They defeat the Darkness, but the struggle during has left Dean and Sam so broken and wounded that things aren't the same anymore. A poorly written letter is all Dean leave's behind, hitting the road and driving as far away from Kansas as possible.

It's been two years since Dean has seen or spoken with his brother. He's made something of a life for himself in Seattle, and though he spends his nights chasing the bottom of a bottle, he tells himself that he's happy. Or at least as happy as he'll ever be.

His life takes a chaotic turn when Dean stumbles across a pair of werewolves, and is unexpectedly saved by a blue eyed man in a trench coat, who seems to vanish into thin air afterwards. The next thing he knows Sam is calling him back to the bunker and there's an Apocalypse looming over all their heads. Again.
SOOOOO This is my FIRST Destiel fic :O feeling the jitters!

Just wanted to say a few things before going into this mess I like to call a story lol First off, this is all canon adjacent up until season 11. Basically it's gonna be a season 11 alternate. Also, the events that took place at that time will be revealed through FLASHBACKS. Mostly Cas' memories up until later in the story when it's Dean's as well.

I know a few of you will not be too happy to discover that Cas' wardrobe has... changed a bit. I promise there's a REASON for it, though. You just gotta hang with me a find out.

Second, just a warning that this story will have a pretty decent amount of angst in it. Can't help it. I'm a sucker for the drama XD

Also, I've made it a challenge to myself to make music a LARGE part of this fic. I intend to have a song for each chapter, which I will post at the end of. The first song I figured was a perfect foreshadowing for the overall things to come in this fic. So I hope the song doesn't turn you off :(

Also, you will notice a few things... different about Dean. Also, just like Cas' wardrobe, there is a reason for this.

With that said! I really hope you like the first chapter. I know it's kind of long and if you're like me, most of you are 'Where's the angel?!' Rest assured, he makes an appearance at the end.
He has the dream often, and it lasts for what seems the entire night, but what Dean knows can only truly be mere minutes.

He’s standing on the ledge of a building, the chaotic street below a blur of tiny matchbook cars and colorful dots that are people. The wind is harsh against his face, inducing stinging tears that dry almost as quickly as gathering. Once upon a time Dean used to fear heights; would shy away from anything that got the soles of his boots more than ten feet off the ground, but standing there on the ledge his heart pounds not in fear, but excitement. The world is laid out before him, and damn if he doesn’t feel invincible.

Something’s whispering at the back of his mind, a gentle caress to his senses that speaks in a language conveyed more by fleeting images and unwarranted emotions than actual words. Dean drifts closer towards the edge, his toes teetering over, and that sends a thrill through his system, making his limbs twitch and his Adams apple bob as he swallows.

The dream always ends the same. He steps off the ledge.

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Music runs in Dean’s veins like blood. Word is the only way he’d settle down as a baby was if his mom serenaded him with ‘Hey, Jude’; her voice so sweet the angels gathered to listen (or so his dad used to say). After her death he grows up listening to John Winchester’s cassette tapes, and while there hadn’t been much variety, Dean never got tired of hearing Hendrix draw out one of those funky, electric solo’s, or Bob Dylan pour his heart out while moving Dean’s own. And sometimes when Dean felt like he was going to crawl out of his skin, break under the responsibilities that being the oldest son entailed, he’d scream along to the high pitched screech of AC/DC. On the nights where he just couldn’t take anymore, he’d smoother his cries under his blanket and cling to his pillow for dear life, Jeff Buckley’s soft, soothing voice soulfully crooning the lyrics of Hallelujah to him. To this day, when Dean felt used up and unable to move forward he’d play the song on repeat.

Two years ago, when Dean had arrived in Seattle, he hadn’t expected his love for music to land him a job, but after a night of drunken karaoke at his favorite dive bar, El Diablo, the owner Jimmy had offered him a part time gig busing tables and climbing on stage every weekend to put on a show for the locals. For some reason the crowds loved him, and after picking up a second hand guitar from a thrift shop his fans had only grown in number. He's not complaining. Not only does he get free
booze, but standing on stage with a guitar and singing into a mike certainly doesn’t hurt his sex life; not that he had ever needed any help with that. Thank you very much.

El Diablo is buzzing tonight, though, and Dean's had a constant flow of anxiety under his skin since coming into work, and the douche group that had left the table he's mopping down had apparently thought their napkins were confetti, cause someone had tore the thing to bits and the paper is scattered over the entire table top. It takes him a full ten minutes to gather it all, and by the time he's done he's feeling done as well. Slinging the dishcloth over his shoulder he twist's on his feet and all but stomps away, trying his best to ignore the group of drunk women doing an awful rendition of some Brittny Spears song. Shaking his head he head's towards the bar, acknowledging a few nods of hello and raised beers in his direction.

Looking up he see's Kate all but violently trash talking some guy that's putting the moves on her. He can't help but hang back a moment, grinning. Honestly, he'll never get tired of the chick. Jimmy had hired her almost a year ago, and her fiery attitude and snarky mouth had been an immediate turn on for him. It had only taken a few days before they were rolling around in his bed, rocking each other’s worlds. It had never became anything more than that; just casual hook ups whenever the itch was clawing at both of them, and honestly Dean had never been interested in having something more. That wish (as secret and stunted as it had once been), had died years ago. Besides, there was nothing better than a hot night of rough, no-strings-attached fucking.

The pissed off guy at the bar swings around, spitting out some serious foul mouth, and Dean just barely steps aside before they collided into each other. He glares at the retreating form before heading to the back of the bar. “Another of your fans?”

Kate rolls her dark eyes, her pony tail slapping every which way as she shakes her head. “I swear this place only attracts jackasses and lowlifes.”

“Isn't that why we fit right in?” It was only half a joke, honestly.

Kate turns to face him, looking him up and down. Dean knows that look. He's experienced it many times right before Kate switches to Sex Goddess Dom mode and rocks his world all night. Usually the look is all it takes to have him on his knees, but tonight he just didn’t seem to be feeling it. Clearing his throat Dean nods towards the kitchens. “I’m up in ten; gotta finish up back there or else Jimmy will be all over my ass. You know how it is.”

Kate narrows her eyes, searching his face like she's looking for something. For some reason her gaze is so discomforting to Dean that for a moment he's frozen on his feet, his mind going slightly fuzzy as if searching his memory for something.
“You’ve been weird lately.”

“Huh?”

Kate rolls her eyes and turns around to grab a beer for a guy that is impatiently glaring at them both. “You’re not acting like yourself.”

“Uh… okay? And what does that mean?”

“It’s been two months, Dean.” Kate swings back around to him with a tired sigh, crossing her arms over her ample chest.

“Two months?” Seriously. He was obviously missing something here.

“Since we’ve fucked.”

Dean jerks back in surprise, glancing sideways and finding a few people at the bar now watching them with obvious interest. He gives a nervous laugh, shaking his head at a guy that is eyeing him with an arched brow. “It hasn’t… been two months.” He turns back to Kate with a near cringe. “Right?” At her obvious expression his shoulders slump. “What… for real?” Holy hell. Had he really not had sex in two months? What was that all about?! “Alright, just hold up. I don’t know about you but I seem to recall a pretty memorable night not too long ago at your apartment. You know, the – uh…” He leans a little closer so he can speak softer. “The candlestick.”

Apparently he hasn’t spoken quietly enough because someone whispers ‘candlestick?’.

Dean shuffles awkwardly, laughing. “Nothing weird! Totally normal and all.”

Before he can make even more of an ass of himself he sighs and pulls Kate away from their audience and through the swinging door that leads to the kitchen. Rob’s at the grill but he’s wearing some ear buds and belting out CCR, so Dean isn’t worried much about being overheard. He slaps his dishcloth down into a sink and wipes his hands off, turning to Kate again. “Alright, what’s going on?”
“Oh, I’ll tell you what’s going on.” Kate draws up to her full height, and even though that’s still a good five inches shorter than Dean she still manages to come across as intimidating. And sexy as hell, of course. “We’ve gone from pretty much screwing each other sore to not at all. I don’t know why, and I don’t care, but a girl can’t help but feel a little dejected here.”

Dean scrubs a hand over his face with a sigh, shaking his head. “Yeah, I’ve just been really..."

“If you say you’ve been busy I’m going to punch you in the face, I swear to God.”

Dean snaps his mouth shut.

