’s nothing to say. “Sorry,” he mutters, turning away. “It was stupid, I should’ve realized – sorry.”

Dean waits for Cas to get up and leave, but there’s no movement, nothing to indicate he’s gotten off the couch. He counts to ten in his head, to twenty, to thirty. He makes it to forty-five before he feels a warm hand on his shoulder and instinctively turns to look. “What’re you—,”

Cas’ lips fit so perfectly to his, the shape of them already familiar to Dean as Cas slowly coaxes them open, tongue tracing over the seam and delving in as soon as Dean allows him to. Dean’s not sure why Cas is kissing him, and for a brief moment he considers putting a stop to it, walking away. But then Cas is clambering onto Dean’s lap, his whole weight settling against him as he kisses him harder, and Dean decides fuck it.

He likes this. He likes kissing Cas.

Cas seems to like it too, if the pleased noises he’s making low in his throat are any indication. Dean’s surprised to find that he wants this, would be happy just doing this for the rest of the night, and Cas indulges him for a few minutes, lets Dean stroke up his back before he breaks away.

“Fuck,” Dean chokes out, unconsciously reaching his hand to trace a finger along Cas’ slick, kiss-swollen lips.

Lips that curve slightly under his touch. “Pants off.”

“You’re the boss,” Dean mutters, but he works his pajayma pants over his hips anyway, Cas sliding down to the floor and watching in that intent way of his that somehow makes Dean feel way more exposed than nakedness does. He’s half hard, fairly impressive considering all they’d been doing is kissing, though he supposes Cas grinding down on his lap hadn’t really hurt matters. “So uh,” he clears his throat and looks to Cas, whose making no moves to get his clothes off, and vaguely gestures. “Are you gonna—nggh, Cas!”

Cas had leaned forward and taken the head of his cock into his mouth, and Dean immediately feels his dick hardening, as Cas sinks lower, taking as much as he can. His mouth is warm and wet, and Dean finds himself sinking a hand into Cas’ hair, the other gripping the armrest of the couch. “Fuck, Cas,” he grits out. “Jesus, fuck.”

Cas hums around him, the vibration jerking Dean’s hips a little and he manages to groan out, “God, Cas, you feel so good,” before Cas sucks, and suddenly he’s lost all coherent thought.

Cas goes begins to bob his head, sucking, wrapping his tongue around Dean and probing at his slit, and while it’s not the best blowjob Dean’s ever gotten, it doesn’t really matter. Cas’ enthusiasm more than makes up for it, his single minded intensity, and Dean finds himself gritting out praise, encouraging him to go faster, be rougher. He can feel his orgasm building, driven by the obscene sight of Cas fully dressed on the floor with his mouth full of Dean’s dick, lips stretched around him and eyes dark with want. Dean swears when he notices that Cas has slipped his own cock out of his sweatpants, is palming himself while he sucks Dean off.

“C’mon Cas, so close, c’mon, please,” he babbles, his hips jerking uncontrollably again. He wants to move, needs it, needs to get closer, but he doesn’t want to hurt Cas. He cries out when one of Cas’ hands finds a way to his balls and squeezes, can’t help the upward shove of his hips. “Jesus, Cas!”

He hears a filthy pop as Cas pulls completely off his cock, and Dean swears he doesn’t whine when cool air hits his exposed skin. “Dean,” Cas growls, hint of accent stronger than it’s been in months, “Stop screwing around and fuck my mouth.”
And that’s all folks. Cas immediately gets those fucking ridiculous lips back around him, and this time Dean doesn’t hold back, doesn’t stop his hips from cantiing off the couch and into Cas’ mouth as his hand clenches at his hair. He feels the dam about to burst, warns, “Cas, I got—I’m gonna come, I’ve gotta—,” and instead of pulling away Cas sucks harder, squeezing Dean’s balls again until he shouts and empties straight into Cas’ mouth, down his throat. And god he should not find it as hot as he does when Cas pulls back, looking extremely satisfied and licks his lips, nor should he have been on the floor that fast with him, kissing him hungrily and tugging him once, twice before Cas shot all over their bellies, his cry of “Dean!” muffled by Dean’s own mouth.

Frank probably would have counted that as an extraneous activity, Dean dazedly thinks minutes later, staring up at the ceiling.

He can’t seem to work up the energy to get back on the couch, and neither can Cas, who’s taken it upon himself to collapse half on and half off of Dean’s chest. They’re sticky and disgusting, only half naked. Dean can feel the headache he’d forgotten slowly returning, knows his back will kill him in the morning for this. He can’t seem to care.

“Where the hell did you learn to talk dirty?” he asks.

Cas snorts. “It is the first thing I learned.”

That makes sense, in an NHL locker room. It makes even more sense when Dean considers Gabriel and Balthazar. The thought of the locker room gives him pause, remembering the first time they had sex, and his chest starts constricting again. He thinks Cas must want to do this, after all he was the one who started it, but Dean can’t be sure, doesn’t know. Cas has never expressed interest in him before, and he’s finding it hard to believe that this is happening, that he’s allowed this, whatever this is.

“Hey, Cas,” he says hesitantly. “We can do this again, right?” Cas sits up and quickly amends. “I mean if you want to, we don’t have to, I mean we could forget—,”

Cas reaches over him and pulls the blanket off the couch back, dragging it back down over himself and Dean. “You’re an idiot,” he says, not unkindly, before flopping over Dean’s chest again.

Dean lets out a breath he hadn’t realized he’d been holding. Alright then.
Long Change

Dean is a horrible patient. Sam tells him so when he calls in the morning, waking Dean from his surprisingly comfortable position on the floor. Whether or not the position has anything to do with Cas’ head resting on his chest is something he doesn’t want to contemplate.

“Hey,” Sam says, voice all concerned in that little brother way Dean hates to hear. Means he’s not doing his job right. “Wow, glad to hear you’re awake. How are you feeling?”

“Fine,” Dean says lowly, conscious of the man…he doesn’t have another word for it, the man snuggled just below his chin. “Better. You tried calling?”

“Yeah, Cas said you were sleeping it off. You want me to come over?”

“No!” Dean says so quickly his chest jumps, and Cas snuffles. Even that manages to sound irate. “I mean no, I’m fine Sam. You’re gonna have to find somebody else to play nurse with.”

“You should really have somebody there to—,”

“Cas is here.”

“Cas is still there?” Sam asks, sounding surprised.

“So?” Dean asks defensively. “Not like I tied him up or anything.”

“I’m just surprised he’s still there. You get pretty grumpy about people trying to help you.”

He scowls. “I do not get—,”

The phone is pulled from his hands and Dean bites off a protest as Cas presses it to his ear. “Sam?” he says, and then there’s a series of uh-huhs, and yeahs that gives Dean absolutely no clue what direction the conversation is heading in. Cas hangs up, shoving the phone away from them.

“What was that about?”

“Sam will see you next week,” Cas tells him, and before Dean can really work out an answer to that Cas has crawled over him to get to the bathroom, dragging the blanket with him and leaving Dean exposed to the cool air of his apartment.

So Sam’s not showing up and Cas…stays. Dean catches him coming out of his bathroom, toothbrush hanging out of his mouth. He sits with him on the couch and suffers through documentaries on art-deco until he manages to convince Cas to switch it over to a hockey game. And he physically wrestles him away from the stove when Cas manages to burn grilled cheese.

“I can melt cheese on bread without injury, Dean.”

“Go,” Dean brandishes the charcoal encrusted spatula at him until Cas settles at the table, grumbling. He pouts all through the meal.

Dean waits for the inevitable shoe to drop. It’s all so tentative, he feels like there are trip wires everywhere, and one small move could set one off, could rip a hole in his chest. He waits for Cas to leave, tries not to get too close to Cas because he’s sure he’ll be rejected. He doesn’t know what they’re doing anymore and can’t ask, not without risking whatever they’re doing right now, which may not be ideal but at least it’s safe. At least Cas is here.
Cas doesn’t act any differently. Dean watches carefully, waits for some kind of sign that something has changed, that their dicks touched and Cas had his mouth on him and that Dean is still not gay but he might be gay for Cas, a little, and he means that in a totally sexual way without any feelings attached.

Except Cas is pretty damn awesome. And he likes him.

But Cas doesn’t try to get his pants off again, or even kiss him. He just reads, or attempts to sneak into the kitchen to make Dean food. And as nice as this all is, Dean can feel his shoulders getting tighter and tighter with the tension, the anticipation of whatever type of rejection is bound to appear when it’s time to get back on the ice.

The rejection never comes. Dean walks back into Crowley’s on Monday morning, Cas in tow, and is greeted to a round of sarcastic applause, Gabriel and Balthazar throwing balled up pieces of stick tape over his head like confetti. Bobby glares at him, says, “Good thing you got a thick skull,” and practice resumes as normal.

That night, Cas climbs back into the impala with him and Sam, Sam shooting Dean a surprised look. Dean carefully doesn’t look at him. When they get back to their building, he’s only mildly surprised when Cas follows him all the way up to his own apartment. He doesn’t question it.

Dean goes through most of February not questioning things. He doesn’t question Cas’ toothbrush in his toothbrush holder, or the guest room slowly filling with things. He doesn’t question that every other day of the week, Chekov’s not whining at his bed to go for a run because Cas is taking care of it. He doesn’t question when he wakes up on those days and there’s hot coffee waiting for him.

He doesn’t know why Cas hasn’t left yet. Dean’s not getting headaches anymore, not that he’d let Cas do much to nurse him when he was anyway. He’d just kind of been there, and now he was still here, like a weird fever dream Dean wasn’t sure he ever wanted to leave. Cas isn’t acting like anything is different, his attitude towards Dean so unaltered he has to wonder if somehow he hadn’t noticed that Cas had been his roommate since October and the sex was all in his head.

Dean won’t talk. He refuses. If he opens his mouth he’ll ruin it. But Cas is slowly driving him insane. Their hotel rooms seemed filled with sexual tension now, Dean unable to relax as Cas goes about his nightly routines around him, brushes against him, smiles at him. He feels like a spring wound tight, feels only slightly better after games where he’s able to slam around and skate fast, escaping everything before it all comes crashing down on him once again.

Sam comes over to watch college basketball one night and Dean pretends his brother isn’t paying more attention to him than the game. When Cas pads out of his bedroom, barefooted and hair ruffled, to plop down next to Dean and steal his beer, Dean pretends Sam doesn’t raise his eyebrow. But when Cas heads back into his room, exasperated because every time he asks why a foul is called Dean answers, “Sexual misconduct,” Dean doesn’t ignore Sam’s snort.

“What?” he demands.

“Nothing,” Sam smirks. “Just think it’s kind of funny that Mr. Extrovert is only just now living with somebody. How did that happen, anyway?”

“He’s not living with me,” Dean counters, resolutely staring at the TV. “He just never left after the whole concussion deal.”

Sam snorts again. This time Dean does ignore him.
Dean lasts two weeks. Two weeks of standing rigidly at the kitchen sink, washing dishes while Cas dried, constantly brushing arms. Two weeks of Cas smiling in that way he did whenever Dean made a stupid joke. Two weeks of an extra plate on the counter, of a trench coat hanging next to his own leather jacket.

They’re doing laundry when the fragile strings holding Dean together snap.

“They don’t fold like that.”

Cas glances at him. Dean’d thrown Cas’ clothes in with his own without even thinking, habit ingrained from years of taking care of Sam, and there’d been a funny feeling in his stomach as he’d pulled them all out of the dryer. There was something weirdly intimate about all their clothes being mixed together, smelling the same. Something domestic.

“I’m not sure what you mean,” Cas says, picking up another one of Dean’s shirts and folding it. Dean stares as his fingers run nimbly over the plaid, practically caressing it.

“That’s not how I fold them,” Dean repeats, and he can feel his shoulders setting as a sick feeling wells up in his stomach. “They won’t fit.”

Cas looks down at the shirt, like he expects it to chastise him too. “It shouldn’t be hard to make them fit,” he says, a note of confusion coloring his tone, like he can’t really figure out what the fuck Dean is talking about but is going to humor him anyway. “You have a big closet.”

The sick feeling in his stomach wells up into his throat, and if his shoulders were drawn any tighter he swears they might crack. “They can’t,” he manages to get out.

“Dean,” Cas says, beginning to look concerned. “I can redo them if it’s bothering you.”

“Yeah it’s fucking bothering me!” Dean cries, all semblance of whatever he was holding together shattering. “You come into my apartment, you stay here, and now you’re folding my clothes and you think just any way you do it means they’re gonna fit?”

Cas kisses him. His mouth is soft and warm and Dean feels everything melt away the second their lips touch, his shoulders loosening and the sick feeling in his stomach being overwhelmed by the heat building there instead.

Some sort of floodgate opens after that. When Cas stumbles out of bed at eleven in the morning, bleary eyed and pissed at the world, he presses a kiss to Dean’s jaw. When Dean chases Cas away from the stove for the fiftieth time, he does it by mouthing at his neck. February is a series of kisses, the unspoken rule being that whatever they’re doing only happens inside the apartment.

Dean still has no idea what’s happening, but now there’s kissing. He and Cas kiss regularly, soothing the unsettledness that had been building since his concussion. They don’t have sex again, but he’s fine with it. He just wants to kiss.

He’s starting to wonder if he’s a little screwed.
Being in the locker room while it’s empty is always weird for Dean. Locker rooms are like second homes to him, except his team is what makes it his home. Without them, it’s like this strange, in between empty space, something with the potential to make him happy but devoid of the means. It’s not a feeling he really likes to explore, just gets in and dumps his stuff and gets out as quickly as possible until the locker room starts filling up again.

“Dean!” Bobby yells from his office, and Dean swears internally before sticking his head around the door.

“Yeah?”

Bobby’s got the scowl on his face that never means anything good, and Dean’s spirits sink even lower. Practice had ended for the day, but all of the guys had stuck around because Bobby’d told them to. Dean figured they’d been out there long enough for Crowley to appear and start bitching. He doesn’t envy whoever tries to get between the argument Gabriel is bound to start with him.

“Team meeting,” Bobby grimaces, like the words leave a bad taste in his mouth. “We need one. Call it.”

“Now?” Dean asks. “C’mon Bobby, practice is over.”

“I asked all you morons to stay, and ya did,” Bobby snaps. “We got some business to go over. End of the season is coming, need to discuss strategy for March.”

“You sure picked a hell of a time to do it,” Dean growls. He really doesn’t want to go out there and tell the guys they have to come back into the locker room for another two hours to listen to Bobby.

“I look like I care to you, boy?”

“At least let us get outta Crowley’s,” Dean wheedles. He can see Bobby considering it. He hates Crowley as much as the rest of them do. “C’mon Bobby. We can go get you some coffee.”

Bobby’s face scrunches. “It’s Coach to you, Dean,” he grumbles, and Dean takes that as a yes.

Dean still maintains coffee was a good idea. Starbucks probably wasn’t.

“What the hell is that?” he asks when Gabriel slides into the booth across from him and Cas, his mug piled high with whipped cream.

“Sex,” Gabriel answers promptly with a leer.

Cas squints at Gabriel’s mug and nudges the Americano he’d gotten for Dean closer to him. “That is not sex.”

‘Course that’s when Sam has to appear, making an indignant self-righteous face. “Do you guys talk about anything but sex?”

“If you’d like we can talk about your sex, Sam,” Cas offers, and Dean lets out a surprised bark of laughter.

“Yeah Sammy, how is Jess?”

“Shut up,” Sam says, turning bright red as he slides in next to Gabriel. Balthazar appears almost as soon as he’s settled.
“Did I hear correctly?” he asks with interest. “Are we finally going to learn about dear Cassie’s sex life?”

Cas looks contemplative. “What do you want to learn?”

Dean pauses with the coffee halfway to his lips, panic welling inside him.

“Anyone else notice how Gordon’s not here?” Benny demands, slamming his giant coffee cup down on the table. Dean considers kissing him.

“Why the hell do you think I’m in such a good mood?” Gabriel counters, whipped cream gathered along his upper lip.

Benny shoots him a skeptical look. “I figured that was the ecstasy, Cher.”

“You sure know how to sweet talk a girl,” Gabriel coos.

Dean glances around the tables the team is gathered at, noticed Bobby has got his head tipped back far enough to be drinking the last of his coffee and raises his voice, “Alright guys, we’re here for a team meetin’, so listen up. Coach has got something to say.”

Bobby shoots him a dirty look as Dean smirks into his cup. Serves the old bastard right for wasting their Friday night.

Bobby grumps around for a bit before he starts laying into the defense, so Dean zones out, focusing on the warm cup of coffee in his hands and the warm press of Cas against his side. They’re in a separate room off to the back so no one can hear what they’re talking about, but the place is lined with windows, and Dean catches a glimpse of other customers peering through them with excited looks on their faces.

A rush of warm air caresses his ear. “They’re watching you,” Cas says softly.

Dean lets out a huff of laughter. “Probably more like you Cas. You’re the one scoring lately.”

Benny snorts from beside him, and Dean startles. He’d forgotten he was there. “You making innuendo, brother?”

“I believe it was a flirtation,” Cas corrects. Dean feels a hand brush against his knee and glances at Cas, but he’s busy paying attention to Benny. Must’ve been an accident.

“Can someone please inform me why it’s alright for Dean to flirt with Cassie, but my flirting with Gabriel is practically cause for a third World War?”

“That ain’t flirtin’,” Benny snorts. “It’s sexual harassment.”

“Besides,” Sam says, looking straight at Dean. “We know Dean doesn’t mean it.”

Dean scowls darkly at Sam, who only raises a questioning eyebrow in response to him. He knows this whole Cas living with him situation is kind of weird, and Sam’s got questions, but Dean really wishes his little brother wouldn’t go around assuming things. Especially when Dean is trying hard not to think about those things.

He likes the kissing. He really does. But he wants to touch more of Cas, something that for some reason isn’t on the table.

He has no idea what the fuck Cas is doing to him.
“Damn it all,” Balthazar mutters, and Dean focuses back on Bobby just in time to see him pulling out the playbook they’ve studied about a million times this season. He lets out a groan along with just about everyone else, except his groan evolves into a yelp.

“Uh, Dean?”

“I’m fine,” Dean tells his brother in a tight voice. Cas’ hand is clenched around his upper thigh, massaging slowly and occasionally brushing against his quickly lengthening erection.

“Weirdo,” Sam shakes his head and turns his attention back to Bobby.

Cas’ hand has slowly worked its way up to Dean’s waistband, his thumb slipping under Dean’s shirt and brushing across the sensitive skin there. Dean grits his teeth, darting a quick side-eyed glance to see that Cas is still stoic as ever, a calm expression on his face as he listens to whatever the fuck Bobby is saying.

Dean takes short deep, breaths, hoping like hell Benny doesn’t glance over. Sure, Cas’ hand is pretty well covered by the table, but how can his teammate not know that Cas is currently trying to kill him?

Dean tries hard to concentrate on something unarousing, like Gabriel in a speedo or Sam after Mexican food night, but all he’s really able to focus on is Cas’ hand inching closer and closer to his cock and the warmth pooling deep in his belly.

“You want me to run through the play,” Cas says, and Dean wonders why he sounds like he’s repeating that for someone’s benefit when the button of his jeans is flicked open deftly and the zipper is pulled down. He stiffens and tries not to burn a hole in the wooden table below him with his stare. A chorus of shit shit shit shit shit runs through his head.

“Once the defender has the puck on their stick,” Cas begins, carefully freeing Dean’s erection from his pants. “And it is carried over the blue line, the offense need to be in position.” He begins working his hand over Dean’s length, and Dean almost feels dizzy with the feel of Cas’ hand on him, wrapped around him. “The puck will be passed to the corner, then circled around the back of the net,” he runs his thumb around the head of Dean’s cock, smearing precome. “Then the player closest to the crease must crash the net, distracting the goalie,” he begins twisting as he strokes, thumbing at the slit of Dean’s cock and smearing even more mess. Dean bites his lip hard, feels pressure building steadily. “Then we must shoot over and over again,” two more vigorous strokes, Dean has no idea how Benny isn’t seeing this, he might as well be screaming with how loud and fast his breathing is getting. Cas gives one more twist, lets go, and Dean is actually about to scream when he feels a sharp pressure on his balls and shoots into Cas’ hand, barely stopping himself from slumping forward onto the table as he sucks in a huge gulp of air.

“Until we score,” Cas finishes calmly, pulling his hand away. Dimly through his haze of lust and disbelief, Dean wonders where he thinks he’s going to wipe that mess.

Bobby says something in response - praise maybe, more likely just some grunt of acknowledgement – but Dean can’t concentrate. He hastily readjusts, zipping his pants back up, and stands abruptly from the table.

“Coffee run,” he murmurs to Sam’s questioning look, shooting Cas a glare. Cas’ eyes darken almost immediately in response, and Dean leaves before he drags the man over the table towards him.
Luckily the line for coffee was long, and he was able to zone out, concentrating on calming down. He really can't believe Cas had done that. Dean was no stranger to lewd public displays, had even been caught having sex in public places, but Cas had taken it to an entirely different level. No one had known what was going on under that table—hell, Dean had been terrified someone would figure it out. That small taste of fear had been exhilarating, and not being able to touch Cas back...Jesus.

“Castiel Krushnic!” he hears someone squeal behind him, and Dean whips around.

Cas must have literally just exited the other room, pushed up against the door like he is. A short blonde woman is hanging onto his arm, an excited look on her face. “Ohhh, your muscles are so big!” she breathes, “Say something in Russian! Please?”

“Ah,” Cas looks slightly panicked, his eyes darting around for an escape, and Dean feels a weird sense of protective possessiveness wash over him. He heads over quickly, curling a hand around Cas’ bicep. Dean feels him relax almost immediately under his touch and stomps down the curl of satisfaction in his gut.

“Bathroom’s free,” he says, not paying the small blonde any attention.

“It is?” Cas asks in confusion.

“Yeah. You needed to use it, right?”

Understanding dawns in Cas’ eye and he allows Dean to pull him away with barely an apology to Becky. “Thank you,” Cas says when they reach the bathroom. “I am still unsure how to handle aggressive fans.”

“No problem,” Dean says, a fake breeziness to his tone as he turns the lock on the door.

Cas watches this with squinted eyes. “What are you doing, Dean?”

“Why’d you follow me, Cas?”

“I wanted to get more coffee as well.”

“Bullshit,” Dean declares.

Cas cocks his head at Dean. “Bullshit?”

“Bullshit,” Dean advances on him, doesn’t stop until they’re standing chest to chest, Cas pressed to the counter of the sink. “Wanna know what I think?”

“I’m sure you’ll tell me anyway.” Despite still looking completely unruffled, Dean’s gotten way better at reading Cas now, especially when it comes to stuff like this. Cas has always got this certain look in his eye when he knows Dean is about to kiss him, like this anticipatory hunger, and he’s wearing it now, staring defiantly back at him.

For the past month, Cas has been slowly tearing him a part, never saying a word about it. Dean wants to do the same.

“I think,” he says, lowering his voice and leaning closer so that his mouth will brush the shell of Cas’ ear, “That you liked the feel of my dick in your hand so much you followed me out here for more.”

Cas’ breath hitches, the only indication he gives of not being totally calm. “Are you offering?” he asks roughly.
“Nah,” Dean turns his face into Cas’ neck and smiles against his skin, fitting his hands to his hips and holding him to the counter. “Think it’s my turn.”

Cas growls low and deep in his throat, the vibration against him all Dean need to cant his hips forward, fitting a thigh between Cas’ legs and dragging a hand through the back of his hair and pulling to reveal the column of Cas’ throat. He begins kissing along Cas’ jawline as Cas’ hands run up his back.

“Christ, Cas, you know how crazy you’ve been driving me?” Dean mutters, nuzzling stubble on stubble before pulling back to study Cas’ face. Cas’ lips are parted and his pupils are blown wide, dark. Dean feels a thrill run through him over having done that with just a kiss and moves his thigh a little, massaging it against Cas’ cock.

“Dean,” Cas grits out.

“Yeah?” Dean smiles, leans in to kiss him. “What d’you need, baby? I’ll get you there.”

Cas nearly lurches forward at the offer, and Dean knows he must be hurting because he’s already straining against his zipper himself. He quickly unzips them both, running his lips over Cas’ skin the entire time, down to his collar bone. Cas whimpers when Dean lightly bites his clavicle. “Your mouth,” he breathes. “Dean, I want your mouth on me.”

Dean pulls back again, more fully this time.

He’s definitely never done that before.

Dean’s stopped trying to fool himself. He’s having gay sex with Cas, and he likes gay sex. He likes the weight of Cas in his hand, he likes Cas’ mouth wrapped around his dick. There’s no way to get around those things, and frankly, he’s already exhausted himself trying. But he’s never been the one…initiating, before, and he can’t shake the feeling that doing so will cross some kind of line.

“Dean,” Cas says quietly, and he knows what he was thinking must have been showing on his face. “I would very much like to taste you again as well.”

“Fuck, Cas.” Dean groans and without allowing himself to think more about it, sinks to his knees.

He’d expected to not like it, to have to soldier through the first few seconds before he got used to it, but that isn’t the case. Cas is hot and heavy on his tongue, the taste of him a mixture of salt and musk and something else he can’t really define. It’s not bad. Dean runs his tongue around the head of Cas’ cock, probing curiously, and Cas shudders, immediately clenching both hands in Dean’s hair.

“Fuck,” he says quietly. “Fuck. Dean, that’s amazing.”

Dean grins as well as he can around Cas’ dick before slowly moving his head forward, taking as much of Cas as he can before pulling back. Concentrating, he does it again, only this time he hollows his cheeks, begins sucking as he uses his tongue to taste Cas.

Cas hisses above him and his hips jerk under the press of Dean’s palms. Dean taps one encouragingly and it moves again of its own violation, shoving Cas’ cock to the back of Dean’s throat before pulling out again. Cas swears above him. Dean’s never had much of a gag reflex.

Cas begins moving in earnest, and Dean focuses on making him feel good, getting the rhythm down and letting his hands explore Cas, his muscular thighs, the divets between them and his balls, and finally his balls themselves. They’re tight and heavy in his hand, and Dean gives one an experimental squeeze.
“Dean!” Cas says it like the air has been punched out of him, and before he knows it he’s being pulled off Cas. Before he can complain, before he can beg to go back, to finish, to taste him, Cas’ lips are on his, messily working his own open and entangling their tongues. Cas seems to love the taste of himself, and Dean can’t believe how turned on he is by Cas’ frenzied movements. He feels Cas take his own dick in his hand and pushes against him, nudges against Cas’ wet warm cock until Cas is forced to take it in his hand too. They’re pushing together, pulling, kissing, creating a friction that’s better than anything Dean has ever felt in his life before Cas is coming, and Dean isn’t too far behind, spurts of come shooting onto Cas’ hand again and their legs.

“Holy shit,” Dean pants into Cas’ shoulder, and Cas makes a lazy hum of agreement, shrugging a little to get Dean off. He lifts his come covered hand in bemusement, studying it.

Dean’s not sure what comes over him, but he leans forward and sucks one of Cas’ fingers into his mouth.

Cas is back on his lips, hand fisted in his hair, before he can fully register the taste.

“I’d really, really like to do that again,” Dean struggles to say as Cas traces the lobe of his ear with his tongue, “But they’re probably wondering where we are.”

He sighs and pulls back, looking so much like a petulant child that Dean laughs.

“Just tell them we’re having sex and we’ll be out soon,” Cas says darkly, leaning over to pull out wads of paper towels.

“Ha, sure,” Dean agrees. “I’ll take something I’d never admit to anybody for five hundred, Alex.”

Cas finishes his clean up silently and waits for Dean.

Gabriel is standing outside the bathroom with an entirely too big grin on his face when Dean and Cas exit. Dean schools his look into one of annoyance to disguise the panic quickly rising to suffocate him. “You running out of hobbies, Gabe?”

“You wound me, Deano, waiting outside of bathrooms is an art, not a hobby,” Gabriel claims, placing a mock offended hand on his chest. “You missed the meeting, kiddos.”

“By the look on your face I assume there was something important,” Cas says dryly.

Gabriel grins even wider. “Three guesses.”

“Gabriel,” Dean growls threateningly. He’s got no patience for this, not with the dried come stiffening his boxers.

“Alright, alright, geez, Cranky Kelly,” Gabriel rolls his eyes. “Gordon’s gone.”

“What?”

“Traded this morning,” Gabriel says gleefully. “We got picks.”

“Bobby say why?” Dean hates admitting it, but Gordon wasn’t a bad player at all. He just sucked as a person.

Gabriel shrugs. “Guessing Sambo had something to do with it.” He pulls a lollipop from his pocket and carefully unwraps it before shoving it in his mouth. “Everyone took off already. I’m heading out too. Got a date with a leggy blonde and some whipped cream.”
“Please tell your mother we said hello,” Cas tells him, the perfect picture of politeness. Not that Dean is buying it. He has no idea how no one’s called them out already, with Cas’ hair in the state it’s in.

Gabriel bursts into loud peals of laughter, clapping Cas on the back. “Sure thing, Casablanca,” he smirks, winking. “And next time you two decide to trade handjobs in a Starbucks, try to be louder for the people in the back.” He salutes them with his lollipop before ambling off towards the door.

Icy cold doubt slides up Dean’s spine and wraps around his chest. “He doesn’t know, does he?” he asks Cas helplessly. Cas frowns and gives Dean’s hand a reassuring squeeze. It’s not really an answer.

Sam calls him when he’s walking the dog, which in retrospect might be a good thing because there’s nothing to do when he takes Chekov out but think, and at this particular moment he’d been trying to figure out how to get Cas into his bed.

Not even for sex. He just figured if the guy was living with him, and they enjoyed sucking one another off, they might as well sleep in the same bed.

Christ, he was fucking lame.

“Hey,” and joy, Dean can already tell Sam is annoyed and on his way to slightly pissed off. “What gives?”

“Depends on what you’re askin’ for,” Dean replies, twisting Chekov’s leash tighter around his hand.

“I dunno, maybe to hear from my brother? It’s been like a week.”

Dean laughs. “I see you every day, Sammy.”

“Yeah, at games and practice,” Sam snipes back. “Doesn’t count. We still barely talk. And are you seriously not gonna ask me what happened with the whole Gordon thing?”

The Gordon thing. Oh yeah. Gabriel had said Sam had something to do with that. Dean had completely forgotten, wrapped up as he was in obsessing over the blue eyed Russian staying in his apartment. “Sorry,” he says sincerely. “I’ve been distracted.”

Sam makes a noise in the back of his throat which Dean can’t really identify but knows must be paired with some sort of bitch face. “That’s another thing,” he gripes. “I’ve been pretty patient, Dean. When were you planning on telling me you and Cas were dating?”

Dean freezes on the sidewalk and Chekov comes running back to figure out why they’ve stopped, licking at his palm. “What?”

“You and Cas,” Sam repeats, and yup, that’s definitely his pissy voice, though Dean can’t really concentrate on that now based on the fact that his little brother, the person who knows him best in the world, thinks he’s dating Castiel Krushnic.

“We’re not dating Sam, jesus.”
“Uh huh,” Sam says in disbelief. “He lives in your apartment, you do everything together, and if I believe Gabriel, which I really hate you for making me do, you had sex in the bathroom at Starbucks.”

Dean swears, loud and colorful. He hadn’t heard everything from Gabriel and figured the little weasel was just making one of his stupid jokes and hadn’t actually heard them having sex. Fuck.

“Yeah. So. You going to tell me what’s going on?”

“We’re not dating,” Dean repeats, teeth clenched. “We’re just…Cas n’me…,” he sighs, running a hand over his face. “We’ve done stuff,” he says hesitantly. “And I’m allowed to kiss him whenever I want, I guess. But that’s it.”

Sam is silent for a very, very long time, so long that Dean pulls the phone from his ear and checks to make sure that the call is still connected. “Are you telling me,” he finally says slowly. “That you’re dating Cas and you don’t even realize it?”

“I…,” Dean shuts his mouth and thinks over the last month or so. Him and Cas living together, him and Cas going out to dinner. Cas suffering through Cupcake Wars and Dean leaving out the news paper every morning because the freak likes doing the Word Jumble in his head. “Shit.”

“Do you two even talk?” Sam asks disbelievingly.

“My mouth is usually kind of full,” Dean answers truthfully.

“I really didn’t need to know that,” he mutters. “Maybe you should ask him what he thinks is going on,” Sam’s getting into it now, his need to fix erasing whatever crappiness he’d been feeling towards Dean. “Maybe there are some cultural barriers? I can look up some stuff on Russian romantic interaction, if you want.”

“Jesus no, thanks Sam,” Dean says. “Think I can manage Cas’ dick without that information.”

“Dean,” Sam says in frustration. “Cas is your best friend. You think maybe you should talk to him about this stuff?”

“S’not like he’s talking to me.”

“So what, you refuse to be the more mature one on principle?”

Dean would stick out his tongue just to be an asshole, but even if Sam could be able to tell what he was doing it wouldn’t have the same effect. “Leave it alone, Sam.”

“I swear to God, you have the emotional range of a teaspoon.”

“Don’t quote your nerd books at me.”

“If it’s such a nerd book, why have you read it?”

“It’s a cultural phenomenon!” Dean protests. “I ain’t responsible for other people’s bad taste, and I’m not about to be the one shmuck in the bar who doesn’t know who the fuck Hermione is.”

“Is that why you read Twilight?” Sam asks, the smirk clearly evident in his tone.

“Shut up, Sam.”

“Great comeback, Dean.”
Dean sighs and runs his free hand over his face. The leather of the leash still wrapped around it scraping almost soothingly against his skin. “This isn’t…weird for you?”

“What, arguing about your stupid cool guy hang ups? No, that’s pretty on par for the course with your idiocy.”

Dean’s mouth twists. “No bitch, I mean it’s not weird for you that Cas and I are…I mean – shit, Sammy, I basically just fucking came out to you or somethin’.”

“Dean,” Sam says seriously. “This is a surprise to literally no one but you.”

Dean’s knee jerk reaction is panic, because what the fuck does that mean, that everyone in the world knows how gay he is for Cas? Can they tell when he’s playing or something? Does he fucking look gay? Sam must sense his miniature freak out, because he amends, “I mean to the people that know you, Dean. People on the team.”

“You all thought I was fucking gay?” Dean asks, his voice way higher than he’d like it to be.

“No, Dean, Jesus,” Sam mutters. “I can’t believe you’ve seen Cas naked and you’re still having these hang ups.”

“Not the point, Sam,” Dean growls. “What do you mean it’s not a surprise?”

“I’ve told you before,” his brother says in exasperation. “You’ve always…I dunno how to describe it Dean, but no one on the team would be surprised about this. You’ve always flirted with everyone. Think the guys just assume you sleep with who you want to, I always did.”

“And you never figured that was important to mention to me?”

“If I’d known you were struggling with your bisexuality, I would have helped a lot sooner,” Sam mutters, and that’s definitely a threat. There’s a beat of silence, then, “How long?”