Kate sighs, her shoulders slumping a little. “Look, I know this isn’t anything more than fun, and I’m all for that, but we had a good thing going and if you want out you need to let me know.”

“No! I definitely don’t want out. I want very in.” He gives a suggestive wink and Kate snorts, shaking her head. Ambling a little closer Dean reaches out to run his hand down her arm, feeling her skin prickle in awareness. “Actually, how about we reintroduce ourselves tonight, huh? After my gig?”

Kate looks like she was going to play hard to get a full five seconds before giving in, a slow grin coming to her face. “You better be glad you’re so cute.”

Dean wags his brows. “Believe me, I am.” Leaning forward he grazes his lips over hers, just a hint at what’s to come later. Kate melts like putty in his hands.

Somewhere at the back of his mind a nearly silent whisper begins to sound.

Dean ignores it.

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The lights flash in quick pulses of red, green and pale yellow as Dean climbs the stairs leading up to the stage. Behind him the bar’s filled with loud whistles and cat calls, a few loyal fans screaming out his name in a way that never stops amusing him. He grins, pulling his guitar strap over his shoulder and stepping up to the mike, adjusting it higher to fit his height. He lets the crowd have their fun a moment before waving for them to settle down, and yells at the guy working the lights to pick a damned color and stay there. The soft yellow hue settles over him, and Dean cracks a grin down at the audience. “How’s everyone doing tonight?!”

More screams and one highly inappropriate request to his left. He snorts, squinting through the shadows below. “Alright now Linda, I thought we already talked about this? Pretty sure your husband wouldn’t like it very much if I did that, yeah?” Laughs ring out and Dean can just barely make out Frank, said husband, shooting him a birdie. “Okay, okay. Easy there big guy.” He cracks his neck a few times, shaking his body to try to induce a burst of energy. “Alright, what do you assholes want to hear?”

Dozens of voices begin to shout out requests, so jumbled together that Dean could barely differentiate between them all. He catches someone shouting out Pink Floyd and is going to settle on that when a tingling begins at the back of his head. He pauses, his lips parting in a soft exhale and his vision going slightly blurry. Some part of him, the part that's confused and frustrated every time he goes into one of his little trances, fights for control; struggling to break through the haze, but as always it takes him over completely. Images began to flash across his eyes, too fast to really get anything more than fleeting glimpses. The moon, hanging high and full in the sky. The darkness of an alley, and two glowing orbs of pale yellow.

And just like that, the images are gone.

Dean shakes slightly and sucks in a calming breath. The visions had gone, but in their wake is an impending sense of forewarning. That something dark is just around the corner.

At that moment Dean wants nothing more than to step off the stage and get the hell out of dodge, but he forces his feet to stay rooted to the ground less he betray himself to everyone. He's come so far; made a name for himself. He's got a life now, and he's not ready to give that up. Clearing his throat he stands a little straighter, his hands settling into place on his guitar. They start on familiar cords before he has any real idea of what he was doing, and Dean lets out a dark chuckle while the crowd cheered loudly, beginning to bob their head’s and wave their hands in the air as he starts in on ‘Bad Moon Rising’. He can’t help but feel like the song, as well, is an omen in itself.

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They stumble through the door, Dean nearly tripping over shoes lying in the path and bringing them both down. Kate laughs into his ear as he desperately tries to steady them. And then they're kissing again. Dean wraps an arm around Kate’s waist and pulls her flush against his body, Kate all but purring in pleasure. He grins, because yeah, he's a bit of an egotistical son of a bitch.

“You’re gonna have to make up for those two months.” Kate says seductively, pulling away from him to walk slowly backwards towards her bed. She works at the buttons of her blouse as she goes, and Dean’s eyes are drawn to the sight.

He not gonna lie, the first thing he had noticed about Kate were her breast, or rather how large they were. In all honesty, he's more of an ass man, but that wasn’t to say he couldn’t enjoy a nice D cup as well.

Kate tosses her blouse to the ground and starts working at a lacy black bra, wagging her brows seductively. Dean grins and starts after her, already reaching out to touch. Kate, ever the tease, shies away as she drops her bra to the ground, already reaching down to start on her skin tight jeans.

“I don’t think so. You gotta work for this, babe.”

Dean arches a brow. “Oh, really?”

Kate wiggles her hips to work her jeans down, stepping out of them and kicking off her heels until she's standing there in only her sheer black panties. She scoots backwards onto the bed, propping herself up on her elbows and watching Dean expectantly. “Mm-hmm. So why don’t you give me a little show, hmm?”

Dean arches his brows. “You want me to strip?”

Kate just grins, waiting.

Shaking his head with a chuckle Dean reaches up for the button of his flannel, his fingers moving tantalizingly slow as he bites down on his lower lip. Hey, hes all about performance, alright? Kate
licks her lips, shifting on the bed and letting out a shaky breath. Oh, yeah. He has this in the bag. He strips out of the flannel with seductive grace, and then reaches for the bottom of his tee shirt, lifting it just a little to show defined hipbones and a sinful treasure trail that vanishes into his low hung jeans. “You want this, hmm?”

Kate draws up a little, her attention caught. “You know I do.” Her hands slid down the center of her chest, her eyes raking over him.

Dean slowly pulls the shirt over his head and lets it drop, and is reaching down to the fly of his jeans when he feels a cold shiver shoot down his spine and up the back of his neck. He pauses, his heart picking up speed and his mouth going dry. At the corner of his vision he can barely make out a soft glowing light, and suddenly whispers fill the dark recesses of his mind. Dean swallows, clenching his jaw tight. He doesn't turn around. He refuses to. There's nothing there after all. There's never anything there. With slightly shaking hands he pops the buckle of his belt and starts at his fly.

“I know I wanted a show, but dammit I don’t think I can wait anymore.” Kate jumps off of the bed and slaps his hands away, taking over, and Dean loses himself in the sensation of her. The feel of her lips on his chin, her nails dragging down his chest and belly, making his muscles clench. It isn't until Kate falls to her knees in front of him that the glow finally fades from his vision, and the whispers recede.

*********

Later, as Dean lays in bed staring up at the ceiling with Kate resting beside him, he can’t help but wonder if this is all his life would ever be. Not that it's such a bad life. Hell of a lot better than his old one, at least. But still… sometimes he can’t help but feel like somethings... missing. Something that he had once had and lost. And that makes no sense.

His life here is good. He's worked hard to be where he is, and he doesn't have to struggle to survive here.

No. He has a good thing going. He can’t risk losing that.
Seattle is a relatively safe place to live. There isn’t much in the way of crime and while a robbery may happen now and then, the mortality rate from crimes isn’t nearly as high as some of the other places Dean has squatted at in his many years.

Once upon a time El Diablo had gotten its fair share of bar fights and drug dealings, police constantly busting into the place, but Dean and Jimmy had taken care of that once and for all. The bar – though pretty much still a dive, was a place where many now called home. Hell, Dean's pretty sure Jimmy actually lived there. The guy never seemed to leave. Speaking of…

Dean crosses over the empty streets and jogs a few paces down a short alley, swinging the corner to where El Diablo sits nestled in beside a tobacco shop. Sure enough a dim light is shining through the glass window of the door somewhere deep in the bar. Most likely the kitchen. Shaking his head with a chuckle he fishes around in his pockets for his keys. He calls out his arrival as he enters, locking up behind him. He hear's Jimmy grunt out in reply from the kitchens. Frowning Dean walks across the floor and behind the bar, pushing open the swing door and finding Jimmy at the grill making… is that a grilled cheese sandwich?

Dean glances at the clock on the wall. “Jimmy, what the hell are you doing cooking at three AM?”

Jimmy swings his head over his shoulder to give Dean a faint chuckle, his old face withered with lines from both time and what Dean knows to be stress from his younger years. “A man can’t want a grilled cheese at three in the morning? What about you? What the hell you even doing here? I gave you those keys for emergencies, you know?” He bites out gruffly.

Dean can’t help but smile. When he had first met Jimmy the man had reminded him so much of Bobby that it was impossible for him not to instantly like him. Dean pulls a chair out from the small, scuffed up table and sits, crossing his arms over his chest. “Yeah, well I call raiding your stash a pretty good emergency.”

The older man looks him up and down. “Rough night? Cause I could of swore you just got laid.”

Dean rubs the sore hickies on his neck. “Yeah… she likes to leave her mark.”