“How long what?”

“How long with you been struggling with it?”

“Honestly?” Dean barks out a laugh. “Just since Cas.”

“Really?” Sam asks, unable to keep the note of surprise out of his voice. “Huh.”

“It might have been longer, deep down there,” Dean admits, watching Chekov sniff around a tree. “I definitely thought some shit I shouldn’t have about guys.”

“And what, you ignore it?”

“Sam,” he says in a pained voice. “You remember dad, right? Tall, imposing, bought me that prostitute when I was sixteen?”

It’s not smart bringing up to dad to Sam. They’d always fought, constantly, using Dean as the mediator who always tried to please them both. If Sammy had started noticing guys, he’d have said something about it and gone out and found a boyfriend out of spite. Dean had gone the exact opposite direction, throwing himself at multiple girls in order to fit into his father’s expectations.

Surprisingly enough, Sam doesn’t start a fight, or call Dean an idiot. He just sighs heavily. “I get it,” he says, sounding almost sad somehow.
“I swear Sam, if you’re gonna start pitying—,”

“I’m not,” Sam interjects. “I’m just…I’m really glad you found Cas, okay?”

And shit, now he’s getting all sappy.

“I’m hanging up now.”

“He’s helping you be the real you,” Sam continues, and the scary part is, Dean can really only be eighty five percent sure that he’s joking.

“Goodbye, Sam,” Dean says forcefully, and he distinctly hears Sam chuckling before he manages to hang up the phone. Bastard.

Sam may be a bastard, but he’s fucking effective, and Dean thinks about how he and Cas haven’t exactly talked about what they’re doing all the way back to the apartment. He knows they should, because otherwise Dean never will, and it’s seeming more and more like Cas won’t either, and Dean will be stuck in this thing where there’s kissing and random unannounced sex and everyone seems to know what’s going on but him.

The magazine stand in the lobby of the apartment building catches his eye, forcing him to pause.

Two hours and half a bottle of bourbon later, the damn article still isn’t making sense to Dean. He doesn’t get it, even as much as he squints at it as he takes another large gulp of bourbon.

He hears the front door open and watches Cas come into the apartment with his stupid trench coat on. Hair all ruffled from the wind Chicago starts kicking up in March. “Hey, Cas!” he says, throwing his arms wide. The magazine goes flying. Luckily the bottle of bourbon does not.

Cas pauses for a brief moment to take him in before shrugging his trench coat off. “Hello, Dean,” he replies, casting a glance at the TV. “What are you watching?”

Dean waves his hand dismissively. “Into the Woods,” He pats the couch beside him. “C’mere, Cas.”

Cas comes and sits down without question, and it’s so weird, but it makes a warmth bloom in Dean’s chest that he’s pretty sure isn’t the bourbon. Maybe he needs more. Action follows thought as he tilts the bottle again. “What is it about?” Cas asks, his voice deep and rumbly besides Dean, and Dean shifts closer almost unconsciously. Christ, he wants to bury himself in Cas.

“Dunno,” Dean says, smiling at him. “Magic beans.” He hums a few bars of the song currently playing. “Agony…far more painful than yours…”

“I dislike the idea of you experiencing agony.”

“S’perience all the time,” Dean says matter-of-factly, and fuck it, he throws his feet up on the couch, tucking himself into Cas. To his credit, Cas doesn’t even question it, just moves a little to make more room for Dean, his arm fluttering uncertainly for a moment before ending up draped across his back.

“You’re very drunk.”

“Most of the time,” he agrees.

“If that were true, Bobby would not allow you to play.”

“Bobby can shove his rules up his ass,” Dean grumbles, nuzzling his face into Cas’ shoulder. “You want some bourbon?”
“I would prefer vodka,” Cas muses, and Dean chuckles.

“Be an American, Cas.”

“I believe you are enough of an American for both of us.”

“Damn right,” he agrees. “Apple pie and baseball, that’s me.”

“And sun kissed hair, freckled skin,” Cas pauses for a moment like he’s seriously thinking this over and Dean isn’t flushing into his shoulder. “You swear as much as I was told an American would too. You are very beautiful, Dean. You have a good soul.” He says it all earnest and shit, that’s too much.

“Don’t say stuff like that, Cas,” Dean mutters, hugging the bottle of burbon closer. He doesn’t know how anyone could think he was beautiful, least of all Cas, with his fierce protective streak a mile wide and the stupidly cute way he asks for clarification when he doesn’t understand a word or a phrase.

“Why not?” Cas asks, and he must decide to fuck it too, because he pulls Dean tighter to his body. It’s uncomfortable, but Dean wants to touch Cas, needs to touch Cas, so he swings his leg over Cas’ lap, straddling him. The bottle of burbon sits between them, preventing their chests from pressing together, and Cas frowns down at it like it’s personally offending him.

“M’not beautiful.”

“Yes you are,” he replies instantly. “You are a beautiful person, Dean. I like this very much about you.”

“Oh you like me, huh?” Dean leers and trace a finger along Cas’ collar bone, using one finger to pop the top button of his shirt. Cas is funny, whenever the have days off, instead of walking around in T-shirts and sweats like a normal guy, he puts on honest to good shirts. With buttons. Dean wonders if this is a Russian thing or a Cas thing. “Why you wearin’ a shirt?”

“It was cold outside,” Cas answers, thinking. “And the neighbors might have objected.”

“I wouldn’t have objected,” Dean smirks, than thinks of that chick Meg from upstairs who’s always staring Cas down like he’s some kind of prime rib and grimaces. “Never mind. I would’ve. But I ain’t objecting now.”

Cas raises an amused eyebrow. “No going outside with no shirt,” he repeats. “Does this include televised interviews inside the locker room?”

“Especially televised interviews,” Dean growls. “Don’t want the media catching sight of your hickies, do ya?” Which is the logical thing to think, except some primal part of Dean’s brain unlocked by his good friend alcohol is screaming that that’s exactly what it wants, Cas all marked up with Dean’s bite marks on national TV, practically stamped all over with the word ‘taken’.

“I don’t have any hickies, Dean.”

Dean leans forward and scraps gently at the lobe of his ear with his teeth. “We can fix that,” he says quietly.

He feels Cas shudder beneath him and barely suppresses a grin, turning his attention to the skin just beyond the bolt of Cas’ jaw.

“Do I get to make a request as well?”
“Anything,” Dean promises, because the alcohol is sitting warm and heavy in his stomach, and Cas is warm and solid beneath him, and Christ this feels good. His brain is buzzing with the bourbon, filled with nothing but the smell of Cas and the taste of Cas and Jesus Christ, Cas.

Cas doesn’t ask for anything though. He just nudges Dean away from his neck and when Dean is looking up, confused, because what the hell man, Cas kisses him, and he has to admit that this is a way better idea. Cas is so fucking smart.

And hot, Dean’s brain supplies helpfully as Cas’ tongue slips into his mouth. And caring and dorky and he’s got the fucking voice and the accent. And last month he fought a guy for Dean, and he’s never been so turned on by a pissed off guy in his life.

Dean’s groans into Cas’ mouth, his hands twisting where they’re bunched in Cas’ closer, trying to get closer, crawl inside of him maybe. Cas’ hands clench around his hips in response.

He doesn’t deserve this.

Breaking the kiss abruptly, he looks away.

“Dean,” Cas says quietly. “Why are you drinking?”

I know what my decision is, Cinderella sings on the TV behind them. Which is not to decide.

“Was pissed off,” Dean murmurs. “Doesn’t matter.”

“Of course it matters,” Cas says, and his forehead is bunching up in those frown lines that Dean is itching to smooth. “You use alcohol as a coping mechanism, it must matter very much.”

“You read any magazines lately, Cas?”

If Cas thinks this is a subject change, he gives no indication of it. “No,” he cocks his head. “I still find it difficult to read in English. I am much better at listening to you.”

“You mean everybody,” Dean corrects.

“No,” his mouth quirks. “Mostly you.”

Dean’s not sure what to do with that, so he plows forward. “The fucking tabloids are making a big deal outta me not being out with any chicks lately. I used to do it a lot.”

Dean feels Cas’ hands flex, but his voice remains as steady as always. “They care about this?”

“They’re…,” Dean scowls deeply. “They’re saying maybe I’m gay. Because of Gordon, I think. I’m glad the bigoted asshole is gone.”

Cas’ face goes dark, kind of stormy. “Me too.” Dean feels his thumb tracing a circle in his side, the touch light and comfortable and safe. “Do you want to go out with any women?”

Dean swallows roughly. “No.” He pulls the bottle out from between them and takes another swig. “Not right now.”

“It shouldn’t matter what they think, Dean.”

But it does matter, it matters a lot, and Dean’s not sure how to handle it, how to be okay with everyone thinking he likes dick, even if it turns out he does. Or Cas’ dick at least, but with the alcohol he can admit that he’s probably not picky, would be fine with any attractive guy who wanted
to get naked with him. He doesn’t know what to do about this, he just doesn’t and suddenly he feels
like maybe he shouldn’t be touching Cas when he’s like this. He shouldn’t be ruining him.

Cas is perfect, and fine, and he doesn’t deserve Dean’s shit.

“When did you know?”

“Know what?”

“That you were gay.”

Cas looks thoughtful. “I’m not sure what I am.”

Dean snorts loudly. “Pretty sure my dick in your mouth makes you pretty gay, Cas.”

“It’s not as simple as that,” Cas reprimands lightly, pulling Dean flush to his chest now that the bottle
of bourbon isn’t in the way.

“So make it simple,” Dean demands, pressing their foreheads together.

“I haven’t been with many people in my life.”

“You tryin’ to tell me you’re a virgin, Cas?”

“No,” Cas scowls. “I am not. I have found myself admiring both women and men, but for some
reason it is…difficult for me to develop emotional attachment, and I find sex rather unappealing
without it.”

Dean frowns slightly, struggling to understand. Basically what he got out of that is that Cas definitely
isn’t having as much fun as he is with the whole ‘get naked’ deal, which makes it even harder to
figure out why the hell Cas is doing it in the first place.

“Sorry, sweetheart,” he mumbles, because that’s all he can really think to say. “If I pressured you or
somethin’. Know I was getting kind of flirty there.” He looks down at their position. “Shit,” he says,
starting to move.

If possible, Cas gets an even tighter grip on him. “Dean,” he says, voice filled with surprise. “Do you
honestly believe we have no emotional attachment?”

Dean stills, chewing on his lip. “Why’d you stay, Cas?”

Without warning, Cas is caressing his cheek, this look in his eyes that Dean really isn’t ready to
analyze yet. His booze soaked brain dutifully files it away for later, and maybe he’ll look back on it.
“You were hurt.”

“What about after?” Dean persists. “I’m just too irresistible, huh?”

“Exceedingly.”

“You like what I look like naked.”

“That’s certainly a factor.”

If Dean weren’t drunk, he never would have said it, even as a joke. But the words form in his brain,
clear and concise, and the push between his lips without his consent. “You love me.”
Cas just looks at him.

Dean looks down at his hands.

“What are we doing here, Cas?”

“I thought…,” Cas sounds hesitant, afraid almost, and Dean hates it, hates it because he knows he’s causing it. “I thought maybe we could date.”

He’s not drunk enough for this. “You want to date me?”

“Very much.”

Dean laughs bitterly. “You don’t want to date me Cas. I suck at relationships. Not even sure I ever had a real one. I’m an asshole and inconsiderate and needy and I break ‘em. I’m broken. It ain’t gonna work.”

Cas’ mouth sets in a stubborn line. “What if we want it to work?”

“Why would you?” Dean asks, genuinely baffled. Sure, he’s got the team, and he’s got Bobby and Sam and Ellen and Jo and now Charlie too, and those are all relationships he does pretty well in, but he puts them through a lot of shit, and they’re kind of stuck with him. Cas isn’t. Cas could go somewhere else. He’s the best hockey player Dean’s ever met, he could go anywhere.

Cas has got that look in his eye again though, the one that Dean can’t think about, refuses to interpret. So he leans forward and kisses Cas again.

“Dean,” Cas sighs against his lips, and Dean sighs and drops his head onto Cas’ shoulder.

“We can’t tell people.”

Cas is quiet for a long time, and Dean thinks, good. Maybe he fucked it up before it could even get started. It’ll hurt less. Because he can’t tell people he’s bisexual, or whatever. He just can’t. He’s seen the kind of shit the gay football players get, and there’s never even been a homosexual hockey player, retired or present. There’s no way he can be the first. He can’t handle the attention he’ll get, and he especially can’t handle the shit that will be piled on him.

“Okay,” Cas breathes out, and Dean is surprised he agrees. “We won’t tell people.”

Dean pulls back and gives him a tentative smile, probably a grimace more than anything, but hey, at least he’s trying. And does he ever get fucking rewarded. Cas full on beams at him, all gummy teeth and crinkled eyes, and Dean has the weird simultaneous feeling of giving Cas what he wanted most in the world and fucking it up all at once.

It’s a complicated feeling. He wants to roll around in it and push it as far away from him as possible at the same time.

“Drink,” he says instead, holding the bottle out to Cas. Cas takes the bottle and presses it to his lips. Their kisses taste like bourbon the rest of the night.
Major Penalty

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Bobby’s gonna kill Gabriel for getting champagne all over the locker room, but Dean can’t find it in himself to yell at the guy. Not when he’s this excited.

“We’re going to the fucking playoffs!” Gabriel roars, not even attempting to get the champagne in anyone’s mouth as he whips around in his awkward as fuck gear. “We’re going to Nashville and we’re going to kick ass!”

The guys cheer, and Ash somehow manages to get up on a bench and launch himself at Gabriel, wrapping his hands around his neck and hanging off his back. “Doctor Badass in the house!” he whoops. Gabriel passes the bottle off to Balthazar, who drinks a worrying amount like he’s sucking down water before dumping the rest over Sam’s crotch.

“Jesus!” Sam yelps, jumping up and almost knocking over Kevin. Dean laughs loudly, taking in the scene before him. Everyone is so fucking happy. It’s not like they’ve never made it to playoffs before – they did just last year. But they’d had a second round exit, had promised to do better. This year feels different. There’s something in the air.

Dean looks at Cas, who is taking in the scene with that look of barely contained happiness on his face as he listens to Garth replay Cas’ own goal back to him. When he catches Dean looking at him, he smiles, big and bright, and Dean’s heart flips in his chest.

“But can you feel the love tonight?” Gabriel croons softly in his ear in a horrible, off pitch tone. Dean hadn’t even noticed him make his way over here, which is real impressive considering the huge pads he still hasn’t taken off.

“Shut the fuck up, Gabe.”

“In short our pal is—“ Dean elbows him in the stomach, which probably hurts him more than it hurts Gabriel, but Gabriel gives a loud ‘oof’ and shuts up anyway, so goal achieved.

“I’m not kidding Gabe, I hear about this anywhere other than Sam and I’m coming for you.”

Gabriel makes a face at him. “Nothin’ wrong with a little dick lovin’ there, Deano.”

Dean huffs a noise of disbelief. “In this sport?”

“Alright, maybe,” Gabriel concedes. “But who cares what anyone says if they turn up dead the next morning?” He gives Dean a truly scary grin, which is really messing with his head when paired with the sudden affection he feels for the man.

“We’re just lettin’ it be for now, Gabe. Run it’s course. Hope I don’t fuck it up.”

“Right,” Gabe smirks. “Because I’ve seen a couple more perfect for each other than Dean and Cas. You can try to fuck it up, kiddo, but I’ve never met a more stubborn pair of jackasses—“

“Give us a speech, Chief!” Benny yells over everyone else. For some reason he’s got an extremely happy looking Kevin in a headlock. Dean’s not gonna ask. He doesn’t have to when ten seconds later Kevin has Benny flipped and pinned to the locker. Shame the kid can’t use that type of shit on
“Sammy’s the one who’s better at giving speeches.”

“You’ve just hit on precisely why we want it from you,” Balthazar drawls. Dean notices he his his phone up like he’s recording and flips him off for good measure.

“Speech, speech, speech, speech!” Ash starts chanting from where he’s been deposited on top of a bank of lockers. Dean knows he’s not getting out of it when even Garth, who’s always a little slow on the uptake, starts in on it.

“Alright, alright, shut the fuck up!” Dean says loudly, getting up on the bench so he’s taller than them all. Well kind of. He’s still not much taller than Sam, which he’s not gonna think about if he wants to keep any sort of dignity as the older brother.

Dean’s never been good with words, and especially speeches. Speeches require feelings, which ya know, Dean feels, but he ain’t so good at telling others. He tells ’em other ways, he knows they all know. They’re all staring at him like he’s about to whip out Shakespeare though, so he clears his throat. “We worked hard to get here. Damn hard.” He rubs the back of his neck before adding, “I’m proud of us.”

Cas realizes he’s done first, even though Cas is almost as bad as Dean and doesn’t know how to do emotions correctly. So he ends up clapping (fucking enthusiastically, too. Dean rolls his eyes at him, but that only makes Cas clap harder, and then he has to wonder if they fucker knew what a weird response that was all along) and everyone else joins in to make the awkward guy feel less awkward, and Dean’s standing up there feeling like he just delivered Braveheart instead of his dumbass, ‘I’m proud of us,’ like that even means anything.

He hops off the bench and Cas is right there, smiling slightly at him. “I enjoyed that, Dean.”

“You enjoyed it too much,” Dean grumbles, refusing to smile back.

Cas tilts his head and considers this. “Would you prefer I dampen my enthusiasm? You didn’t seem to mind the other night.”

“No! God no, never,” Dean says. “Keep it down, would ya?”

Cas gets that pinched look on his face that he’s been getting ever since they decided not to tell anyone and Cas keeps bringing it up in public, but there’s not much Dean can do about it, not with Benny suddenly clapping him on the shoulder.

“Couldn’t have said it better myself, brother,” he says, looking amused.

“Blow it up my ass, Benny.”

“You gonna bend over?”

Cas makes some kind of weird noise next to Dean that has both of them turning to look at him, but the weirdo just stares back like he has no idea what they’re doing.

“You going to celebrate?” Benny asks.

“Yes,” Cas cuts in before Dean can answer, which is good, he guesses, because this is all news to him. “I told Dean I would make dinner.”
Dean stares at him in horror, because Cas never said that and no way would Dean ever in his right mind agree to it, much less be excited about it. He wracks his brains for anything Cas might have said post-orgasm that he was too fucked out to notice at the time and comes up completely blank.

“Shame,” Benny shrugs. “We’ll probably go to the Roadhouse.”

Damn. Dean wants to go to the Roadhouse. But he can practically feel Cas radiating something at him, so he doesn’t open his mouth.

“Our first game is Wednesday,” Cas says, and shit, Dean knows that voice. “Will you be prepared to train tomorrow?”

Benny narrows his eyes, and Dean decides to drag Cas away before this goes anywhere. “We gotta feed the dog,” he says, laying a hand on Cas’ bicep before physically pulling him to the other side of the locker room. He lets Cas stew as he takes off his gear and puts on his workout clothes before asking quietly. “Why are you trying to pick a fight with Benny?”

Cas glowers at his skates. “I did not like his comment about your ass.”

“Even you haven’t had my ass,” Dean points out. “Why the fuck would that bother you?” He pauses to take stock for a moment before grinning brightly. “Oh my god, are you jealous?”

“Of course not,” Cas tells the floor.

“Cut the crap.”

That gets him a scowl. “Sam did say you exhibited a certain fascination with Benny when he first joined the team.”

“Sam’s gonna get a kick in the nuts,” Dean answers, and like his brother knows what a fucking big mouth he has, he chooses that moment to look towards Dean and raise an eyebrow. Dean makes a rude gesture, which Mr. Prissy Pants doesn’t seem to appreciate.

“Look Cas, even if I did kind of have the hots for Benny a couple years ago, I definitely wouldn’t have admitted it then. And I don’t have ‘em now. Quit throwing your smite face around the locker room, these guys are your family.”

“My smite face?” Cas asks, finally looking up.

“Yeah, smite face. Like you’re gonna murder someone with those pretty baby blues o’yours.”

Cas’ lips quirk, so Dean figures they’re in the clear for now.

They get a couple more invitations to follow everyone to the Roadhouse, and while Dean really wants to go with them and catch a moment with Charlie and Jo, Cas clearly has something planned, and Dean doesn’t want to ruin that.

It’s kind of worrying how much he’s come to care about Cas in just a few short months of friendship, and an even shorter period of them realizing they’re…something, to one another. But he does. The guy’s feelings matter to him, and Dean’s trying real hard to keep those friend feelings separate from all the sex, but that’s getting mixed up in his head too.

Cas kisses him as soon as they’re inside the impala, and Dean melts into it so fast he’d be embarrassed if it didn’t feel so good.
“You’re not really gonna try to fucking cook, are you?” Dean asks, even though it’s kinda hard to care about the apartment potentially being set on fire with Cas’ hand down his pants and his lips on Dean’s neck.

“I can cook you know,” Cas grumbles. “Your ovens are different here.”

“You’re so full of it,” Dean chuckles.

“I’d like to be,” he replies, and Dean’s brain stutters. “No, Dean, I was not going to cook for you.”

“Where we going then?” Dean asks, biting back a moan when Cas withdraws his hand and pulls back into the seat. “Hold on, where the fuck are you going?”

“We’re going to be late,” Cas explains, like he hadn’t just worked Dean up to near climax and then walked away.

“Holy shit,” Dean complains, starting the car. “If I’d known having a boyfriend meant dates were more important than sex, I wouldn’t have agreed to the fucking date thing.”

“I suspected you only wanted me for my tongue,” Cas says, but he looks extremely pleased, and Dean makes a mental note to use the boyfriend word more often. He never does, because it’s so foreign to him, and it’s not like he can exactly go up to people and announce, ‘this is my boyfriend, Cas,’ so what context is he going to use it in anyway?

Fuck. He wishes he could though, if only to get that look on Cas’ face every time.

They end up in Hyde Park, outside a place called Seven Ten Lanes, and Dean stares at the sign incredulously for a long time before turning to Cas. “A bowling alley?”

“I wanted to go on a date,” Cas says stubbornly.

“Dude, we’ve been on loads of dates,” but even as he says it, Dean is wracking his brain. He remembers the initial agreement, through a drunken haze and laughter and awesome morning after sex, where Cas became his first ever boyfriend. And he remembers the hard three weeks of hockey afterwards, making sure they remained in the top three teams in the division to earn their spot in the playoffs.

He knows he’s made Cas good dinner loads of times, and he knows they’ve watched movies almost every night. He remembers Cas being a dick during The Hunt for Red October and turning off the Russian subtitles so he could laugh at random times and drive Dean fucking crazy, and he remembers sex. A lot of sex. Best sex Dean’s ever had. He doesn’t remember taking Cas on a date, not the kind he’d have taken a woman out to.

He guesses Cas never had a date in Russia either.

Fuck, he sucked.

“You see this in a movie?” he asks, and feels instantly like an ass.

It just rolls right off Cas though, and he’s been doing that a lot lately, not letting Dean antagonize him unless Dean deserved it, because Cas is awesome and for some reason wasn’t lying when he said he wanted this to work. “I did. Can you bowl?”

“I dabble.”
Turns out instead of the typical Brunswick Zone shit Dean was expecting, Cas had managed to find probably the only bowling alley in Chicago that Dean could fall in love with. Hell, Cas was lucky Dean wasn’t dropping to his knees and proposing right now. The place is all old school American, with wooden panels and scorecards you fill out by hand. He’s pretty sure he audibly whimpers when he sees the burgers on the menu.

It’s pretty clear Cas has never been bowling before in his life. Not like Dean’s a pro or anything, but he’s always been pretty good at whatever sport he tried, and at least he can throw the ball down the damn lane. Cas gets so many gutter balls Dean’s sides hurt from laughing, but offering to put the bumpers up gets him such a death glare that he lets Cas be until he can’t take the weird angle he’s throwing his wrist out at anymore.

“Dude,” he says, “if you can’t throw right, use two hands.”

“I refuse to look like a child, Dean.”

“Too good to have a ball between your legs?”

“If that were the case I sincerely doubt I would enjoy being here with you,” Cas replies, and promptly throws another gutter ball.

Dean hauls himself out of the uncomfortable plastic chair and ambles over to Cas standing dejectedly at the ball return with this kicked puppy look on his face, but like he’s pissed about it. “Need some help?” he drawls.

“Yes.” Cas turns that look on him, and Dean doesn’t know anyone in Hyde Park, has never known anyone in Hyde Park, and its fucking midnight on a Monday. So he kisses Cas, pulling away pretty quickly but keeping his hand threaded through his soft hair. “Just call me the Dude.”

“I like Dean better.”

“Sap,” Dean mutters. Cas’ ball finally comes rolling out and he grabs Cas’ hand, positioning his fingers in it correctly. “There. See how it’s your middle finger and your ring finger, instead of your index?” He gently nudges Cas towards the alley, stopping right behind him so he’s chest to back with Cas. “Pull your arm back,” Dean murmurs. Keep your elbow in line with your wrist. Keep it locked.” He gently pulls Cas’ elbow back and watches as he swings forward letting the ball go in a smooth roll straight down the center of the lane, knocking down half the pins.

Cas turns to him with that eye crinkling grin and Dean kisses him again, lingering longer this time. “There you go sweetheart.”

It was the last frame, so Dean agrees pretty easily to play another game, if only to let Cas bowl the right way this time. Ten frames later, Dean’s regretting it.

“You dirty hustler.”

“I didn’t know how to bowl Dean,” Cas protests, carefully marking another ‘X’ on the scorecard.

“You just picked it up that quickly, huh?”

“I’m a very fast learner,” he agrees, and Dean believes it, but that doesn’t mean he has to be happy about it.

“Dirty, Cas.”
Cas raises an eyebrow. “What did I manage to hustle out of you?”

Dean makes a face at him. “My groin pressed against your ass? Affection?”

“All things I’m able to acquire fairly easily by my own merit, especially when I take my shirt off.”

“Yes, yeah, you’re hot shit.”

“We could play again.”

“I think I’m done being humiliated, thanks though.” Dean knows he’s pouting, knows it even more when Cas crouches on the floor in front of him, resting his hands on Dean’s knees and trying to catch his eye.

“Dean.”

“Don’t do that thing with your face.”

“I’m not doing anything different with my face, Dean.”

He totally is. He’s doing that thing with his face. That wide eyed soul searching makes Dean feel ripped open wide for the world to see thing. “You are. You do the…” he trails off and gestures with his hand, like that explains more.

Cas catches his hand and kisses his fingers.

“Christ.” Dean feels his face heating up.

It’s hard to get back to the car, with him and Cas kissing all the way there. Cas has got him pressed up against the impala, stubble scraping along his exposed neck, when Dean suddenly has a thought.

“Shit. We gotta grow playoff beards.”

“Hmm?” Cas mouths along his collar, and Dean finds it hard to concentrate for a minute.

“Playoff beards,” he repeats. “We grow ‘em out for however long we’re in the playoffs.”

Cas lifts his head at that and appraises Dean. “I bet you look good with a beard.”

“You kidding?” Dean makes a face. “Damn thing comes in red. You though,” he brushes a finger along the apple of Cas’ cheek. “Bet you look damn nice with all the peach fuzz and your tough guy jaw.”

Cas just smiles at him. “If you want to see, we’ll have to keep winning.”

Dean hasn’t had sex in the back of the impala since he was a teenager, but he’s seriously considering figuring out how to manage with two fully grown six foot men in the back seat when Cas kisses him again, decisive and quick. “Let’s go home.”

The shoot of disappointment Dean feels must show on his face, because Cas says, “I would rather have you in a bed,” and no other sentence could have gotten Dean going faster.

He wonders if Cas will let Dean in tonight, let him fill him up and have all of him. It’s Dean’s favorite thing to do, and he thinks Cas’ too, although he sometimes wonders if maybe Cas wants to top. Cas has never mentioned it, and he’s never even gotten anywhere near Dean’s ass with lube, but…he wonders sometimes.
He’s not sure about how he feels about having a dick up his ass though. He doesn’t like the idea of the loss of control, and he really hates to admit it, but he’s still got hang ups about being fucked by a dude. It’s like the ultimate surrender to his bisexuality.

He’s really glad he’s never said that out loud to Cas. He’d get punched.

“Did you have a good time?” Cas asks, pulling Dean from his thoughts, and Dean glances over at him.

“Yeah, Cas,” he replies, placing his hand on Cas’ thigh. “Good date.”

He keeps his hand there the rest of the way home.

Gabriel is a goddamned prophet. They beat Nashville in five games, five games that pass in such a whirlwind of adrenaline and anxiety that Dean barely remembers them. All he remembers is Benny’s overtime goal in game two, Chuck making his first hit all season, Gabriel snatching the puck in his glove just before it was about to cross the line to keep the score tied and eventually lead them to a win in game four. He remembers Sam’s beaming face and he remembers getting to caress Cas on the ice, to hold him without anyone looking at him funny because everyone else was doing it too. He remembers the hand shake line.

It was a hell of a week and a half.

Bobby had ordered them to rest before they had to head up to Minnesota, and they get a good solid week of a mixture of that and practice. This first day though, is all theirs, and Dean is taking full advantage of it by not getting the fuck up from his couch.

“Cas,” he says petulantly when he catches sight of the other man wandering into the room, a newspaper that’s probably two months old in his hand. There are newspapers everywhere, because Cas never throws them away, and because he never writes down the answer to the Jumble, so if he waits long enough he forgets the answer and gets to do it all over again. Stupid and adorable. “Come sit with me.”

“If I come sit with you, I will never get up, and eventually we’ll be having sex on that couch,” Cas says, squinting at his newspaper.

“You say all that like it’s a bad thing.”

“I don’t want to have sex.”

“Geez, Cas,” Dean says, feeling a pang of something Not Good deep in his chest. “Tell us how you really feel.”

That gets Cas to look away from his newspaper, and Dean tries not to get too distracted by his peach fuzz, and how the dark shadow across the lower half of his face makes his eyes pop something crazy. He also doesn’t think about how that beard feels scapping across his thighs. “I get very enthusiastic during sex with you,” Cas says, frowning.
Dean stares at him wordlessly for a minute. “You saying you worried about pulling something?”

“We’re going into the second round of the playoffs, Dean –“

Dean’s loud laughter cuts him off, and Cas gets a very irritated scowl on his face before stomping off into the kitchen.

“Ah, c’mon Cas, come back,” Dean calls, still laughing. “I promise not to strain your dick!”

“Bite me!”

“I’m tryin’!”

His phone starts ringing, so if Cas answers Dean doesn’t hear, still laughing as he picks up his phone and swipes the screen. “Hello?”

“Uh. Hi. Is this Dean?”

The voice is young and female, and Dean sits up, disturbing Chekov. “Yeah,” he says cautiously. “Who’s this?”

“I’m not sure if you remember me. Krissy? I was at the Make A Wish deal with my friend Aidan a few months ago. You gave us your card.”

“Krissy,” Dean smiles, and he actually feels relieved to hear from her. She’d crossed his mind a couple of times since he’d last seen her, but not like he could do much about it without invading her privacy. “How ya doing kid?”

“Don’t call me kid,” Krissy says automatically, and Dean chuckles. “I’m alright, I guess.”

“So just calling to chat, huh?” Dean teases. “Saw we were in the playoffs and figure you could get tickets? You might be in luck, kid, I never had anyone to hand out tickets to before.”

“Aidan would like that.”

Dean waits for more, but it seems like nothing’s coming as Krissy seems content to just breathe into her phone, listening to Dean echo her back. He’s pretty good at waiting stubborn kids out, raising Sammy did that to him, but the longer she doesn’t talk, the more worried he gets.

“Everything okay over there?”

“I had surgery. A few days ago.”

“What?” Dean asks urgently, and this time Chekov does jump off the couch, probably to go find Cas, who won’t launch him out of his comfortable resting positions. “Why? What happened?”

“it’s fine, I’m fine,” Krissy snaps. “I had a problem. They fixed it.”

“What kind of problem?” Dean demands.

“The kind called none of your business,” she says testily. “This was stupid. I shouldn’t have called.”

“Well you did, now you gotta deal with the consequences.” Dean stands up and runs a hand through his hair, all thoughts of resting gone. “You out of recovery?”

“Yes,” she bites out.
“Great. Do your hair or whatever. I’m coming over.”

“I don’t need to do my fucking hair!” he hears her say indignantly, but he’s already hanging up, heading to the kitchen and poking his head in.

Cas is sitting at the kitchen table, brow furrowed in concentration at his newspaper and Chekov curled up at his feet. “Hey, Cas, I’m headed over to the hospital.”

“What?” Cas looks up in alarm, eyes scanning quickly over him like he expects Dean to be holding his detached arm out towards him. “Why?”

“Remember those kids from the Make A Wish? Krissy was just in surgery. No clue where her dad is, thought I’d pay her a visit. Want me to pick up dinner?”

Cas has already dropped his newspaper and is standing up. “I’m coming with you.”

Dean frowns at him. “But you hate hospitals.”

“Yes,” Cas agrees and heads off to get his trench coat.

“Like, really hate them,” Dean persists, following. He’s not sure why he’s pushing this. It’s not like he doesn’t want Cas to come. He doesn’t want him to hurt himself either though. “Scared of them, actually.”

“Remind me to start paying you for your pep talks,” Cas says dryly.

“Dude, I’m awesome,” he responds automatically, but he stops Cas before he can open the door, forcing him to look him in the eye. “What are you doing, Cas?”

“This is important to you, and you are important to me,” Cas says simply. He’s already waiting in the Impala when Dean gathers himself enough to go down there after him.

Cas keeps saying stuff like that, out of nowhere, like Dean’s used to hearing this kind of shit all the time. It’s hard for him to comprehend that someone like Cas, someone who owes him nothing, can care about him as much as he seems to.

It scares him.

As they get closer and closer to the hospital though, it’s pretty clear Cas’ freak out is way more imminent. Dean swears every stoplight has Cas’ shoulders drawing closer together, until the guy is practically curled up on himself.

“Cas,” Dean says, staring straight ahead at the road. “You don’t have to come in, man.”

“I want to come in with you,” Cas answers immediately, and Dean didn’t really expect anything less. He’s not happy about letting Cas torture himself, but he’s sure as shit not going to tell the guy what he can and can’t do.

When they walk through the front doors, Cas’ face is almost as white as the walls. Dean hates seeing him like this, knows what kind of memories must be associated with the place and wants to kill the assholes that made them. Some nurse tells them pediatrics is up on the fifth floor, and Dean has to place a hand briefly on the small of Cas’ back to get him moving again.

They crowd into the elevator with a doctor and a couple of nurses. Dean listens to their conversation intently and is disappointed that they sound nothing like they do on Dr. Sexy. Sometime between the
third floor and the fourth, Cas’ hand slips into his. Dean squeezes once and doesn’t let him go, not even when they got off on the fifth floor.