“Hope you and Kate know what you’re doing.” At Dean's wide eyed fish out of water look, Jimmy laughs and shakes his head. "Kid, I may be old, but I'm not blind.”. He grabs a few beers out of the fridge and sits them at the table, popping the top of one and taking a swig.
Dean opens his beer and takes a nervous drink, eyes on the table. “Look. The whole thing was my idea. If you fire anyone, make it me.”

“Why would I do that?”

Dean glances up at Jimmy eating his grilled cheese like he doesn't have a care in the world. “You don’t care?”

“You’re a grown man. You're capable of making your own choices, just like Kate is. If things go South between you two, I just expect you to keep it professional while you’re working. I’m not putting up with any lover’s quarrels here.”

Dean is shaking his head before Jimmy even finishes the sentence. “It’s not like that, man. We’re just having fun.”

Jimmy gives him a dry stare.

“I’m serious! Look, you won’t have any trouble, alright? We both know what we want, and it’s not going to cause you any grief.”

Jimmy wipes his hands off on his shirt before sitting back in the chair and watching Dean over the tip of his beer. “So, if you just got laid, why you’re panties all in a bunch?”


“Obviously.” Jimmy stands to toss his empty beer bottle in the trash before grabbing another off the table. Instead of sitting though he chooses to lean against the sink, watching Dean with eyes that are far too knowing.

Dean shifts in his seat, always uncomfortable being under someone’s radar.
“I remember when you first stumbled in through those doors. Even though you tried to make it look otherwise, you were a mess, kid. I could see it clear as day.”

“I don’t know what you mean.”

“Mm-hmm. Kid, I’ve seen my fair share of shit. I’ve been to war, and I know a fellow soldier when I see one. And I see that in you. You’ve got this look that makes me think you’ve seen some shit as well. That you’re still seeing it, maybe.” Jimmy shrugs. “I figured you had served some time. You got the mannerisms, you know? It’s the way you watch people. How you scan a room when you enter it. Not a lot of people notice that kind of stuff, but I do.” Jimmy tilts his head slightly, his eyes narrowing. “You’ve been off lately, distracted. Hell, just the other day you zoned out for a full damn minute.” When Dean opens his mouth to argue Jimmy holds up a hand to cut him off. “Don’t play stupid with me, boy. I know what I’m talking about.” For the first time his expression shifts from gruff to worried. “Are you in trouble? Do you need-“

“Whoa, whoa, man. Just… just calm down.” Dean pushes away from the table with a sigh. “I’m fine, Jimmy. Seriously.” He makes sure to leave no room for argument, his voice firm.

The room is silent, both men staring at each other, drawing one another up. Jimmy finally gives a soft sigh and shrugs his shoulders. “Alright. If you say so.”

Dean nods. “Yeah, well I do. So…” He tosses his beer bottle in the trash and cast's another look at the clock on the wall. “Alright. It’s pretty late; I’m going to head on home. I’ll see you tomorrow, Jimmy.” He makes it to the door before Jimmy calls his name. Resisting the urge to give a tired sigh Dean turns his head slightly, not quite looking over his shoulder.

“If you ever need any help – or hell, just someone to talk to, door’s always open. You got me? People… we aren’t supposed to do this thing alone, Dean. Sometimes you need someone. Doesn’t make you weak.”

Dean swallows hard. His hands clench into tight fists as Jimmy’s words run in mocking replay within his mind.

The only acknowledgement he gives is a silent nod before leaving.

******
Two years ago when Dean had given up hunting, he had never expected to live an apple pie life. He knows that leaving the life doesn’t mean never coming across something big and bad ever again. Monsters are everywhere. The fact that so many of them know who he is doesn’t help either. Since coming to Seattle, Dean's found himself rolling with a few vampires, demon’s here and there, and even toasting the bones of a ghost that had been haunting his apartment. For a hunter, leaving the life doesn’t necessarily mean leaving the life – it just means not actively seeking it out. You never really stop being a hunter. You never stop looking over your shoulder, waiting for the next attack. Dean doesn’t leave his apartment without his bowing knife strapped to his leg, and most days it takes everything he has to not tuck his gun in the back of his waistband. He's still got a full arsenal in the trunk of the Impala, and he makes sure every damn day that the sigils there are in place and undamaged.

That isn’t to say that he hasn't made mistakes. There's a few times when walking down a dark alley he’s jumped a poor joker for thinking their a monster. Each time Dean's made sure to apologize before making a swift exit, and as embarrassing as it is lately the things that go bump in the night turn out being the drunken straggler making their way home.

Which was why he doesn’t pay much mind to the sound of feet falling into place behind him in the alleyway.

Tucking his hands into his coat pockets Dean tries to shake off the chill of the mid November air, his thoughts preoccupied by everything that Jimmy had said to him back at the bar. The old man is kooky, no doubt about it, but at times he has this almost uncanny perception that makes Dean paranoid. There's also something strangely familiar about him. When they had first met Dean had racked his brain trying to find out what it was. There's just something about the name Jimmy that rings distant bells in the back of his mind.

After their conversation Dean feel's off his game – so off his game, in fact, that he's caught completely off guard when an arm snakes it's way around his waist and another his neck.

For a split second panic overwhelms him, but then years of muscle memory takes over and Dean slams his head back into his attacker’s nose with as much force as he can muster. There's a grunt and his attackers hold lets up immediately, giving Dean the room to twist slightly sideways and then nail the guy hard again in the face with his elbow.

He's going for his knife in his boot as he turns, and has just gotten his grip on the handle when a boot slams into his cheek.

He grunts and goes down hard, his skull hitting the concrete and inducing a sharp flare of pain that
has his vision swimming. He blinks, trying to see with bleary eyes. His knife is in his hand, and he tightens his fist around it only for a boot to stomp on his wrist, and Dean cries out as he feels fragile bones crack.

“Well, lookie what I got here.” The man standing over him draws out with a slow, predatory grin. “If it ain’t Dean Winchester.”

Dean grunts in fury, his lips twisting.

“Son of a bitch broke my nose!” Another voice spit out.

The one over him twists to glare over his back. “It will heal!”

Dean glances sideways and see's another guy bent over and clutching a bloody nose. His eyes are narrowed and filled with anger; and they're glowing yellow. A laugh suddenly bubbles up from Dean's lips.

The man standing over him tilts his head with an angry scowl. “Something funny here?”

Dean snorts and falls back slightly, catching sight of the full moon hanging overhead.

_I see the bad moon arising…_  

He can’t help it; more laughter spills out. It's just too fucking funny.

The werewolf above him kicks him swiftly in the head, and Dean see's stars.

“He’s gone crazy.” The one with the bloody nose says, like he can't believe what he's seeing.

“Doesn’t matter. He’s going to be dead soon, anyway.”
His vision is still swimming, and both his head and wrist felt like hell fire, but Dean forces the confusion and pain aside. He rolls over to his side swiftly and embeds the knife that he somehow managed to keep a grip on deep in the werewolf’s calf. His wrist screams in protest, but he ignores it, quickly shuffling to his feet as the werewolf goes down screaming. Dean is raising the knife again to bury it in the monster’s neck when the other plows into him from the side. His head slams into the brick wall of the building behind him, and suddenly he has a face full of snarling, snapping fangs. He cringes and draws as far back as he can, his arms crossed over the werewolf’s chest to keep his face from becoming kibble.

“Kill him!”

The werewolf snapping at his face steadily draws closer, and Dean isn’t sure how much longer he could hold him off. In all honesty, this is the time when Sam usually comes running to the rescue. But Sam isn’t here. He's alone and his arms are beginning to shake, the strain too much. He can feel hot, foul breath on his cheek. He closes his eyes… and hears whispers.

Opening his eyes he vaguely notices the street light above him flickering in and out. He stares up at it mesmerized, and once again something tickles at his memory.

The wolf at his front shoves in hard, snapping his attention back to the present, and Dean's eyes go wide at the sight of a dark haired man with narrowed eyes standing directly behind them. Before he even has time to process where the guy could have come from, or if he's friend or foe, the man pulls a strange looking sleek blade from his black trench and raises it high. Dean stiffens, but the blade doesn't come near him, instead plunging deep into the werewolf's back. The monster's eyes jerk wide and it's mouth falls open with a silent cry, and then it just crumbles to the ground.

Dean slumps against the wall, weak and dizzy, and watches with wide eyes as the strange man turns his full attention to Dean. Dean sucks in a sharp inhale. He's never seen eyes that blue...

Movement over the guy's shoulder draws Dean's eyes away, and he's opening his mouth to shout out a warning when the dark haired man swings around and blocks the werewolf's attack. Dean falls to his knees immediately, scouring the ground for his knife. When he finally finds it he holds it in his good hand and stumbles to his feet, wide eyes taking in the battle. He gets a good look at the guy, his eyes assessing over dark pants and a black trench, unbuttoned over a black suit jacket and even a black tie. He'll laugh about the outfit later, when he's not in danger of becoming kibble.

The guy's fast, faster than any human or creature that Dean had ever seen. He watches the two trade blow for blow, and is about to jump in when the man in black does a fancy type of twist around the werewolf, and then that strange blade is plunged deep within it's back. Dean see's the point of it slide out from the things chest before it's quickly withdrawn. The monster drops like a bag of bricks.
Blue eyes lift to meet his and Dean knows without a doubt that whoever this guys is, he isn't human. He doesn't care that he's just saved his ass from being minced meat, doesn't care that what he most likely should be doing is finding out who he is, and what he wants. All he knows is suddenly he's terrified. His blood feels freezing in his veins, and his heart hurts from pounding so frantically. Fight or flight instinct snaps to life, and with a cry Dean rushes forward and slams the blade of his knife deep into the man's chest.

Nothing happens.

Dean’s eyes shoot wide and he stares up into an electric blue gaze narrowed on his face. He jerks back with a gasp, looking back at the blade still buried to the hilt in the man’s chest. “What… how-“

The man doesn’t once break eye contact, even as he lifts his hand to slowly pull Dean’s knife from his body and lets it drop with a clatter to the ground. His head lowers as he begins to walk forward, and Dean's reminded of an animal going in for the kill.

It's been a long time since he's felt fear. Actual fear. His body acts on instinct, his feet shuffling backward and his breath coming out in gasps of fog around his face. “Hey! Just – hold it right there!” The man doesn’t even blink as he continues to advance. Dean feels his back hit brick and he jolts. His eyes dart over the ground, looking for anything he can use as a weapon. The man's almost on him now, and in a last, vain attempt at protecting himself Dean shoves his hand out. “Stop!”

Shockingly enough, it works.

The man pauses, now only a mere two feet away. His eyes dart over Dean’s face, his lips drawing down slightly and his head tilting.

Dean sucks in sharp, bitingly cold breaths, for the first time noticing that there's a strange sort of… light coming off of the guy. It's faint, almost too faint to notice, but if he tries hard enough he can just make it out. It's a sort of glow that seems to be coming from inside of the guy. “Who… what are you?”

Something flickers across the man’s face, something that strangely enough resembled pain, but its was gone almost as quickly as it had appeared.

All it takes is a single blink, and suddenly the man is directly in front of Dean. He gasps and lift's his
good hand to block against any attack. A steel like grip closes around his wrist and his arm is pushed against the wall. Dean hisses and grabs feebly with his broken wrist at the man’s arm, trying to break his hold. Out of the corner of his eye he see's the man lift his other hand. Dean stiffens, his body readying for an attack, but all he feels is a slight touch to his temple, and then everything goes black.
Can't Always Get What You Want

Chapter Summary

Dean wakes up in his apartment, left to wonder if the events hours before were all just a dream. A call from Sam set's an old life into motion once again.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Dean jerks awake and immediately searches for his knife. There's a deep sense of lethargy within him, making his limbs heavy and his motions stunted and slow. After years of training his mind and body to sleep lightly in case of a threat, he feels disorientated and confused with the urge to even now just close his eyes and return to the darkness that had just before had hold of him.

When he finally gets a bit of his bearings back, he realizes that he's no longer in the alley, but in his own bed. His confusion increases, and he struggles with the idea that everything that happened back in the alley was only some vivid, drunken dream. His feet hit the floor and he frowns down at the old wood a long moment before standing and making his way to the bathroom. He's still in the clothes he wore yesterday, which is odd in itself seeing as he usually slept in his briefs and a tee shirt. When he sees his reflection in the mirror, he finds his face isn’t bruised or covered with dried blood. There's not a blemish. Dean glances down to his hand and curiously turns it this way and that, but there's no pain.

He lets out a huff of breath and shakes his head, rubbing his temples because nothing makes sense and he can't even begin to wrap his head around what the hell really happened. Was it all a dream? And if so, where did the dream even start? Had he even gone to the bar after Kate’s?

Suddenly intense blue eyes fill Dean’s mind, and he swallows hard, glancing around the bathroom even though he’s alone. It had been a dream. Had to have been. There was no way possible eyes that blue could be real.

But now the fact that Dean had dreamed up some mysterious blue eyed man to rescue him like he's some damned damsel is vividly clear, and he scowls even as his face heats slightly. Wanting to wash the booze and dream away, Dean turns on his shower and is pulling his coat from his shoulders when his cell begins to obnoxiously blare in the small, quiet space so loudly that he jolts. Cursing Dean digs in his pocket for it, only to stare down at the screen with wide eyes. The phone continues to ring, and Dean quickly swipes at the green bar.

For a few seconds he can’t say anything. It's like he's lost all ability to speak. The line is just as quiet,
and Dean suddenly feels incredibly awkward just standing there with the phone to his ear.

“Dean?”

The one word is like a punch to his gut. He tries to speak, but his throat's dryer than the Sahara. He clears it and tries again. “Sam?”

Silence again.

Dean pulls the phone away from his ear and looks at the screen, thinking maybe he had accidentally hung up, but the call's still connected and he hurriedly jerks it back to his head worried that Sam would hang up. “Hey.” He says, his voice more strong. “Sammy, you there?”

Sam sighs softly on the phone, and for some reason Dean has a vivid image of him sinking heavily down to sit on the edge of his bed in the bunker, one hand rising to rub at his forehead.

“Uh, yeah, Dean. I’m still here.”

Dean licks his lips, bobbing his head slightly. He feels claustrophobic in the small bathroom, and not bothering to turn off the shower first he heads down the hall to his pathetic excuse of a living room. A strange sense of self-consciousness comes over him, and without knowing why his eyes move to stare at an empty spot at the corner of the room. They linger there as he gives a laugh that’s far shakier than he’d like. “Okay. Yeah, well, how’s it going man?” Jesus it sounds so normal, like they did this every day. Like it hadn’t been two years since the last time they had actually spoken.

“It’s good, you know? I mean…” Sam pauses on the line, a soft sigh drifting over the wire and directly into Dean’s ear, and it’s almost like they’re in the room together. “Actually, Dean, things aren’t good. They’re pretty bad.”

He jerks his eyes away from the corner, drawing a little straighter as every protective instinct he has simmers under his skin. “Sammy, what’s wrong? You in trouble?”

Sam lets out a slightly bitter laugh over the phone, and Dean’s frown deepens. “Actually… it’s more like we’re all in trouble.”
“What does that mean?”

“Dean it’s happening again.” A long, drawn out pause, and when Sam speaks again his voice is soft, so soft that Dean almost doesn’t hear. “The apocalypse, Dean. It’s happening again.”

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He owes it to him. That’s the only reason Dean stops by the bar. Its still pretty early in the day, not even five yet, but there are a few cars in the small lot out back – the regular old drunkards that call El Diablo as much a home as Jimmy does. Dean parks the Impala and heads to the back entrance, stuffing his hands in his pockets and trying to ease the unsteady twisting of his stomach.

He’s never done this before. Had never really cared enough to do this before. But things are different here, and as unchanging as Dean may seem, he’s different. These past two years, well – maybe only the past year, he had allowed himself to actually grow attachments. To make friends and form relationships with people; even if they are far more stunted and vulnerable than normal.

In a strange way Dean feels like he owes some type of explanation to everyone – especially Jimmy. As closed off as Dean can be, Jimmy had put it out there early on that he was always there if needed, no matter for what reason. Dean respects that.

As he enters the few regulars at the bar glance up and give silent nods in greeting. Dean grins in return, but his smile falls when he spots Kate wiping down the bar top. In all honestly he hasn’t even thought about what to say to her, or if he even should. What they have isn’t exactly normal. Turns out he doesn’t have time to think about it, though, cause Kate glances up and sees him, her lips pulling to one side. Dean gives a strained grin in return, clearing his throat and moving to the bar.