The pediatrics ward is easy to find. Where the rest of the hospital is offensively white, the walls here are bright cheerful colors, and before Dean knows it, they’re standing at the nurse’s station. He’s not sure how to do this. He’s never visited a kid at the hospital before, not without the rest of the team.

“Can I help you?” the red haired nurse asks politely. Dean’s about to open his mouth to answer when her face smooths into a recognition very familiar to him. “Oh my – I’m sorry. You’re Dean Winchester.”

“And Cas Krushnic,” Dean says, lifting their joined hands and flushing almost immediately. Shit. The nurse doesn’t blink twice though, so maybe two guys holding hands isn’t as gay as he thought. “We uh, came to see Krissy, but it’d be pretty cool if we could visit with the rest of the kids too.”

“Ohhh,” the nurse breathes. “Oh, that’s so generous of you, to spend your time with them.”

“Yeah,” Dean coughs uncomfortably.

“We can do autographs,” Cas speaks up for the first time since they entered the hospital, and Dean’s pretty sure he’s the only one who would be able to detect the slight shake in his voice. “Anything you need.”

The nurse’s face brightens into a wide smile, and it’s so infectious that Dean can’t help but grin back. “Come with me,” she says, gesturing them past the desk. A small ways beyond it is a large common room, in the same bright colors as the hallway. Small tables dot the room, along with various puzzles and toys, posters reminding the kids to wash their hands and eat healthily. There are a couple of kids in there who all turn to gape at them, although only a couple seem to actually recognize them.

“This is where we have visitors,” the nurse explains. “In the public room. Krissy has her own room though, if you’d like to follow me?”

Cas’ hand tightens around Dean’s in this hallway, but Dean just pulls him closer, smiling reassuringly. Krissy’s room is towards the end, and the nurse leaves them before they push open the door, telling them to come back to the main room when they’re ready.

Dean’s not sure what he expected, but Krissy looks fine. She’s sitting up in bed, watching the TV suspended from the wall in the corner. There’s an IV in her hand, connected to a drip bag, but that’s the extent of the medical equipment Dean can see.

“I can’t believe you actually dragged your ass down here,” she says as soon as she spots Dean.

“Hey, you called me kid. You really want to start this game?”

Krissy huffs and her eyes slide to Cas, then down to their still clasped hands. Dean shifts uncomfortably but refuses to let go. There’s nothing wrong with this. Even if Cas were still just his friend he’d be doing everything he could to help the guy out. “You brought Krushnic,” she states.

“Hello Krissy,” Cas says, and then he drags Dean forward to hold out his hand (his left one, since he still refuses to let go of Dean). “It is nice to see you again.”

Krissy looks at his hand wearily for a moment before slapping it lightly in a high five. “Yeah, you too. So, not to sound rude or anything, but what are you doing here?”

“Points for effort, I guess,” Dean mutters, pulling up a chair and dropping into it. He realizes his
thumb is idly running along the curve of Cas’ hand, but he could really care less at the moment, with the look Cas keeps shooting the drip bag. “Came because I was worried.”

“I told you I was fine.”

Dean rolls his eyes. “Sure. Were you fine before too? Or the hospital go wasting drugs on you?”

She sets her jaw. “I don’t wanna talk about it.”

“Hey, I got all night,” Dean shrugs, leaning back in the chair. Krissy glares at him. He grins back.

“Dean,” Cas says quietly, tugging on his hand. Dean looks up, meeting the uncertain look on Cas’ face. “I think it might be best if I went out into the hall.”

Dean stands up again. “Are you sure?” he asks, leaning closer so his voice is a quiet murmur. “Are you gonna be okay?”

Cas gives a short, sharp nod, then in a move that takes Dean completely by surprise, surges forward and hugs him, burying his face briefly into Dean’s neck and clinging tight before heading out into the hallway without another word.

Dean instantly wishes he’d had more time to savor the moment. Cas never seems to need to touch him as much as Dean does, and moments of the guy getting cuddly are few and far between.

He’d forgotten Krissy was in the room until he hears her sheets brushing together as she shifts in her bed, and he almost follows Cas right out the door.

“That was cute.”

“Can it short stuff,” Dean points at her and drops heavily back into his chair.

“What’s up with that? Are you two dating or something?”

“Why did you have surgery?” Dean shoots back.

Krissy makes a face. “You first.”

Dean sighs and scrubs a hand over his face. “I like Cas.”

“So you are dating.”

“Kinda. It’s not that simple,” he frowns deeply. “You gotta keep your mouth shut about this, kid, I ain’t kidding. It’ll be bad news if anyone figures it out.”

“You know all the tabloids are already paying attention to you, right?” Krissy asks.

“Don’t remind me,” Dean mutters.

She shrugs. “I’m just saying.” She fiddles with the tube of her IV. “Do you love him?”

“Jesus, Krissy, why the surgery?”

Krissy scowls. “My pacemaker crapped out on me again, okay?”

Dean’s stomach drops and he almost laughs, which would have been morbid as fuck. He’d been figuring cancer. But nah, she’s got heart problems. Shit. “You okay?”
“I’m talking to you, aren’t I, dumbass?” She crosses her arms and looks away from him.

He doesn’t know what to say, or how to handle this. Basically he’s useless. It kills him.

“I need a new one,” she speaks up. “But the wait list is long, and dad can’t really afford…” she trails off and shrugs. “Guess you know why Make A Wish came knockin’, huh?”

“Krissy…”

Krissy looks up, eyes fierce. “I told ‘em no, though. They’re for kids with fatal diseases.” She purses her lips, like the thought of fatality was so far below her it had never even crossed her mind. “I’m not gonna die.”

Dean believes her.

The talk quickly turns to hockey, because Krissy insists, and she makes him promise to say boobs on camera if they win the next round of the playoffs, which Dean might have tried in his earlier years if he wasn’t so certain Bobby’d have tanned his hide and sent him off to the Carolinas. He offers up tickets to a game again too, which Krissy accepts on Aiden’s behalf, even if she’s not sure she’ll be able to go herself.

“Just make it into the fucking finals,” she says, face as close to a grin as Dean’s ever seen. “I’ll come for that.”

“Yeah,” Dean grins in return. “You’ll see me play some good games there.”

“I’m not coming for you, jackass, I’m coming for Stanley.”

“You and all the other ladies.” And Cas probably. He wanted to see the big shiny cup just as much as anyone else.

“Shit,” Dean shoots out of the chair. “I forgot Cas.”

Krissy looks faintly amused by this outburst but miraculously avoids commenting, so Dean takes off after telling her to come out into the main room before they leave to get his damn autograph, or a hug or somethin’.

The hallway back down to the main room isn’t that long, but Dean walks it quickly anyway, hoping he doesn’t find Cas hunched up in the corner or something with curious kids trying to beat him out in a staring contest.

Pretty friggen’ far from what he finds though.

He hears a lot more activity going on in there before he rounds the corner, and what he sees stops him straight in his tracks.

There’s a small group of kids gathered around Castiel, all listening pretty intently from what Dean can see. Cas has got a dead serious look on his face as he reads from some children’s book Dean has never heard of. There’s a little girl on his lap, and Dean can tell just by looking that she crawled up there on her own, with the way she’s captivated by Cas’ face. Dean knows the feeling.

Cas stumbles over a word a little, his accent thickening as he reads on, and Dean remembers what he’d said about having difficulties reading English still. And he’s doin’ it anyway.

That’s the fucking rub, isn’t it? Cas, doing things for other people, always doing things for other
people. Coming to the hospital even though it scares him shitless because he figured Dean wouldn’t want to be here alone. Reading out loud to kids even though he’s not too proud of how he sounds. Punching a guy on the other team, wasting his suspension time over the concussed idiot.

Whatever Dean needs, Cas is there, no question. Basically the best teammate ever.

He’s pretty sure he’s loved Cas for a long time now.

Dean knows he’s staring pretty creepily at Cas now, but he can’t help it. Guy’s sitting on the floor in a trench coat with a little girl on his lap for Christ’s sake, and it should look ridiculous, and Dean should be laughing, except he’s not laughing because there’s something weird building in his chest and it’s starting to hurt, how much Cas means to him.

He swallows thickly. Shit. Shit. He loves Cas.

The story must be over, because Cas closes the book and looks up and catches Dean’s eyes immediately. Dean’s fascinated to watch the subtle change that comes over his face, from stoic and put together to this vaguely awed and appreciative look Dean sees a lot but has never really registered before. And then Cas smiles at him. Not a big one, like he’s been doing lately, but small, mostly with his eyes, the one Dean is used to from before. That private little smile. His smile.

Dean looks away. He’s in so much trouble. He doesn’t know how to love someone.

“Mr. Winchester!” the redheaded nurse is back, looking apprehensive but determined. “You mentioned autographs before, and many of the children have expressed interest. Since Mr. Krushnic has finished reading, I was hoping you two would sign some now.”

“Oh,” Dean blinks. “Yeah, of course. Want us to just set up at a table?”

“Actually, many other children who are staying in the ward and some parents have showed up,” she says sheepishly, not at all apologetic. Dean can respect that. He did offer. He just hadn’t expected this to turn into a full on session. “So I have you on this side of the room and Mr. Krushnic over there.”

Sure enough, Cas has carefully extracted the little girl from his lap and is sitting at one of the small table on the other side of the room, the kids gathered around him in a kind of sad attempt at a line as they clamor to get his attention and wave sheets of paper.

“Alright,” Dean agrees easily. “Where do you want me?”

It’s definitely not as bad as the official autograph sessions the organization sets up. Dean always has and always will love the younger fans the most, and here he gets a constant stream of them. Hell, some of them aren’t even fans and are just kind of trooping along because it’s what everyone else is doing, but Dean still loves listening to them, loves signing whatever random shit they shyly shove at him. When a little girl with a bandanna tied around her head giggles at his question about her Barbie as he carefully traces a heart next to her signature, he feels a flush of warmth. They’re doing good here.

There are a couple of parents mixed in with the kids, and they’re excited too, but Dean tries to get them to move on as quickly as possible. This isn’t about them.

He’s about an hour in to signing when an unhappy looking kid in a Cavs shirt makes his way up to the table. He’s got brown hair and for some reason reminds him a bit of Sammy when he was little, which is an irrational reason to decide to like the kid but he does all the same. “Hey buddy. You got something you want me to put my name on?”
“Yeah,” the kid say shortly and slides over a trading card. Dean feels his lips quirk up in a smile when he realizes its his own rookie trading card.

Dean always expects kids to be chatty, especially the ones who seem to be fans. But this one is quiet, and he doesn’t seem shy. Dean finishes signing his name and looks up. “You alright there, kid?”

The kid gives a frustrated huff. “Ariana won’t be my girlfriend.”

Whatever Dean expected, it definitely wasn’t that. Kid looked like he couldn’t be older than ten, and besides which, he has no idea what about him suggests that he’d be any good at giving some sort of advice on this. “That so?” Dean says carefully. “Did you ask her why?”

“Yeah,” he mumbles. “She doesn’t like me.”

“Gotta respect her feelings there, bud,” Dean says with a slight smile.

“But she’s lying,” the kid insists. “She says she likes Abby, and that’s a lie. Girls can’t like other girls.”

Dean closes his eyes briefly. It figures. “What’s your name?”

“Jacob.”

“Look, Jake,” Dean sighs heavily and slides the trading card back and forth across the table. “Course girls can like other girls. Just like boys can like other boys.”

Jacob narrows his eyes suspiciously. “I don’t know a boy who likes another boy.”

He can’t believe he’s actually fucking doing this. But who’s gonna believe the kid if he spills? As long as Jacob believes him and takes what he says to heart, s’all that really matters. “Sure you do,” Dean says. “I do. I like my buddy Cas, over there.”

Jacob turns around to look at Cas and Cas, with his freaky mind reading powers, looks up at the same moment to shoot Dean and inquisitive squint. “You’re boyfriends?”

“Yeah,” Dean nods firmly.

Dean can actually see Jacob mulling it over, trying to connect the man he watches skating around the ice every other night with the man in front of him, telling him he likes a boy. He sees when it clicks too. “Cool,” Jacob nods back and grins, snatching up his trading card. “Good luck in the playoffs, Dean!”

“Thanks,” Dean replies, still distracted by what had just happened.

He’s pretty sure he just took on some kind of active role model deal. Shit.

There aren’t many more people around after that, and it’s getting late anyway. They gotta be at Crowley’s at six tomorrow morning, and Dean knows from painful experience it’s hard enough getting Cas up at the time when he has had enough sleep. Krissy had already showed up to give Dean shit, and Dean had made her promise to text him (“I have your number now,” he threatened) when she was all set to go again. He’s going to convince her to come to a play off game if it kills him, and it’s big incentive to get into the third round so she actually has a game to come to.

The nurse gives them enthusiastic thanks as she kicks them out of the pediatrics ward, and Dean feels an even bigger sense of accomplishment than he had when they’d gotten into the playoffs to begin
“You doing okay?” he asks Cas as they had off down the corridor.

Cas stops so abruptly Dean almost runs into him reaching for his hand again (shut up), and then he feels Cas pushing, and they’re in some sort of closet, Cas’ eyes running over him as he brackets Dean between his arms. “You’re glowing,” he murmurs.

“That some crack at my beard?”

Cas’ eyes fly up to his face and one hand leaves the wall to caress his cheek, finger smoothing over the soft bristles. “You were right. It does come in red.”

“I told you,” Dean mutters, and he refuses to be jealous about how much fucking hotter Cas’ beard is. If only because he’s the only one that actually gets to appreciate it properly.

“You are so good, Dean,” Cas whispers quietly. He’s staring straight at him, hand still held to his cheek, and Dean stares back, too captivated to look away. Cas’ words are making him uncomfortable, the weight of them sinking into his bones. He knows they’re not true. “You’re a good man, Dean Winchester.”

Dean surges forward and kisses him.

He goes for hard and pressing, biting at Cas’ lips, but Cas’ other hand comes up so that his face is being cupped, and Cas slows it, gentles it before pulling back and smiling a little. “I no longer think hospitals are so bad.”

Dean frowns and Cas runs a thumb over the bow of his lip. “Just like that?”

“Well,” something dark flashes over Cas’ face for a brief second. “I still do not like them. And I do not believe I could come here alone. You make them better.”

Dean’s heart aches. “Cas,” he swallows. “Cas, you know I would never…y’know, hurt you or anything, right? Not on purpose.”

“I do,” Cas says with a confidence that doesn’t really help the aching.

“Told some snot nosed kid you were my boyfriend,” he says in an effort to make Cas smile. It works.

“Did you?” Cas asks curiously.

“Yeah. He didn’t think girls could like girls. Or boys could like boys. Was trying to prove him wrong.”

“And he believed you,” Cas hums. “Because he looks up to you. I’m sure many children look up to you.”

Dean knows where he’s going with this, and he reaches up to clasp Cas’ wrists. “Still not outing myself, man. Especially not during the playoffs.”

“I don’t like hiding,” Cas growls, and yeah, Dean knows he doesn’t. He feels like shit for it. But he can’t. He’s not ready.

“Hey, at least we saved the future from one bigot.” Cas’ hands drop from his face and Dean sighs. “Look Cas—,”
“I know,” Cas interrupts, running a hand through his hair in frustration. “In Russia we would have to hide for fear of being imprisoned. Here we hide for a different fear. It’s stupid.”

“It is,” Dean agrees, brushing a hand along Cas’ own and taking it when he doesn’t jerk away. “We’ll figure it out, Cas. We just got a lot of other stuff going on right now.”

Cas sighs at the door. “We should go home.”

“Yeah,” Dean agrees before grinning, “Hey, at least you’ll be getting me out of the closet somehow.”

Cas’ unamused look is totally worth it.

Dean ignores the one or two photographers hanging around outside the hospital when he and Cas emerge. He’d figured word must have gotten out somehow, with all those parents, so they’re not holding hands. They don’t really matter.

When they get home Dean makes them frozen pizza they eat on the couch, and Cas goes to sleep at nine because he’s an old man and Dean’s suggestion that he get less than eight hours of sleep for once makes his face go all funny and pinched.

Dean ends up joining him about an hour later anyway, because apparently he’s getting older too. At least, it’s an easier excuse to give than that he just really, really wants to spoon Cas.

Cas is curled up on his pillow by the time Dean’s got his pajamas on, hair ruffled and mouth slightly open. Dean climbs in next to him, wrapping an arm around Cas and fitting easily around him. Cas shifts and burrows into him like he’s been doing it his whole life, and something catches in Dean’s throat.

He never thought he’d have this. He loves Cas.

He doesn’t know how to say the words just yet, or make them come out the right way. He doesn’t even know if Cas wants to hear them. Probably not, since Dean doubts he feels the same way. He tests the weight of the words in his head, rolls them around.

I love Cas.

Cas rolls, and Dean watches without surprise as he maneuvers into his favorite sleeping position, head pillowed on Dean’s chest and limbs sprawled over the rest of his body like an octopus. Dean’d asked him why he did that once, and Cas just blinked at him. Do you have a problem with me being on top of you?

Dean didn’t. He definitely didn’t.

Cas’ hair tickles his jaw, and Dean tilts his head, buries his nose in it. “I love you,” he breathes softly.

Cas understandingly doesn’t answer.
Sometimes being on a hockey team is like being surrounded by a bunch of high school girls.

Scratch that, Dean scowls as he watches Garth bend over and whisper something to Kevin right in front of him. They’re worse than high school girls.

“I miss a memo or something?” he demands, turning to Sam.

Sam looks up in surprise and catches sight of Kevin and Garth. “Oh,” he shrugs. “They’re just excited because Carver and Edlund are here.”