“What’re you doing here? Thought your shift wasn’t until tonight.” Kate’s already popping the top off of a beer and sliding it over to him.

Dean take it appreciatively and tips it back for a long drag, hoping that in the short span he’ll have enough time to come up with something good to say; something that will leave things smooth between them. Some magical word that will take away all the curiosity and awkwardness that comes with him leaving. By the time the bottom of the bottle taps softly against the bar though, he’s still just as lost. “I need to talk to Jimmy about something.”
Kate frowns, her eyes questioning. “He’s in the office. Everything good?”

“Yeah, just… some stuff I need to go over with him.” He clears his throat and slaps a hand on the table. “Well.” Clicking his tongue against the roof of his mouth he gives Kate a finger gun before better judgment can stop him, and tries not to be too embarrassed when she arches a brow at him. “Later.” Twisting on his feet Dean scurries around the bar and down the short hallway to where the office is, having to battle with the urge to slam his face against the wall. He waits for Jimmy to give the A-Okay before opening the door.

Jimmy is sitting at his desk, bent over in his old, ratty rolling chair and peering down at some papers. When Dean enters he glances up and frowns. “Dean, what are you doing here?” He looks at the watch on his wrist. “Your shift isn’t for another three hours.”

“Yeah, about that…”

Jimmy frowns and sits a little straighter, his eyes traveling over Dean with more scrutiny. “You’re splitting town.”

Dean's head jerks up in surprise. “Wh – how the hell did you know?”

Jimmy rests his elbows on the table. “I’ve done it enough times to know what it looks like. So, suppose you won’t tell me why you’re leaving? Or where you’re going?”

“I just got to be somewhere, Jimmy.”

“Now, see, if that’s true, I’m okay with it. I can live with that. Just as long as it’s ‘got to be somewhere’ and not ‘got to run somewhere’, cause I told you once, Dean, and I meant it, you got trouble and I’ll-”

“No, look it’s nothing like that. Honestly, okay?” Dean tries to convey with his eyes that he isn’t, for once, running from something. Apparently it works, because Jimmy gives a slow nod. “It’s a family thing, you know? My brother needs me. Needs my help.”

“Brother? Hell, boy, I didn’t know you had family. You’ve never said anything.”
Dean tries to pass it off like it isn’t that big of a deal. “Yeah, well. My brother, he’s… kind of all I got in the way of family, you know? So he needs me, and I’ve got to go.”

Jimmy nods again. “Okay. I can understand that. Family is important, I’ll agree. But… you said you’ve ‘got to go’. Not exactly the same thing as wanting to go, if you catch my drift.”

Something cold and hard coils in Dean’s belly, and suddenly he’s frozen. He opens his mouth, ready to deny Jimmy’s words, but all that comes out is a choked, cut off sound, broken and weak.

A touch of sadness enters Jimmy’s eyes, and Dean hates it. The last thing he wants is for anyone to pity him. “Look, this ain’t exactly rocket science, okay? Point is I’m leaving. This is me giving you my notice.” The words are bit out and more harsh than most likely needed, but Dean’s feeling defensive.

Jimmy holds up his hands, the universal gesture of harmlessness. “Hey, I said I get it, and I do. I just want to make sure that you’re not doing anything you’re gonna regret.”

Dean can’t help but let out a bitter laugh. If Jimmy really knew why he was leaving, he’d think differently. But he couldn’t exactly say that, could he? “You know, the funny thing is, I’ve pretty much realized that no matter what I do, in the end I’m gonna regret something anyways. So, what the hell, right?”

For one frightening moment he’s afraid that he has said too much. Let slip the big secret; the fact that he’s as broken and twisted inside as everyone imagines. He tenses, working up a way to laugh it off, pretend like its nothing, but Jimmy’s already standing from the desk, the rolling chair squeaking loudly as its pushed backwards. Dean draw straighter, practically staring down his nose as he watches Jimmy walk around the desk and stop before him. He internally freaks a minute, not knowing if Jimmy’s gonna try and hug him, or make him talk about his feelings. The old man surprises him, though, when he instead holds out his hand. Dean stares down at it a moment, like he had no idea what to do. When his brain finally gets back on board he clears his throat and claps his hand with Jimmy’s for a firm shake.

“It’s been a pleasure having you, Dean Winchester.”

Dean smiles weakly, nodding his head. “Thanks. Been fun, Jimmy.” Hell. He hates goodbyes. Always had. He was never any good at them. Before things get any more chick-flick Dean gives one final nod and then pulls away, heading for the door.
“I’m just gonna say one more thing before you leave. And I know you don’t wanna hear it, but I’m gonna do it anyways.”

Dean closes his eyes and drops his head a bit. Of course. “Oh yeah?” He looks back at Jimmy with a grin. “And what is that?”

Jimmy regards him with a soft smile. “Life’s a funny thing, son, and despite what some people try to make you believe, everyone in this world is running around without a damn clue. Hell, sometimes I feel like even God don’t know left from right.” He laughs, shaking his head. “I know I sure as hell don’t. But that’s okay, because you’re not alone in that confusion. There’s always someone there, Dean. Even if it’s only one person, there’s always someone there.”

His words fill the silence of the room and bounce around his skull, and in that instant Dean is sure that even if parts of last night had been a dream, his talk with Jimmy hadn’t been. A part of him wants to linger, to put off the inevitable as long as possible, but he know it isn’t wise. So he just gives a hum of acknowledgement and walks out of the door.

Kate stops him as he's walking out of the back entrance with a hand to his shoulder.

“You in your own little world there or something? I was calling your name.”

Dean looks her up and down before putting on a smile, shaking his head. “Sorry. Lost in thought.”

“Mmh. You actually think? I was never aware of this before.” She teases.

The smile that spreads across his lips is more real than the last. Damn. He really is gonna miss Kate. She has some sass to her that he could totally appreciate.

“So… why do I got the feeling that you’re little talk with Jimmy was more than you’re letting on?”

“Can’t fool you, huh?” He decides to make it as quick and painless as possible. “I’m leaving town.”
Kate’s surprised, her brows rising towards her hairline. “You’re not coming back, are you?”

Dean doesn’t say anything. He doesn’t need to.

She nods. “I knew something was up. I just figured you had met someone.”

“Say what, now?”

“Dean, you haven’t really looked at me in months. You’ve been distracted. I’ve been through this a few times. I just figured you’d met someone you actually cared about.”

Dean suddenly feels like he’s treading on very dangerous territory. He fumbles out some incoherent mumbles, feeling like he’s teetering over thin ice.

Kate laughs, her head falling back slightly. “Calm down, I’m not trying to set you up,” She shrugs. “I like what we had. I know it wasn’t anything more than fucking, and I’m okay with that.”

Dean shakes his head with a soft laugh. “You’re one of a kind, you know that?”

The smile that curves Kate’s lips is slow and seductive. “You remember that when all alone and lonely, yeah?”

He snorts, his grin stretching. “Believe me, I will.”

They stand there a moment, smiling at one another in a sort of silent acknowledgment. Kate finally steps forward and wraps her arms around Dean’s shoulders, drawing him in for a tight hug. “I’m going to miss you, though.”

“Yeah. I’ll miss you, too.” He draws out gruffly, hugging her briefly before pulling away.

“Now I’m going to need you to take care of yourself, alright?”
Dean chuckles, giving a little salute. “It’s been a pleasure.”

Kate grins. “I don't know why, but I got the strangest feeling that I should say ‘good luck’ right now.”

Dean swallows, his grin slipping a bit. “Yeah, I’ll probably need it.”

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Later, as radio mocks him with the knowledge that you ‘can’t always get what you want’, he maneuvers the Impala onto the Freeway and moves an old, well-worn road map from his dashboard to the passenger seat.

It isn’t until he’s crossed the Oregon state line that Dean realizes he had never actually told Jimmy his real last name.

It eats at him all the way into Idaho, where he finally stops to check into a hotel.

Chapter End Notes
Let me know how you guys found this chapter! Kudos & Comments are always welcome <3
Here I Come, But I Ain't The Same

Chapter Summary

Dean has a memory within a dream... yeah that happens.

He & Sam reunite.

Chapter Notes

Kudos & Comments always welcome :)

Even though his eyes are closed, he knows where he. There's a hot rush of wind against his face and pressing against his clothes. He curls his toes in his boots, and feel the give of nothing but air under them. Everything's the same, and yet somehow Dean's aware of something so completely different than the other times he's found himself in the dream.

The hairs at the back of his neck and arms stand on edge, and his senses coil and quiver around his body like living limbs, reaching out and seeking a presence that he can feel directly behind him. It's a strange sensation, a sort of warm vibration that thrills and alarms him all at once, and for a moment Dean plays with the idea that if he were to open his eyes he would see some foreign thing softly pulsing from himself. But he keeps them shut, because he isn't ready to look. Not yet, at least.

As a particularly strong gust of wind pushes against him, Dean’s thoughts shift to something more familiar. Something that he can acknowledge without fear or confusion. Logically, the thought of stepping off of a building that's at least six hundred feet high should be daunting. Hell, it should be downright terrifying. But it isn’t. It's thrilling and strangely simple. More simple than anything in Dean’s life so far.

Once upon a time, before he and Sam had their last falling out, Dean can remember a night they had spent in Boston working a case. It had been a long night, filled with fighting and bloodshed, and they had crawled back to their motel room beaten and bruised, Dean falling immediately into bed after a hot shower to ease his aching bones. He had woken up during the middle of the night to find Sam sitting up in his bed, laptop on his knees and face scrunched as he read in the dark.

“What the hell are you doing?” Dean had said in a gruff, sleep heavy voice. “I swear to God, Sammy, if you’re watching porn while I’m sleeping next to you, I’ll –“
“I’m not watching porn, Dean.” Sam’s sigh had been deep and filled with slight irritation, and he hadn’t even lifted his eyes from the blaring white screen to scowl at Dean.

“Okay. So what are you doing then?”

“Research.”

Dean had just stared at him, unblinking. Because what the hell? “What time is it?”

Sam had glanced down towards the bottom of the screen. He cleared his throat before answering. “Three-thirty.”

“Sammy what the hell?” Dean had angrily rose to sit against the headboard, glaring with confused frustration at his brother. “So what, you just given up on sleep, or something? What is this?”

“No, Dean. I haven’t given up on sleeping. I just can’t sleep.”

That? Now that was something that Dean could understand. Hell it came with the freaking territory. Suddenly feeling not so aggravated Dean had straightened even more, sitting there with his hands in his lap and staring into the darkness. The silence wasn’t uncomfortable. Dean supposed he could say something. Could ask if Sam wanted to talk about it, but he knew the answer already. Or at least he knew how he would have felt; and while it was true that he and Sammy were as different as night and day in some cases, Dean had a feeling this was not one of them. So he didn’t say anything for a long while. Just sat there, hoping that was support enough in itself.

In all honestly he lasted a good five minutes before the urge to speak was finally an itch too annoying to ignore. “So what are you researching?”

Silence was all he was met with a few moments before Sam cleared his throat. "L’appel du vide."
Dean’s bitch face had always come so naturally when around Sam. “*Am I supposed to actually know what that is?*”

The corners of Sam’s lips had risen, and Dean resisted the urge to stomp out of bed and slap him upside the head. Besides, he honestly didn’t have the energy. He was exhausted.

“*It’s French.*” Sam offered before clearing his throat, a sure sign that he was about to go into something most likely long and super boring.

Dean had questioned his decision to be awake.

“You know that feeling you get when you’re standing in high places? The one where you can’t help but wonder what it would be like to just… jump?”

Jesus if Sam spouted out anymore nonsense Dean was going to just say fuck it all and roll over. Pull the covers over his head and pretend this moment never happened. “*No, Sammy. Can’t say I ever have.*”

Sam had glanced over at him with a face that had clear ‘bullshit’ written on it, and Dean rolled his eyes and grumbled, scooting a little further back into the bed. Okay. Fine. So he’d found himself maybe once or twice wanting to do insanely stupid things just to see how they would span out. Sue him. Apparently his face gave him away, cause Sam turned back to the laptop with a smug grin.

“*Anyway. The French came up with a name for it. L’appel du vide. It means ‘call of the void’.***”

*Call of the void.*

Neither of them had spoken again, and after a moment Sam shut the laptop, darkness filling the room. Dean had laid back down and rolled over to his side until his back was to Sam.

*Neither of them had actually slept.*
The memory fades from Dean like the breeze drifting across his body and over his shoulders. Was this L’appeal du vide then? For some reason that Dean had never fully questioned, that night had always stuck with him, but he thinks he knows why, now.

So often in his life, hell, in Sammy’s too, they've felt a certain darkness clinging; whispering to just give in.

A call of the void.

He finally opens his eyes and squints against the wind. The sight before him is no different than what he’d already expected, and yet it’s still… not quite the same. It's like he's looking through glass. Like there’s a sheen over the world that's never really been there before. Or at least that he’s noticed.

Pale golden light blurs at every edge of his vision, but he ignore's that; again something whispering 'not ready' at the back of his mind.

The presence at his back is stronger now, somehow more solid. Physical. Dean struggles with the idea of leaning backwards, imagining strong arms wrapping around his waist and hot breath ghosting against his neck. He doesn’t know how he know's, but whoever – or whatever, is behind him, want's him to step away from the ledge. To come back down to safety. But Dean's tired of feeling safe. He’s tired of just existing without the thrill of actually living.

He steps off of the ledge.

Once again his dream proves to be unlike the rest as his name is frantically gasped out in a voice deep and strangely familiar. He’s able to twist his head around just in time to see a black trench billowing in the wind, deep blue eyes wide, and a hand stretched outwards.

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Dean jolts awake with a gasp, sucking air into starved lungs. His body is covered by a fine sheen of sweat, but it's a cold sweat, the kind that leaves him feeling clammy and uncomfortable. He takes a moment to get his bearings, taking in the familiar hotel room that he had stopped at last night. After a glance at the alarm clock on the bedside table Dean groans, realizing that he's only gotten three hours of sleep. A part of him wants to roll over and throw the covers over his head, but experience tells him it'd be pointless, so instead he tosses the covers off and pads on bare feet to the small bathroom. He strips out of his sweat soaked clothes, and steps under a cold shower, hissing at the first touch of water on his sensitive skin.

He washes quickly, lathering soap within his hands and scrubbing at his skin. There seems to be a certain humming there, just under the surface, and it makes Dean feel twitchy and uncomfortable. It's the sort of feeling he sometimes gets just before a vision hits him, or when he's fighting a monster and a random burst of something surges through him, allowing him to somehow move more quickly on his feet, to hit with more force than before. When the water's washed all trace of soapy trails from his body Dean shuts off the spray with short, frustrated movements. He's reaching for the handle of the shower door when he once again felt the hairs on the back of his neck rise up, and a cold chill shoots down his spine. His dream comes back to him and he freezes, his hand still reaching outwards.

The shower door is covered with a slight frosting, but not so much that he can’t actually see within the bathroom. Looking out though he sees nothing. Clenching his jaw Dean pushes the shower door open with more force than necessary and jerks a towel from the hanger on the wall. He ignores the sensation of eyes on him as he angrily wraps the towel around his waist, telling himself that it’s a normal process; that it’s not like he really needs to dry himself off anyways. He starts for the door but slows, and then stops altogether because there’s this idiot voice in the back of his head telling him that there’s someone standing there in the way. That just a few steps more and he’ll run into them. It’s frustrating.

In the beginning, Dean had thought he was being haunted. When he discovered that his apartment back in Seattle actually was haunted, it had just seemed natural to assume that’s what the sensation of being watched constantly had been. But he had taken care of the ghost, and the presence had never left.

In all honesty he doesn’t know what the hell to think anymore. He's set traps, salted the place like no tomorrow, and yet nothing had worked. Sometimes he wonders if he's finally lost it; one too many hits to the head.

Well, it isn’t like he hadn’t expected it to happen at some point or another.

Setting his jaw Dean heads for the door, and not once does he feel a cold spot or shift in the air.
Of course.

He checks out within the hour.

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Dean stops once more in Cheyenne, Wyoming, gets a solid six hours before hitting the road again, and as weary as he had been when he started the road trip, he finds himself slowly sliding into a sense of normalcy. It’s familiar, after all. The sense of falling back into an old routine is both frightening and thrilling, and with the soft purr of Baby around him, and some good tunes filling his ears, Dean almost feels like he never stopped doing this. Like he never said goodbye to Sam two years ago after they had somehow beat the most colossal bad the world had ever seen.