“For practice?”

“Yeah.” Sam doesn’t shrug again, but Dean can definitely sense the air of a shrug around him. “Because we made it to the second round, I guess. They wanted to come watch.”

“Makes sense to me,” Dean says, because it does make sense, and he doesn’t now why everyone is freaking out over the owner of the team and the general manager being here. Not like they’re even mean guys. Dean’s had dinner with them and Bobby a couple of times. Both are a little weird, but brilliant.

“They’re just nervous.” Sam bends down to tighten the lace of his skate. “Hey, how are you and Cas doing?”

“Peachy,” Dean says shortly, and Sam seems to get the hint to shut up, at least while they’re in here.

He doesn’t see Carver or Edlund all through practice, but that doesn’t mean they’re not watching. Everyone definitely acts like they are. Dean feels like he’s traveled back seven years and he’s in camp all over again, trying to do shit that makes him stand out from all the other guys who play the game just as good as he does. At least it makes for a productive practice.

He’s about to head for the showers when Bobby catches him.

“Carver wants ta see ya.”

“Me?” Dean asks, wondering what the hell he did. “Kind of not looking my best here, Bobby,” he says, gesturing. His hair is damp with sweat and he’s pretty sure he smells.

Bobby rolls his eyes. “You think he’s gonna ask you to prom?”

Dean makes a face and follows him back to his office.

For some reason Cas is already in there too, sitting stiffly in a chair across from Bobby’s desk, and Dean starts to get a bad feeling as he sinks into the chair beside him and Bobby shuts the door.

“Hello Dean, Castiel.”

Carver doesn’t look like anyone special. Brown hair, brown eyes, glasses. Kind of short. You’d never guess he was a multimillionare and the owner of one of the best hockey teams in the NHL. Edlund is almost exactly the opposite, with his long gray hair and lanky body. They make an interesting looking pair, with Carver seated in Bobby’s chair and Edlund standing beside him.

“Hello,” Cas speaks up first.

Carver smiles. “Don’t be alarmed. You two aren’t in trouble. We’re just here to…” he falters, frowning.
“We’re here to solve a problem,” Edlund finishes.

Dean’s shoulders tense. “What problem?” he asks aggressively.

“Behave, boy,” Bobby snaps from his corner, stepping forward. “You think I didn’t need to know that two o’ my best players were doing the horizontal tango together after hours?”

Dean feels himself visibly flinch at the words. “Who told you that?” Cas asks in a measured voice.

“When your brother came to us a few months ago about the issues Gordon was causing on the team and in the media, we agreed it was best to send him somewhere else,” Carver explains, looking at Dean. “We did give him a chance to meet with us, especially since Edlund was the one dealing with his trade. Gordon brought the possibility to our attention.”

“Yeah, I’m sure he said it all nice and polite just like that too,” Dean sneers.

“I’m not sad to see him gone,” Edlund replies for him, mouth twitching.

“That’s not the point—,”

“So you believed Gordon,” Cas cuts in.

“Not at face value,” Carver shakes his head. “We asked Bobby to keep a closer eye on you.”

Dean’s gaze shoots to Bobby. He’s got his arms crossed over his chest and is scowling, more so than usual, and Dean’s suddenly real worried that Bobby’s got a problem with this.

Funny, he’d never even been concerned that his surrogate father wouldn’t accept this, or accept him. Now the fear of it grips him tight and refuses to let him speak.

“Saw you kissing in the car one night,” Bobby grunts begrudgingly. “Hear you two are practically moved in together.”

Dean can taste bile on the back of his tongue. “Bobby—,”

“You think I don’t care about your love life, boy?” Bobby snaps.

Dean blinks. “What?”

“Next time you got a significant other, how about you give me a call?”

“I thought…” Dean trails off.

Bobby’s glare softens by maybe a fraction. “Don’t matter what you thought. I’m your uncle first, coach second. You hear me?”

“Yeah,” he says, and his voice sounds hoarse. Cas places a hand on his shoulder.

“I take it you are actually dating then,” Edlund says.

“Yes,” Cas confirms.

“Who else knows?”

“Uh,” Dean licks his lips. “Sam. Kid I know named Krissy. And Gordon, I guess, but he got lucky. He’s never had proof or nothing.”
Carver bites his lip and reaches under the desk. “There’s also the problem of this,” he explains, throwing a brightly colored magazine on top of it. *Has the Cavs Charming Captain Gone Cold?* the headlines screams. Dean scowls at it.

“What is the problem, exactly?” Cas asks, studying the magazine with his brow furrowed.

Carver and Edlund glance at one another. “We’ve never had an openly homosexual player in the NHL before, much less two,” Edlund says. “If you weren’t dating one another, we could have handled it easily. As it is, there are certain…complications.”

“Such as?”

“Oh people can come up with all kinds of things.” Edlund almost sounds cheerfully amused by it. “Morality issues, for one. Is it fair for you to be on the same team, to play together when you know one another so intimately. It might put you a step ahead of everyone else. Fairness, of course, none of your teammates travel to games with their wives, and you two room together every night. Which leads to distraction, which is a legitimate concern – can you concentrate fully when you’re around one another? What if you have a nasty break up? On top of all that you’ll have to deal with all the typical ramifications of coming out as a homosexual male athlete.”

“I don’t want to come out,” Dean says quickly, and Cas turns his frown on him. “Oh c’mon Cas, especially not during playoffs. It’ll ruin the season for everybody, no way we’d get the cup with that media circus following us around.”

“Glad you’re on the same page as us,” Carver says. “We don’t want this getting out during the playoffs, not at all.”

“Cool,” Dean says with relief. “That’s already what we were doing.”

Carver looks uncomfortable. “We actually called you in here to discuss the possibility of a trade.”

“A trade?” Dean asks blankly. “Ain’t it a bit late in the season for that?”

“Next season, Dean,” Bobby says quietly.

Carver nods in agreement, pushing his glasses back up his nose. “Edlund listed a couple of things that are still a problem. Because of your relationship with one another,” he shrugs helplessly. “I’ve never heard of this happening at a professional level before.”

“You believe the solution is to trade me,” Cas says quietly.

“We don’t want to,” Edlund tells him kindly. “You’re a wonderful addition to our team, Castiel—,” Edlund continues to tell Cas about how awesome he’s been all season and how much they’ll need him next year but since Dean’s had his dick up his ass that’s probably not possible. Who knows. Dean isn’t really listening anymore, it’s all background noise to him.

Cas is going to be sent away, and it’s all his fault. If he could have kept his pants on and just been friends with Cas like a normal guy, none of this would have happened. He’d get to keep him. Now Cas was going to be sent away from his family, all because Dean wanted more.

He almost laughs. Imagine if he’d actually gotten up the nerve to tell Cas he loves him. At least this way it hurts less, he reasons.

It really doesn’t.
“We’ll figure it out,” Carver says. “For now, just focus on bringing Stanley home, you got it?” he grins at the pair of them like he hasn’t just ripped Dean’s heart out of his chest and stomped on it.

Dean doesn’t really know how he and Cas end up back outside the office, but they do. Cas is looking at him gravely, but Dean can’t look back, not without doing something really stupid like crying.

“Guess that’s it, huh?”

“I won’t let them trade me, Dean,” Cas says fiercely. “But even if they do, it doesn’t matter. I will still live with you.”

“They could send you to fucking Vancouver, Cas,” Dean snaps. “You ain’t living with me then. I’ll see you four times a year, tops, and I’ll lose it, and it’ll all be,” he swallows thickly. “All because I wanted—,”

He chances a glance at Cas and wishes he hadn’t. Cas looks furious. “This is not your fault,” Cas says, voice so low it’s all growl. “I wanted this too.”

The locker room is still full when they get back, which is weird enough. Gets even weirder when everyone in there stops talking as soon as they catch sight of Dean and Cas.

“Everything alright?” Sam asks, concerned.

Dean looks out at them all, and can’t shake the guilty feeling that washes over him. This is his family. All this crap he and Cas are accumulating, it’s gonna spill over onto them too. And they don’t even know about it. It’s a goddamned shitty thing to do. So he swallows his pride and closes his eyes and says, “Cas and I are seeing one another.”

“Naked?” Gabriel asks.

Cas glares. “Yes, Gabriel.”

Gabriel hops off the bench and holds his hand out to Balthazar, who reaches into his pocket and slips a bill into his hand. “The rest of you too,” Gabriel says smugly. “All of you are losers.”

Dean watches them in disbelief. “You were taking bets on this?”

"On when you would finally fess up? Fuck yeah I was," Gabriel says, rifling through his stack of bills.

“It was kinda obvious you too had the butterflies for each other,” Garth says, happily handing over his money. “I’m glad you’re together.”

“But I’m not gay.”

Sam rolls his eyes and Kevin grins at him. “You’re whatever you want to be, Dean. You just like Cas.”

“Doesn’t make you less of a man, brother,” Benny says nicely. “Or any more likely that you’d be able to beat me in a fight.”

“You wanna bet?” Dean demands immediately. Cas makes a small noise of displeasure next to him but otherwise doesn’t do anything to stop Benny from coming at him in a headlock.

“Five bucks on Benny!” Gabriel crows, waving one of the bills in his hand in the air.
“I will back Dean,” Cas says.

“I bet you do,” Balthazar says suggestively. Dean flushes but surprisingly isn’t as bothered ad he figured he’d be. Yeah he has sex with Cas. They all know it. Not a problem.

It’s almost normal. Huh.

“No fighting in my locker room!” Bobby hollers, from his office, before slamming the door again to a muttered, ‘idjits.’ Benny lets go and claps Dean on the shoulder.

It is normal.

Chapter End Notes

This is Jebb’s chapter.
It takes them five games to beat Minnesota. Easiest five playoff games of Dean’s life, which Dean doesn’t really understand. Minnesota’s not an easy team. But it was like Cas was charged up with a jumper cable or something. Six goals in five games. Four assists. Was also some of the best sex of his life, ever, Dean turned on by Cas fucking scoring every night and Cas getting excited about Dean being turned on. They fed into one another. It worked, and they won.

They were going to the Western Conference finals.

He and Cas are about to leave the locker room when Chuck calls out, “Hey, uh, did you guys hear? The uh, the Scorpions were at the game tonight.”

Dean hadn’t known, damn. He knew the Scorpions had beaten Calgary in just four games, so makes sense they’d come here to watch whoever they’d be playing next. “Why do we care about those assholes?”

Chuck looks around nervously. “Well, because of Gordon, I guess.”

“Thank you Chuck,” Cas said, because he’s the polite one in the relationship, and steers Dean away.

“Gordon went to the Scorpions?” Dean asks. He’d forgotten to even ask, he’d just been so happy the asshole wasn’t on the team anymore.

“It appears that way.”

“Talk about a team of dickbags,” Dean mutters. “So now we gotta deal with him along with Zachy, Mikey and Luci. Great.”

“It doesn’t matter,” Cas shrugs. “We’re going to win.” He says it like it’s already happened, because that’s just how Cas thinks. He hasn’t even considered the possibility of not getting to hold the Stanley Cup. Dean hopes he doesn’t have to.

“I’m gonna use his face to write my name on the boards is what I’m gonna do,” Dean mutters, throwing his arm around Cas’ shoulder. Cas leans into him minutely and Dean grins. “Whaddya want for dinner?”

“Who knew we’d find two faggots outside of the zoo at this time of night?”

Dean grits his teeth, hand clenching into an automatic fist at the sound of Gordon’s voice. He feels Cas stiffen beneath him, so Dean drops his arm, turning around.

“A shame too, the zoo might have been helpful in explaining which one of them is the female,” Zach says in response, and wow, aren’t they lucky to get both Zach and Gordon. Dean doesn’t see any sign of Michael or Lucifer though, so at least there’s that.

“Can we help you?” Cas asks, his voice eerily calm. If Dean didn’t know him so well, he’d think Cas was unaffected.

“Just came to enjoy the show,” Gordon sing songs. “Deano got a lucky goal there, didn’t he? Maybe there is something useful about learning to spread your legs.”

Dean starts forward, but Cas cuts him off again. “If you don’t have anything intelligent to say,” he
says quietly, his eyes like ice. “Dean and I are leaving.”

“Intelligent?” Zachariah’s sickening smile widens. “They want intelligent, Gordon.”

“I’m always intelligent,” Gordon echoes his smile. “The media certainly thinks so.”

“What, your bullshit tabloids?” Dean spits. “Your word’s about as good as ‘dingo ate my baby’ right now, Gordon. That’s not a threat.”

“A couple of pictures might be.”

Dean’s stomach drops. “What pictures?”

Gordon just laughs.

“Is this an attempt at blackmail?” Cas asks mildly. “Should I call Toronto?”

The laughter abruptly stops. “You get the NHL involved, then they’ll definitely be released,” Gordon hisses. “How do you think the league is going to feel, knowing you two are doing disgusting things on their dime, walking around like you’re real men?”

“Dean’s definitely a man,” Cas counters. “I had the proof up my ass just last night.”

“Cas,” Dean says, quietly horrified. But then Gordon and Zach look just as horrified, so hey, that’s a plus.

“You’re a disgrace to the sport,” Zach says angrily. “You gave it up. When you’re called a cocksucker, it’s actually true.”

“Maybe because it’s not an insult, you ever think of that?” Dean asks hotly. “I’d tell you to try it out Zachy, but anyone you landed would be too small to shut you up, and I’d feel bad for the guy. Come on Cas, we’re leaving.” He whirls around and marches off, ignoring whatever Gordon calls after them.

He’s in the car before Cas, gripping the steering wheel of his baby like it’s the only thing keeping him grounded. “You really have to tell them I had my dick up your ass last night?” he grinds out as Cas slides in next to him.

Cas pauses, like he’s seriously considering the question, before nodding. “Yes.”

“Great. Fucking great.”

“He might not even have pictures, Dean.”

“Maybe not, but we know he’s planning on being an asshole through this entire series,” Dean bites out, starting the car. “If this crap gets in the way of us winning the Stanley Cup…”

Cas doesn’t say anything.

Dean knows he’s fucked up, but he sure as hell doesn’t want to be the one to speak first.

He makes it to their apartment building’s garage complex. “I didn’t mean we were crap,” he tells Cas, staring straight ahead. “I don’t regret you Cas, not even if we don’t win the Cup. It’s just bullshit that we have to be dealing with it all.”

“It is unfair,” Cas agrees. “Perhaps you should choose a girl next time.”
Dean turns abruptly to tell him to stop being a stupid jackass, but Cas is smiling, so instead he gets a make out session in the impala. Not bad.

Nothing appears in the newspaper the week before their first game, but Dean is constantly on edge. Every morning he expects to wake up and find the front page of the Chicago Times sports section plastered with some graphic picture of him and Cas. It gets so bad he stops touching Cas in public, even platonicly, and he knows Cas is getting frustrated. He knows he’s probably being irrational but he’s also being totally rational, because this is his life here, and apparently one guy has the power to ruin it. Dean hates that.

Game one of the Western Conference finals is at the Staples Center in Los Angeles, at six pm on a Wednesday night. Dean tries to concentrate, he really does, but Gordon even looking at him is enough to send him into a panic. He feels like every second is the one where Gordon is gonna rip of his helmet and announce what he knows to the whole world. Dean won’t even pass to Cas.

Bobby yells until he’s blue in the face, but it ain’t happening. Whatever magic Cas had found in Minnesota is gone too. Sammy manages to scrape out an ugly goal that Cain can’t see because Benny’s actually doing his goddamn job as a block, but it’s the only goal they get that night. They lose three to one.

The team heads back to the hoel beaten and dejected, and Dean can’t find it in him to convince them otherwise. Bobby finally gives up too, and tells them if they’re not ready to go in the morning, they might as well just go home now.

“How is this still interesting?” Dean asks in exasperation, throwing another magazine onto their bed. It’s People this time, a step up from a tabloid, and he knows he’s fucking paranoid but he’s also not gonna put it past Gordon to have started calling more places.

“S’cause you’re not talking,” Gabriel says through a mouthful of chocolate. He’s draped over the bed spread. “You’re a big mysterious hunk, Deano. Own it.”

“Then I’ll tell them I’m not gay.”

“You don’t want to lie,” Sam counters from his chair in the corner. “It won’t look good when you and Cas do decide to go public.”

Dean glances at Cas on the floor. He seems intent on his crossword puzzle book, or whatever. “Maybe we won’t go public.”

“Logical,” Balthazar says dryly.

“Well why should we?” Dean says. “All the people I care about know. What fucking right does the media have?”

“I’m not going to lie if someone asks if I am dating you,” Cas says in an even tone.

“Sure, if someone asks,” he snaps. “Fine! But the goddamned newspaper shouldn’t be asking me
that shit. Why do they care?”

“We live in a fucked up world, Chief,” Benny says sympathetically, flicking through the channels on the TV.

“If it makes you feel any better Deano, none of us care that you like being Cassie’s kebab,” Gabriel rolls onto his back and hangs his head over the side of the bed to look at Dean. “I won’t even ask you how it feels. That’s some self restraint right there.”

“Why the fuck,” Dean demands to know. “Am I the bottom?”

Gabriel blinks at him and murmurs, “Interesting.”

“What about that boy at the hospital?” Cas speaks up.

“Are you two looking into voyuerism already?” Balthazar leers. Surprisingly it’s Gabriel who throws a pillow at him.

“That was so out of character,” Sam says.

“I didn’t want to look at his stupid face anymore.”

“Never mind.”

“You meet a nice kid?” Benny prompts. He, Benny and Cas are the only mature people in the room.