It feels good.

When he crosses the Kansas border, though, his stomach starts to knot.

He stops at a gas station in Phillipsburg, about forty minutes away from the bunker, and tells himself it’s because the Impala needs gas, despite still having half a tank. When he’s filled her up he figures he might as well stretch his legs a bit, ease some of the stiffness from the road.

The Gasp ‘n Sip is old, familiar territory, but still Dean takes his time going through each and every one of the aisles – despite there not being very many. For old time’s sake he grabs an Asian skin mag and fills up his basket with jerky and a six pack of beer, and then decides to toss in a slightly alarming amount of junk food. The guy at the counter arches a brow but doesn’t say anything, and Dean swipes his card, pays, and then heads back out.

It’s midday, and the weather is a bit warmer than Seattle, and Dean can’t resist the urge to just sit on the hood of Baby and take a moment to relax. He cracks open a beer and starts to drink, realizing that he’ll have to hang out a bit longer. He can't drink and drive after all.

He glances at his phone every so often, his heart speeding up as he takes his first look, and then returning to normal again when he sees that there’s no new notifications waiting. He’s not an idiot. He knows he’s stalling. It’s just…it’s been so long, and he and Sam hadn’t exactly parted on the
best of terms. Despite trying to convince himself otherwise, low key guilt has always sat deep in
Dean’s belly, and over the past two days that guilt has started to climb back to surface, making him
on edge and shifty.

He honestly has no idea what to expect.

There's a reason he and Sam haven't spoken in two years. Yeah, a lot of it has to do with them both
being hardheaded jackasses, but Dean knows that Sam feels like Dean betrayed him.

When the sun begin to hang low on the horizon and the sky to shift to a darker blue gray, Dean
finally hits the road again. By the time he's parking the car outside of the bunker, his hands are
shaking so much he has to dig his nails into his palms.

His legs feel like dead weight as he slings his duffle over his shoulder and treads across the damp
grass towards the stairs leading down to the thick steel door, and with each step he swears the grass
squishes out a whisper that mocks hypocrite. And he is, isn’t he? How many times has he given Sam
hell for leaving? Hell for even thinking about leaving. How many times has he laid the guilt on as
heavy as possible because he's such a damned coward, afraid of being alone.

How the hell is he supposed to look at Sam again?

Two years is a long time. Were either of them even the same person anymore?

Suddenly the sound of a heavy lock being turned is like thunder in his ears. He freezes, his body
growing stiff and somehow seeming to pulse with nervous energy at the same time.

...And then there's Sam.

All the breath leaves Dean’s lungs. He can’t move. They stare at each other in heavy silence, neither
seeming to know the next move to make.

Sam swallows hard in front of him, and Dean feels tension surge through him like electricity. “Hey.”

Sam’s voice is rough, quiet, filled with all the raw emotion that Dean feels. So many things are

He isn’t sure which one of them move first; hell maybe they meet in the middle, but suddenly they're embracing roughly, hands clenching on jackets and jaws tightly closed.

It's predictable in the best way, and Dean finds himself grateful that despite whatever hell may be between them – whatever river of bad blood, they will always fall back to this.

Being brothers.
It's strange, being back in the bunker. Strange in the way of returning to a childhood home now occupied by other people, and finding out that nothing is the same.

But that doesn't really make sense, because the bunker is exactly the way Dean remembers it. For some reason he had expected it to be different, for Sam to have changed things... made it more of a home. But it isn't. Not really. It's still the same cleanly polished, slightly barren thing. No trace of anything personal to suggest that someone actually lives there.

It bothers him.

When Dean had left he knew Sammy would never stop hunting, but he'd secretly hoped that his brother would somewhat settle down. Hell, Dean had half expected a dog to be running around the place, but he's seeing nothing to suggest any part of Sam’s life had changed within the past two years.

It's frustrating in ways he doesn't even fully understand.

He stops outside a familiar door, his stomach twisting in a knot. For some reason he’s almost too scared to enter – and he’s not sure if it’s because he’s afraid that once he does, he’ll never leave again, or that it will be the complete opposite, that he’ll take one step in and realize he can’t do this after all. That he will abandon Sam – again, and run for the hills.

But Dean’s never been the type to dwell on things that scare him, so he pushes the door roughly open and stomps his way inside.

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It's like he had never left. Everything is exactly the same. Not an item out of place.
He drops his duffle near the door as he enters, mouth gone suddenly dry. Once upon a time this room had signified a part of his life that he thought he could never really have. Now? Dean isn’t sure what it meant to him anymore.

His fingers graze across the surface of a desk against the wall as he walks, dust lightly coloring the pads of his fingertips. He brushes it off on his pants leg as he stops in front of his bed. His eyes linger on the familiar cover and pillow resting there, neatly made and tucked in against the headboard. The shelving against the wall holds old, familiar items. Things that he had never bothered to take with him when he had left. He thoughtlessly reaches out and taps the wrought iron cover of the small fan, and then picks up a cross collecting dust. He twirls it in his hand a moment before brushing off the dust, and particles catch like glitter in the light. He sits it back down with a gentleness that even he knows is out of place.

He's been fighting gravity this whole time, but the pull is too strong now and Dean finally sinks down onto the edge of the bed. He stares blankly at the wall in front of him a long while before something begins to tingle at the back of his neck. A faint, familiar whisper breezes into his ears and Dean reaches out to strongly grasp the footboard of the bed, his knuckles bleeding white. Across from him the floor lamp begins to flicker, lights dancing against the wall, and Dean swallows thickly. The urge to look behind him is too hard to ignore, but when he does, he’s met with only empty space.

The soft knocking at the open door has his head swinging back around. Sam’s standing there, shifting awkwardly like he’s not sure if he should cross the threshold or not. Dean clear’s his throat and shifts on the bed, feeling awkward himself.

“So…” Sammy starts, his eyes flickering over the room as if he’s looking for something to talk about. They land on Dean’s duffle, and he nods his head at it, his brow quirked. “The rest of your stuff in the Impala?”

Dean scrubs a hand over his face and stands. “That’s it.”
A real frown catches Sam’s lips. “What? Dude… how can all your stuff fit into one duffle bag?”

“I dunno, Sammy. What can I say? I’m not a materialistic guy.”

Sam looks at him a long moment, his silence filled with more judgment than any words could express, and Dean almost forgot that look. He almost forgot how unsettling Sammy can be when he knew Dean was spouting bullshit. It's weird. To realize you had missed something you’d once hated.

“So. Two years.” Sammy points out, like it wasn’t obvious. “Two years, and all you have to show for it is one duffle bag?”

His words grate at every nerve ending in Dean’s body, and suddenly he’s mad. Furious. “What did you expect, Sammy? Did you think I would pull up in a U-Haul? Huh?”

“No, Dean. I just –“

“You just what?!“

“I just thought that if you wanted your own life so bad you would have at least made something of it!”

There it is. The fucking elephant in the room. The proverbial slap to his freaking face.

Hateful, condescending words swim through his mind. Words like pointless, and failure. Words that he just now realizes he'd already been whispering to himself these past two years, but in a voice so quiet that he hadn’t even heard. Or maybe he had. Maybe he had just ignored the reality of the situation. The fact that after every god damn thing – every minute of thinking he was free, all he had really been doing was denying a truth that he had known the moment he had set foot out of the bunker.

He's nothing without the life. Just a shell of a man searching for a hope that had never really existed in the first place.
“Boys, boys, boys. You’ve just seen each other and you’re already so close to ripping one another’s throats out.

Dean and Sam both twist around at the sudden appearance of a new person in the room, seemingly to have come out of nowhere. Dean gets a quick glimpse of a tall man with blonde hair in a douchy V-neck and blazer, and the next instant is swinging around to grab at the axe on the shelf. His body moves on autopilot, and he charges the intruder even as Sam yells out his name and slams an arm across his shoulders, halting his movements.

“Really, Dean? I have to say, I’m wounded.” The man says, his voice thick with a British accent and a certain level of smugness.

“What the hell Sam?!” Dean spits out, pushing at his brother.

“Calm down, he’s with us!” Sam pulls away slightly, though he keeps one hand on Dean’s shoulder like he expects Dean to rush forward at any moment.

Dean looks between Sam and the guy, his face twisted in pissed off confusion. “The dude just appeared out of thin air, Sammy!”