“Dean taught a ten year old that it was not wrong to have feelings for someone of the same gender,” Cas says, and Dean wants to cover his ears at the hint of pride he hears in his voice. “And he did it just by telling him that he liked someone of the same gender as well.”

“Awwww,” Gabriel says around the Twix bar shoved into his mouth. “Issa friggen Hawmark momen’.”

“I barely have my own shit together,” Dean frowns, sliding down on the floor next to Cas. “No way I’m gonna step forward and be a voice for the friggen LBGT youth.”

“Q,” Sam adds.

“What?”

“There’s a q,” Sam explains. “For queer. LGBTQ.”

Dean turns helplessly to Cas. “You see?”

“Gabriel,” Balthazar says suddenly. “Darling, are we queer?”

Gabriel throws the other pillow at him.

If there’s anything about them in the media the next morning, Dean doesn’t see it. He doesn’t want to see it. Bobby’s right, they need to get their act together, and hell if he’s going to let them go down two games to none in the series. This is the fucking Stanley Cup, and he wants it.

The game’s at six again, because it’s eight in Chicago and money matters when it comes to TV broadcasts. They’ve got one more game here in LA before heading home to Chicago.

Dean slaps Cas’ ass before they head out onto the ice, just for the hell of it, and the heated glare Cas
They’re not as good as they could be. The whole game is ugly this time. Sam ends up ramming Lucifer into the boards again and for once in his life doesn’t try to apologize, just skates to the penalty box so angrily he’s got guys diving out of his way. The Scorpions score during the power play, but two minutes later Dean finds the puck at his feet in the neutral zone, and then Cas has it and it’s deflecting off Benny’s stick and right past Cain into the net.

There’s no scoring during the second period, just a grueling game of back and forth that the NHL fucking hates because it makes for shit hockey. Dean couldn’t care less. Gordon must agree that it’s boring though, because he goads Dean all through the period, whispering things Dean doesn’t even want to repeat and trying to coax him into throwing his gloves off. Dean doesn’t, but he’s shaking with rage by the time they get off the ice for second intermission, and despite the looks Bobby keeps shooting him Cas spends it tucked up under his arm.

They score right away in the third, Ash making this ridiculous shot from the blue line that Dean wouldn’t have believed if he hadn’t seen the replay. Gabriel is doing incredibly, making save after save, and Dean thinks they’ve got it won when Gabriel makes a save the refs review. They call it a goal, and Dean has to physically restrain Gabe from going after a smirking Michael.

It takes them three overtimes to finally win the game. Practically sixty more minutes of hockey. They drag themselves to the airport and sleep the entire way home, too exhausted to celebrate.

When they touch down in Chicago, its four in the morning. They’re tired and irritable and just want to sleep for a few more hours. No one appreciates the reporters waiting for them in the terminal.

“WINCHESTER,” they yell as soon as the team appears. Dean hears some screams of Krushnic mixed in there too, but no one else, and he’s terrified it’s finally happening until he realizes there are maybe five reporters here, and from the build up it’s been getting he thinks his sexuality would get a little more attention than that.

They want something from them though. They’re fishing, so Dean scowls and plows through them, and Bobby yells, “If you ain’t got a question about hockey, then clear out!” which actually gets rid of two of them. The rest are stubborn, yelling after Dean about Cas being named star of the game. He thinks he hears one of them mention a picture, but chalks it up to his extreme lack of sleep.

In the morning, he sees what they were talking about.

It’s not a bad picture, and if this is all Gordon has he can rest easy. Except he seriously doubts it. It’s him and Cas at the hospital. Someone did actually manage to get a picture of them holding hands, but it doesn’t really scream gay. Dean would laugh at the pathetic attempt if he thought that’s what it was.

But they won last night, and he’s pretty sure this is just Gordon’s way of warning him.

Dean’s still sitting at the kitchen table with the picture spread out in front of him. Cas takes in the scene wordlessly before asking, “Would you like some cereal?”

Cereal is the only thing Cas is allowed to make, and Dean wants to kiss the guy for trying to fix it with food, just like he had taught him. But he doesn’t, because he shouldn’t be allowed to kiss Cas.

The anxiety is already building, creeping up the back of his spine like a snake, wrapping around his chest. They’re not gonna make it through this. Those photos are going to be leaked, Cas is going to get traded. Dean stares miserably at the table.
No thanks.

At least game three is in Chicago, at home. The crowd is pumped after their win the other night, and Dean doubts he’s ever heard the cheering so loud during the national anthem. The game even starts off alright – Chuck scores in the first ten minutes, and Kevin has scored by the time the period is over. Dean’s feeling good, better than he’s felt since this whole damn mess started, and the itch to score starts up again.

He scores in the second period, just because he can, and Cas beams at him and hugs him maybe a little longer than necessary, and Dean hopes to hell Gordon is watching, because fuck him. Fuck. Him.

They fall apart in the third period. No one is scoring, and no one’s playing defense. Gabriel can only stop so many shots, but it’s not enough, and they lose by a goal. Dean’s never felt more sorry for himself in his life, and he’s pretty sure the rest of the team feels the same exact way. It’s even worse when Bobby sends them home without yelling until he’s blue in the face. It means he’s disappointed in them.

Dean wakes up the next morning to Cas standing over him with a mug of coffee in his hands and almost has a heart attack.

“Jesus!”

“Castiel,” he corrects, his lip twitching a little. “But close.” He hands Dean the coffee and sits down on the bed.

Dean takes a large gulp of caffeine with his eyes closed, savoring the small jolt of recognition his body feels. “Why the hell are you up before me?” he asks, keeping his eyes closed. “The world ending or something?”

“No,” Cas says, “Though I’m glad you have enough confidence in me to believe that I would get up for the world ending.”

“I don’t think you’d wake up on purpose,” Dean smirks over the rim of the coffee cup. “Trust me Cas, the world starts ending, I’m going with your cock in my mouth, and you’re sure as shit will be awake for that.”

“I’m glad you have your priorities straight.”

“I’m a regular Boy Scout,” he says, taking another sip of coffee. “You grab the paper?”

“I threw it away,” Cas replies easily.

Dean’s eyes narrow. “Why?”

“Because it makes you mad,” Cas says carefully. “And we need to win.”

It’s a fair point. The only thing really fucking with Dean right now is Dean himself. Well, that and
the constant media speculation, but that’s only getting to him because he’s letting it get to him. Refusing to even see the stuff is a smart choice.

Trust Cas to be the smart guy.

“Dean.”

“What?” Dean asks quickly. Cas has this fucking uncanny ability of knowing exactly when he’s thinking badly of himself, and even though Dean falls in love with him a little more every time he does one, he’s not sure he can handle a ‘reasons your brain is wrong and you are amazing’ tirade right now.

“I had a suggestion,” Cas says. “Sam thinks it’s a good idea as well.”

“Oh, well if Sam thinks so,” Dean rolls his eyes. “I ever tell you how weird it is you guys are bosom buddies? I always feel like you guys are just bitchin’ about how I don’t take out the trash or something.”

“You don’t take out the trash.”

Dean frowns. He takes out the trash. When it’s full. It’s just never full because Cas takes it out first. “What’s your suggestion?”

“Waiting for Gordon to release a picture of us does not seem the best course of action. What if we beat him to the punch?”

“You wanna release a dirty photo of us?” Dean grins. “Kinky, Cas. I didn’t know you had it in you.”

Cas lets out an amused huff. “I thought it might be easier if we were simply to make our relationship public. If Gordon chooses to release his photo afterwards, it will look much more like a dirty move then it would when it is being used as breaking news on our sexualities and relationship status.”

“No.”

“Dean—,”

“Cas, we’re in the friggen Stanley Cup,” Dean snaps, pushing off the bed. “You think coming out as gay is gonna be less of a distraction than Gordon hanging this damn picture over my head?” He folds his arms. “Sides, if we do that, all the news is gonna be about us, not the team. I’m not doing that.”

Cas makes a noise of frustration and stands up with him. “It is the best course of action available to us Dean,” he snaps.

“It’s a fucking stupid course of action.”

“You are the most irritating person I have ever met.”

“Takes one to know one, asshole.”

“It’s idiotic to hide like this, Dean, there’s no point to it.”

“Maybe there’s no point to any of it!” Dean yells.

Cas takes a step back, his eyes flashing. “I’m going to go walk the dog,” he says stiffly, leaving the room.
“Good riddance,” Dean mutters.

Cas doesn’t come back until hours later, and when he does, he heads straight for the guest room and doesn’t emerge until practice the next morning.

Practice is strained, and horrible, and it sets a precedence for the upcoming game. Half of Dean is aching to apologize, to drag Cas back to him and tell him how much he actually needs him, but another part of him is screaming that this is good, and if he goes through the loss now he won’t have to later when Cas leaves.

It’s almost like the beginning of the season again, when Dean and Cas couldn’t make a connecting pass to save their lives. Dean knows Bobby’s ready to tear what little hair he has left on his head out, and he’d probably be feeling that way too if he weren’t so numb. The Scorpions score pretty easily in the first period, and the only reason they don’t score more is due to Gabriel.

Dean actually feels bad. The guy seems to really care about this thing. If he doesn’t he’s doing a damn good job pretending with the way he’s playing.

There’s a sharp whistle in the second period, and when Dean turns Gordon is on the ice holding his bleeding nose and Cas is standing next to him, stick held loosely at his side and not even pretending to look apologetic. Cas gets a four minute penalty for high sticking and Bobby breaks out two new curse words. The Scorpions get another goal during the power play.

Gordon skates by Dean sometime in the third. “You and lover boy having a fight?” he asks.

“Shut up, Gordon.”

“Don’t be rude,” Gordon says smoothly. “I wanted to congratulate you. You’re a little too good for a Russian slut like that, don’t you think?”

Gordon almost gets a stick in a much worse place than to his face, but Sam had heard the words ‘Russian slut’ and practically bullied Dean off the ice.

They lost three to nothing. The series was sitting at three to one. One more win, and the Scorpions would be going to the Stanley Cup finals.

Dean sits on a bench in the locker room with his head in his hands long after everyone else has left.

Cas finally comes to get him around midnight, and Dean is so mentally exhausted and fed up with everything that he doesn’t even want to pretend to see this whole separation with Cas thing through. Cas can leave when he’s dragged from Dean’s cold, dead hands.

“I suck,” he mumbles when Cas sits down beside him.

“Yes,” Cas agrees. “But at least you admit it.”

Dean lets out a choked laugh, because how can he have missed this so much after only just a day. But he does. And then Cas is hugging him to his chest, and Dean is fucking not gonna cry because
he’s not a fucking pansy.

“M’sorry.”

“I know you didn’t mean it,” Cas pauses and considers briefly. “Just don’t say it again.”

Dean probably will, because he breaks everything he loves, but he’s not gonna get into that with Cas now.

“Our plane is in six hours.”

“You think Bobby does it to torture you?”

“Yes,” Cas answers seriously. “And you, by default, as the one who is forced to wake me up.”

“God yeah,” Dean mutters. “You suck.” He pulls away from Cas and starts carefully untying the laces on his shoes.

“Dean,” Cas ventures. “About…about my suggestion…”

“Still don’t wanna come out, Cas.”

“I understand.” Cas’ lips thin. “I respect your decision. I just had a question.”

“What?” Dean sighs and pulls his skates off.

“If it weren’t the Stanley Cup, would you go public?”

Dean pauses in the act of pulling off his hockey pants. “Honestly Cas?” he says. “I don’t know. I’m still not sure I’m comfortable with guys knowing we…” he gestures between them. “Hockey players already use that kind of shit as an insult on straight people. Imagine when they know you’re gay. They’ll fuck it up, make it dirty. I don’t know if I could handle it.”

“We would be handling it together,” Cas frowns. “It shouldn’t matter what they think.”

“No, it shouldn’t. Doesn’t mean that it doesn’t. Sorry I’m not…not as strong as you, I guess.”

Cas frowns deeper.

“My dad wasn’t into this whole LGBT thing,” Dean chuckles weakly. “Old man’s rolling over in his grave right now.”

“I don’t think I like your father,” Cas says, but he leaves it at that and lets Dean finish changing. Dean doesn’t say anything else either, because what’s the point. Dad’s not here, and he’ll either get over it or he won’t.

There are reporters outside, different ones from the ones that had been let into the locker room. Those had been sports reporters, people Dean knew so well he could greet them all by name and knew who they worked for. He doesn’t know these people.

“Dean!” they yell, crowding him as he and Cas try to get to the car. “Dean Winchester!” a flash goes off and Dean shuts his eyes irritably.

“You wanna give us some space?” he says, trying to push past them. Cas says something too, but Dean forgets English isn’t his first language, and all these people yelling at once, words jumbling together, are clearly starting to confuse him and piss him off. “Back off,” Dean tries again, louder.
They don’t listen, crowding closer if possible, yelling questions Dean can’t make out until one clear voice calls above the rest. “Dean! Are you gay?”

“FUCK OFF,” Dean snarls and makes one final push to the car. Another flash goes off.

Dean swears a lot before they’re able to drive away.

When Charlie and Jo call him on the plane, they’re laughing. “Ass munching fuck nugget?” Charlie manages to say between giggles, and Dean grins because it’s nice to hear from them, and it’s especially nice to actually be making something good out of this shitty situation.

“You see how much else I was swearing?” Dean asks. “I was running out of fucking phrases.”

“I liked Captain Limp Dick,” Cas says from his spot on Dean’s shoulder, and Jo shrieks with laughter.

“I’m so happy you two finally starting boning,” Jo says happily. “You’re so cute.”

“Two six foot men dating is not cute, Jo.”

“It’s adorable, actually,” Charlie says. “You two are endgame.”

“What the hell is that?” Dean asks the same time Cas politely says. “Thank you.”

“You don’t know what that means,” Dean says, turning to look down at Cas.

“No. I was being polite.”

“Don’t be polite unless you know what it means.”

“I think that defeats the purpose, Dean.”


The two women stay on the phone with them for most of the flight, and Dean is in an incredibly good mood when they touch down in LA, despite the reporters waiting for them.

There’s an air of seriousness during practice that day. Even Gabriel is keeping his fucking around to the bare minimum, a sure sign that the team has gone into do or die mode. If they lose, they won’t even make it anywhere near the cup.

Neither Bobby or Dean were ever good at making rousing speeches. Bobby’s not the Herb Brooks kind of guy, and Dean’s no Michael Jordan. Bobby just tells them, “either ya boys win, or you go home,” and that’s the most encouragement they’re gonna get. The rest is up to them.

The game is off to a bad start right out of the bag, with a bullshit call from a ref Dean swears can’t be old enough to be out of high school yet sending Kevin into the box. Luckily the Scorpions don’t score during the power play, but they do right afterwards. Dean doesn’t think the Cavs are playing
bad – they’re working their asses off. It’s clear they don’t want this to be the last game of the season. But something isn’t working, or clicking, and they can’t seem to score.

The dam breaks in the second period. Balthazar sends the puck ringing around the backboards to Kevin, who battles it out in the corner and manages to get it to Ed. Ed passes it onto Benny, who’s right in front of Cain again, and somehow the funny little hop he does ends up with the puck in the back of the net. No one knows how it happens, but it does.

Cas gets a more traditional goal later on in the second, but no one is complaining as his puck slips through Cain’s legs uncontested.

The third is when things get desperate. It’s obvious the Scorpions had wanted to finish this tonight, and Lucifer has been harassing Sam all evening, hitting at his legs with his stick when the refs weren’t looking and slamming into him whenever he thought he could. Dean’s been proud of Sammy for handling it pretty well, but next thing he knows there’s shouting and the crowd is going wild, and Lucifer and Sam have their gloves off.

“That wasn’t even a fair fight,” Dean says as he skates Sam to the edge of the ice so he can head off to the locker room.

Sam looks murderous. The cut on his cheek is bleeding. “He was saying shit about you.”

Dean is taken aback for only a second before he grins. “Ah, Sammy. You tryin’ to protect your big brother?”

“Shut up,” Sam tells him.

“You love me!” Dean calls after his retreating back.

Sam flips him off.

They end up winning, and the adrenaline rush he feels after the game, the shouts and celebrations with the team as they chant and cheer and prepare for game six, means he crashes hard. He doesn’t even notice when Cas gets up the next morning around eleven, and when Dean finally does wake he’s still gone.

He makes lunch for himself because it’s after noon, and he’s just about to take a large bite from his sandwich when his phone lights up with an unknown number. Frowning, he presses it to his ear.

“Hello?”

“Hey. Dean Winchester? Don’t know if you remember me, my name is Cole Trenton.”

Dean has no idea why a player from Dallas is calling him. He knows Trenton in passing, but has never really talked to him, and he knows for sure he’s never given him his number. “Yeah, I know you,” he says, taking a bite of his sandwich. “You need something?”

“Sorry for calling you up during the conference finals,” Trenton sounds kind of sheepish. “I got your number from Henriksen, up in Winnipeg. Just thought…I wanted to thank you.”

Now Dean’s beyond confused. And fuck Victor for handing his number out. “Thank me?”

“I got a kid sister,” Trenton says, picking up speed. “I’m not saying the rumors are true, or anything, but you know, they’re out there, and it’s…it’s helping her. She’s got a girlfriend and Texas isn’t so nice to her, neither is hockey, but she got so excited when she read about you in the paper. So…thanks.” His finish is kind of lame, which is fine, because Dean really has no idea what to say.
“Is this going around?” he asks. Every NHL player but those on the Cavs and the Scorpions and on New York and Tampa over in the east are done for the season, and it’s hard to know what’s going on in the sport when everyone has moved somewhere else for the summer. It hadn’t even crossed Dean’s mind that other players might be discussing him despite the fact that he hadn’t said anything to anyone. Rumors were rumors.

“Pretty much,” Trenton says. “Don’t know much about what anyone else thinks, though. Just wanted to thank you. And uh, good luck.”

Dean’s not sure what Trenton is wishing him good luck for, but he thanks him again and eats the rest of his sandwich.

His phone rings again just as he’s finishing up, and this time he answers without looking at the number.

Dean sits in awed silence as Mr. Corbett thanks him for the recognition he’s shining on gay hockey players. Every time Dean tries to protest that he hasn’t done anything, he’s cut off. “Nonsense,” Corbett says. “Even if you’re as heterosexual as they come, you’re being very good about it.” Dean is floored that he’s being praised for not making homophobic comments in response to the accusations, because what the fuck.

“When the season ends, we’d like you to be one of the faces of our campaign,” Corbett says. “Please consider it. Many young men and women think hockey is not open to them because of their sexuality, and that simply isn’t true. We need people like you to tell them otherwise, Dean.”

“Can Cas come too?” is really the only thing Dean can think to say, and Corbett laughs and says yes, of course.

Dean hadn’t realized he was actually doing something. Making an impact. He was just…not being a dick. Turns out most of the world needed help knowing how not to be a dick.

For the first time, he wonders if maybe his and Cas’ relationship is the public’s business.

He’s still sitting at the table of their hotel room, thinking, when Cas gets back.

Carver and Edlund are waiting for them when they get back to Chicago. Not too unusual. It’s a possible elimination game, and if the Cavs don’t get eliminated, they’re going on to game seven. It’s exciting no matter what way you look at it.

Dean’s stomach sinks when he and Cas get called back to their office. He feels like he’s being sent to the principal.

Carver’s got a newspaper held aloft when they enter the room, and Dean doesn’t have to read it to guess what it says. He’s sick of the damn media, sick of this mess and of Gordon holding shit over their heads. He almost wishes he would just release the fucking pictures already.

Obviously Carver and Edlund do too.
“We believe the best thing to do is get ahead of it,” Carver says to both of them. “If we make the first move, we have the opportunity to control your image.”

“I’m not spelling out our private lives because we’re forced to,” Dean growls.

“Dean,” Edlund says gently. “By breaking the story, you have the ability to control it.”

“By allowing Gordon to force us into breaking it, we are proving we never really had control in the first place,” Cas points out.

“Yeah,” Dean nods, relieved Cas is on his side with this one. “I don’t want that asshole deciding when I go public.”

“He’ll be deciding either way,” Edlund says sympathetically, “Whether he releases the photo or whether you come out yourselves.”

Dean doesn’t care. He’s not doing it. “Are you trading Cas away next season?”

Carver and Edlund exchange a glance. “We’re not sure yet,” Carver says.

Game six is another do or die, except the Scorpions are even more desperate this time. Dean had expected them to play dirtier, and they do, starting the first period by slamming Kevin straight into the boards. Everyone on the Cavs bench is furious, especially since it looked like an illegal elbow, but no whistle is blown, and that’s basically how the rest of the game goes.

The Scorpions play dirty. Dean is pretty sure the crowd spends more time booing them than they do cheering for the Cavs. There’s a confusing goal in the first, one that gets lost in a huge pile of bodies that are doing their best to murder each other until the whistle is blown, and the ref points to the puck in the back of the net. Luckily the goal is in their favor.

They don’t score the rest of the first, and there are no goals in the second. There’s one particularly terrifying moment for Dean when Alistair takes off after Cas, with seemingly no purpose in mind but to hurt him as much as possible. Dean’s ready to scream when Cas steps neatly out of the way, and Alistair ends up crumpling into the boards. He doesn’t go after Cas again.

The third period is almost boring in comparison. The Scorpions have either resigned themselves to a game seven or they’re worn down from all the aggression. Dean doesn’t care either way. They’re going back to LA.

Balthazar yells several inappropriate things about where he’d like to stick his genitalia in the locker room that night. Kevin dents a locker when he kicks it with his bare feet. Chuck doesn’t stutter for a whole hour. Dean’s never been happier.

Carver pulls Dean over to the side of the locker room while Benny and Gabe go around the room slapping people with wet towels. Cas and Sam are the best reactions, with Cas looking too baffled to know what to do and Sam so pissed he actually joins in. Dean’s still shaking with laughter when Carver tells him. “We’re not going to trade Cas. Based on his performance tonight it’s clear he’s an important part of his team. We’ll figure out the rest later.”

Scratch that, now Dean’s never been so happy.

Later that night, when they’re in bed, Dean tells Cas what Carver said. Cas sits up immediately.

“Dean,” he says quietly. “Do you know what this means?”
“That you’re stuck with me?” Dean ventures hesitantly.

Cas beams at him. “Exactly.”

Dean ends up on top of Cas, kissing him deep into the mattress as he grinds down on top of him. Cas whimpers his name, his hands tight on Dean’s hips, and Dean thinks maybe they should just never shave again because kissing Cas like this is ridiculous. He breaks away from his lips, running a trail of kisses down his neck and to the hollow of his collar bone.

“You feel so good,” Cas whispers, his hips rotating lazily, pushing his erection into Dean’s.

“Cas,” Dean says quietly into his neck. “I want you to fuck me.”

Cas looks at him like he doesn’t really believe he’s there.

“C’mon,” Dean smiles, reaching over and grabbing the lube from the nightstand. It’s always been for Cas, but he’s been thinking about this for a while now, and his masculine hang ups aren’t worth it. Not with Cas. Dean thinks he’d be pretty proud to say he was fucked by such a bad ass, and everyone else could go suck a dick.

“Are you sure?” Cas asks, but his eyes are hooded and running over Dean hungrily already, and Dean’s never been more sure of anything in his life.

He opens the lube bottle and squirts some over his fingers. “Are you gonna help, or am I going to have to do it by myself?”

Cas ends up doing it on his own, because from the first moment Cas has his finger inside of him, Dean’s lost. He thought it’d be weird to have something inside him, invading him, and it is at first, but then it’s just Cas, and the hot burn of Cas’ calloused fingers stretching him open until a second finger joins, and then eventually a third. It feels so good Dean is pretty sure he could come like this, Cas opening him up with that reverent look on his face, but then something shifts, and Cas crooks his fingers, and Dean shouts.

“Christ, Cas!”

After that it’s frantic, Cas scrambling to lube up his erection and Dean positioning himself over it, hands flat on Cas’ chest, before he sinks down slowly, muttering encouragement all the way as Cas gasps his name, his hands back on Dean’s hips.

Then Cas is filling him, and Dean swears. “C’mon baby,” he says, lifting himself up a little. “C’mon Cas, you gotta help me, I need you to help me.”

That snaps Cas out of wherever he was, and then he’s helping Dean lift himself up and slam back down, until they’ve got a good rhythm going. Dean’s desperately trying to find that place Cas got with his fingers before, chasing his orgasm, muttering, “Cas, Cas, faster Cas, you can do it,” as Cas says a couple of words in Russian that Dean doesn’t understand. Then Cas lifts him up again, and this time when Dean comes back down he feels a jolt, like an electrical current, running through his body, and he thinks he yells, “fucking yes Cas!” but Cas seems to have gotten it because now he’s hitting that spot every damn time. Dean’s not going to last much longer, so he surges forward, and Dean is kissing him when he feels Cas let go inside of him. Dean follows quickly, and this time he’s the one who collapses on top of Cas, boneless.

They manage to clean up a few minutes later, and when they collapse back into bed Cas drags Dean to his chest like it’s the most natural thing in the world.
It probably is. Dean finds he doesn’t mind being the little spoon.

They don’t talk about it being game seven. They don’t talk about how, if they win this one, they’re going to the finals. They can’t talk like that. Dean likes to think he’s not annoyingly superstitious, but this. This is important.

Somebody is going home tonight, and he really doesn’t want it to be them.

The locker room is eerily quiet, even with every single guy on the team present, doing up their laces and taping their sticks. Dean hopes it’s anticipation over nerves, but then nerves might be helpful too. Anything might be helpful.

Bobby must feel it in the air too, whatever it is hanging over them. “Go get ‘em, boys,” is all he says, and then it’s game time.

Cas whispers his own pep talk to Dean as they stand on the ice in front of thousands of people, the national anthem playing loudly. I believe in you.

Dean believes in them too. He can feel it in his gut. The game is theirs.

Dean wins the face off against Michael and passes it back to Benny, who takes it all the way back towards Gabriel before giving it to Sam to take over the blue line. Sam does without any problem, barely even moves when Zach tries to get him off the puck, and makes a slap shot that Cain sees well enough to save. This time Dean loses the face off, and when he gets off the ice Balthazar and Kevin are working hard to defend the net from an answering shot.

That kind of back and forth goes on the entirety of the first period, and they seem so evenly matches at this point that Bobby starts breaking out actual plays. The two teams know each other too well now, having played six games straight, and if they don’t do something different only luck is going to get them a goal. Lady Luck loves hockey, but she doesn’t always pull for the right team, and Dean’s not sure how much trust he wants to put in her tonight, not for something this important.

The first period ends scoreless, and Bobby spends the intermission going over plays with them, from that playbook they all hate so damn much but which is probably going to save their asses now. Rufus cuts in occasionally to help, and that’s when it really sinks in for Dean how important this game is. The Scorpions are the toughest team they’re going to play. If they beat them, they have a very good chance of beating Tampa. They could be champions, part of history.

Dean finds an energy he didn’t have in the first period and skates around like he’s on a goddamned mission. Cas seems to catch it pretty quickly and suddenly he’s skating like that too, then Sam, then Benny. Then the whole team is working their asses off, moving through Bobby’s set plays, and Dean’s never felt more like a captain, yelling encouragement. Balthazar rings a shot off the crossbar that the entire stadium hears, and even though they’re the away team the crowd roars, hungry for some kind of score. They’re rewarded towards the very end of the period, when Cas decides he’s tired of the bullshit and handles his stick so well he practically walks the puck past Cain and into the back of the net.
So it’s one to zero, and they’ve got a period left to go.

“Keep it up,” Bobby says over and over again during intermission. “You idjits came back from a two game deficit, you gonna let them walk away to the finals without you? Keep it up!”

Benny’s the one who lets out a cheer first, short and sharp, and then Sam follows. Soon the entire team is cheering, and they’re storming out of the locker room and back onto the bench.

Apparently the game plan for the Scorpions in the third is to never leave Dean alone. Ever.

Every time Dean is on the ice, there’s some asshole in a black jersey constantly swatting at him with a stick, chirping in his ear. Gordon’s told his whole team what, “a good little faggot” Dean is, how much he loves eating cock and being told he’s pretty. Dean swears right back, and once he ‘accidentally’ gets Zach in the stomach, but he refuses to drop his gloves. They don’t need that shit. And he’d kind of promised Cas.

Gabriel’s doing what he’s been doing all season, blocking so many shots the Scorpions don’t seem to care about the fact that he’s the goalie and start coming for him, and then Bobby basically sticks Sam out on the ice and tells him to stay, and Sam becomes kind of a Gabe body guard. Dean would laugh at how hilarious it was if he wasn’t so tense.

Cas nudges him on the bench with thirty seconds left in the game. Dean refuses to look at him.

At six seconds, Benny ices the puck and the ref blows the whistle. The Scorpions have pulled Cain, giving them an extra player on the ice, and the face off is in the Cavs zone. If Michael wins the face off, the Scorpions will have time for one shot, one chance to tie the game and go into overtime. If Dean wins it, it’s all over.

Dean stares across the face off dot at the patch of ice right in front of Michael and breathes deep.

He ignores the small voice in his head telling him he’s going to fuck this up. He won’t.

Michael sneers at him and asks him to lift his skirts, but Dean doesn’t really hear. He waits for the ref. The whistle blows. The puck drops.

Dean swipes it away.

Sammy is screaming so loudly in his ear Dean is afraid he’s gonna burst an ear drum. Dean thinks he might have actually been lifted off the ice as Sam shoots, “WE WON, HOLY FUCK. WE’RE GOING TO THE FINALS. WE WON, DEAN!” Someone barrels into Sam’s side and Sam all but drops him, and then Benny’s on top of him, shouting in such a thick Cajun accent that Dean can’t understand. He scans the ice frantically, searching, and then bright blue eyes meet his.

Dean can’t figure out why the fuck his face hurts so much until he realizes he’s been grinning the entire time.

“We did it, Cas!” he shouts over the absolute din of the stadium, and Cas’ eyes crinkle and Dean grabs a fistful of jersey and tugs and then Cas is there, flush to his chest, and Dean could give a fuck who’s watching or what they think. “We’re going to the cup!”

Cas’ wide grin is infectious. Dean can’t stop beaming at him.

“Dean,” Cas says, raising his voice to be heard above the crowd. “I love you.”

Dean stares at him. “I wanted to say it first,” he finally manages.
Cas raises an eyebrow. “Maybe you shouldn’t do it when you think I’m asleep, then.”

You can’t kiss with the fucking helmets on, as hard as Dean tries, and maybe it’s a good thing, since Dean forgot where they were for a second. He settles for pressing his visor to Cas’ love for the stubborn Russian asshole filling him to the brim. “You’re a fuck.”

“But you love me,” Cas points out, kind of smug.

“Yeah. You’re family.”

Turns out Cas can’t figure out how to kiss with the damn helmets on either.

They’ll get it eventually. They got time.
“You know you don’t actually have to do this, right?” Sam asks, surveying Dean and reaching out to brush a piece of lint off the suit of his shoulder. “I think everybody’s probably figured it out. You and Cas aren’t exactly subtle.”

“Gotta do it right, Sammy,” Dean shrugs. “Anyway, why the fuck are you complaining about a free day with the Cup?”

The large silver trophy sits off to their left on top of a table. Dean never knew this, but apparently the cup comes with it’s very own little neurotic guy who never, ever takes off his white gloves. His name is Marv, and he’d introduced himself as the keeper of the cup.

Whatever. Dean’s pretty sure if they ever get his gloves off they’ll find out he’s got talons. Cas is pretty sure he’s just hypochondriac.

Cas is no fun.

“I’m not,” Sam says, looking over at it like it might have disappeared in the ten seconds since he’d last checked for it. Dean can’t really blame his brother. They’ve all been doing that since they won it, visiting it just to stare at it, running their hands over their names engraved on the side. Dean’s day with the cup comes in a few weeks, and then Cas’ is in August, so he’ll get to see it more than most of them, but it’s still a new thing. Still shiny.

They fucking won the Stanley Cup. That feeling was never going to go away.

“The league is investigating Gordon,” Sam speaks up suddenly.

“Really?” that catches Dean’s interest. “For what? Leaking homosexual photos?”

“Haha,” Sam says sarcastically. The photos Gordon had were released before he and Cas were even able to stumble drunk back to the hotel after a night of celebrating. And they were pretty incriminating, him and Cas kissing at their first official date bowling. Dean’d be pissed someone was taking secret pictures of him if he didn’t like the damn things so much. He’d framed one and put it next to the photo Rachel sent them ages ago. Cas said it was tacky but Dean loved it.

So yeah. Kissing photos. Pretty bad when you were a guy deep in the closet, but Dean was currently finding his way out of Narnia. He’d managed to get through it, and the distraction of the cup finals had helped a lot. He’d had it backwards, when he’d been arguing with Cas – the media didn’t distract from the finals, the finals had distracted from the media.

“They were actually questioning him about those,” Sam continues. “But they found drugs in his system.”


Sam makes a face. “Seriously?”

“You told the story wrong Sam, give me some fucking detail.”
“Dean,” Cas appears beside him, and Dean almost hates how much better Cas looks in a suit than him. Hate being a rhetorical word. He wanted to rip the thing off of Cas with his teeth.

“Oh my god,” Sam says.

“What?”

“You’re doing that face again!”

“I’m not doing a face!”

“You are,” Cas says. “You’re thinking about me naked.”

“You guys suck,” Dean complains.

“Then don’t think about Cas naked, how hard is it?”

“You wanna know Sammy? You really wanna know how hard it is?”

“I do,” Cas assures him as Sam makes a gagging noise. “But the press conference is supposed to begin at three, and it is currently five past.”

Dean sighs but goes to pick up the Cup with Cas, and they carry it into the conference room to a greeting of flashing bulbs and murmured excitement. Chicago loves the cup. Dean’s happy he could help bring it home.

They set the cup down on the little table provided and Dean goes to stand by the mic, Cas beside him. All the reporters in here are in suits, and Dean recognizes a lot of them. His team is in the back, along with Bobby.

He takes a deep breath. He’s actually doing this.

Out of the corner of his eyes, he sees Mr. Corbett give him a thumbs up. He’s sitting with Carver and Edlund.

“Hi,” Dean clears his throat, and the silence in the room is almost deafening. “So uh, I’m Dean Winchester. I’m the Captain of the Chicago Cavalry, 2015 Stanley cup Champions.” Someone cheers and he smiles slightly. He can do this.

Cas reaches down and takes his hand, squeezing.

He can do this.

“This is, uh, my teammate and boyfriend, Castiel Krushnic. We’ve been dating for three months now, and I’m a bisexual hockey player.”
Chapter End Notes

So many of you have told me that you got into hockey because of this fic and the team camaraderie in it, and I just want to tell you how absolutely ecstatic I am that my love of the Blackhawks and their dynamic has been able to translate over into the world of Supernatural, and that in turn those of you that have a team have been able to translate it back onto them, or those of you that are discovering hockey are able to find it in your own teams. I love hockey so much, I'm so happy some of you are finding it too.

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