Sam’s head bounces with quick nods, and it would be comical under any other situation. “Yeah. Yeah, he kind of does that.”

Dean’s jerks away from Sam, his glare focused on the douche that’s just standing there with this shit eating grin on his face. “Explain. Now.”

Sam steps in front of him, blocking his view of the guy, and Dean panics for a moment; instincts telling him that he needs to be able to see the bastard in order to protect Sammy and himself.

“Dean, it’s alright, okay. Just – just let me explain.”

“Yeah, you do that. And why don’t you explain how the hell he just appeared out of nowhere, huh, Sammy? Cause I don’t know about you, but that seems like something monsters do, and last time I checked, we kill monsters.”
Behind them the blonde man rolls his eyes and turns, beginning to examine the room with obvious distaste. And it pisses Dean the hell off.

“He’s not a monster, okay? And he’s here to help. Actually, he came to me for help, Dean.”

“Help with what? And if he’s not a monster, mind telling me exactly how Hayden Christensen over there can come and go in the blink of a freaking eye?!”

Sam gives him a look, a sort of ‘really, Dean?’. “I’ll tell you everything, I just… I think you should sit down first.”

Dean at a loss of words a few seconds, sputtering at the idiocy of that sentence. “What?”

“Oh, for the love of…” The man glances up like he’s praying for patience before swinging around to the both of them. He holds out his hands, his head tilted to the side with a sort of half grin. “Hi. Balthazar. Angel. I don’t believe we’ve met.”

Dean just stands there, staring in stunned silence at the guy who’s actually got his hand stretched out, as if waiting for a shake. He still has a grin on his face, as if none of this is strange. As if the fact that he had just said he was an angel wasn’t the least bit unheard of. In front of him Sam let’s out a deep sigh and shuts his eyes, his shoulders slumping a bit. Dean once more looks between the two of them until his eyes finally rest on Sam. “You’re kidding me, right?”

Sam shakes his head. “Dude, just… sit down, okay?”

“Sit do- sit down? Sammy, some douche in a V-neck just told me he’s an angel, and you don’t seem all that surprised!”

Behind him the ‘angel’ looks down at his shirt with a slight frown.
“Look, I know this is a lot to take in, okay? Believe me, I get it. I was the same way in the beginning. But it’s true, Dean. He’s an angel. There are angels. And they kind of need our help, man.”

“You can’t tell me you honestly believe this bullcrap.” Dean sputters before a look of pure determination comes over his face. His shoulders draw back and his jaw clenches. “I don’t know what this… thing is, but it’s messing with your head somehow.” He glares over Sam’s shoulder at the man. “Which means I get to kill it.”

Sam can’t hold him back this time as Dean barrels though.

The monster doesn’t seem at all threatened as he shakes his head and mutters under his breath. “Am I really going to have to do this again?”

And then… light.

Dean stumbles to a halt, trying to shield his eyes against the piercing white glare suddenly filling the room. He vaguely hears the sound of bulbs bursting, and there’s an electric current lingering heavy in the air, making the hairs on his arms stand on edge. There’s a strange sort of humming, a vibration almost that sounds like white noise, and Dean looks over to Sam and finds that he’s got his hands clasped over his ears and is bending over as if in pain. The sound intensifies, and Dean jerks his head around to the monster, sucking in a sharp gasp when he finds an otherworldly glow seeming to come from under the guys skin. His eyes are two sockets of white as well, and suddenly Dean’s overcome with an almost overwhelming sense of… everything. It almost brings him to his knees it’s so intense. He feels both powerful and nearly nonexistent at the same time. A part of him screams to look away, that his eyes aren’t meant to take in something so brilliant; that he wasn’t good enough, but another part of him is desperate for more.

By the time the glow finally begins to fade and then vanish all together, Dean feels as though his heart is going to beat out of his chest. He stumbles backwards, his chest aching painfully and something surging just below his skin that has him breathless.

“What the hell was that?”

The man clasps his hands together. “Just an old trick we celestial beings use to entertain the monkeys. Good to know it still works.”
“Do you believe me now?!” Sam draws out in frustrated annoyance beside him, and Dean zeroes in on a trail of blood coming from his ears. Sam wipes at the sticky substance with a cringe. “Can we please not do that again?”

Balthazar takes in Sam's state with a sort of amusement almost, but when he looks at Dean his eyes narrow and study him with almost quizzical scrutiny.

Dean shifts uncomfortably, feeling like the last thing he wants is to be under the guy’s radar. “So it’s true? You’re actually – angels are real?”

Balthazar holds out his hands again, offering himself on display. “Hold your reverence, please. We have more pressing matters to attend to; the world being on the brink of an apocalypse, for instance. I’m sure you understand.”

Dean's having a very hard time understanding everything. More so the fact that angels seemed to be gigantic dicks. “No. I can’t believe it.” He shakes his head. “It’s not possible.”

Balthazar rolls his eyes. “Let me get this straight. You’ve fought demons and you’re honestly telling me that you’ve never stopped to wonder if the other end of the spectrum actually existed?”

“No!” Dean bites out. “Why the hell should I believe that anything good exists in this godforsaken world, because let me tell you I’ve never come across it, and ‘angel’ or not I highly doubt you are it.”

Sam glances sideways at him, his eyes soft. “It’s true, Dean.” He says. “This is the real deal. Balthazar is the real deal, and he needs us.” Dean looks like he’s about to object, and Sam shakes his head, cutting him off. “Look, I know this is hard to take in, but honestly - is it really that much crazier than anything else we’ve dealt with?”

Sadly enough, he can't deny it. The one thing he’d come to learn as a hunter was to keep an open mind. But still… this was as freaking open as it got.

So it's true then? Angels are real. But… did that mean that God was real?
That thought unnerves him on a level that Dean hadn’t fully been aware he has. Suddenly the room's too small, the walls around him closing in. A small, desperate part of him wants to just freak the hell out. To fall back onto the bed and crawl under the covers.

Hell. A part of him wants to leave the bunker altogether.

Sam apparently realizes this, and is in front of him in an instant, his eyes soft and pleading. “Dean, I can’t do this without you.”

Dean has aggressively pushed down insecurities of his own self-worth since childhood, and he does it again, because when it comes down to it he knows he'll always be there for his brother. He looks over Sam’s shoulder to where Balthazar stands, curiously watching the both of them, and Dean feels another surge of hate deep in his belly, even though he doesn’t know the first thing about the guy. Being a hunter, one learns to trust their instincts early on, though. So while he may be reluctantly on board with the notion of angels actually existing, it doesn’t mean he's going to trust one.

He bobs his head, drawing straighter and licking his lips as he looks back to Sam. “Oky. So what doomsday clock is ringing now? What kind of hell in a hand basket scenario are we looking at?”

Sam opens his mouth to speak but Balthazar beats him to the punch.

“Oh, you know, just the normal run of the mill apocalypse. Albeit demons somehow breaking into and tainting heaven seems to be a bit more dire than the apocalypse’s the two of you have faced before.” Balthazar makes a mock apologetic face.

Dean stands there a moment in stunned silence. Because that… holy hell that was something else entirely. He turns away, heading silently towards the doorway.

“Dean?” Sam’s calling out to him, a hint of worry in his voice.

“I need a damn drink.”

“Good idea.” Balthazar remarks wryly from in the room.
A soft sort of flutter fills sounds and Dean turns to find that the angel's no longer there. He stares at the spot he once was before glaring at Sammy.

Sam gives an apologetic shrug. “He does that.”

“Freaking angels, man.” He stomps out of the room and down the hallway, Sam hot on his heels. He head’s to the archive room, bypassing the three large tables and stopping at the liquor cabinet to grab a glass from a gold wine cart and pouring himself some brandy. He drowns it immediately and pours another, overly aware of Sam’s eyes on him. Dean runs his tongue along the inside of his mouth, catching the last remaining essence of the brandy before turning to look around the room. “So, he coming back or…”

Sam shrugs again. “Yeah. Well he always does. Usually…”

Dean shakes his head. “Beautiful.” He pulls out a chair from one of the tables and sits, resting an elbow on the table while keeping his body positioned towards his brother.

Sam continues to stand, looking a little leftwards at nothing in particular and Dean knows the look like the back of his hand, and can pretty much predict the moment when his brother will finally say something. He has to wait all of five seconds and then Sam clears his throat, shifting uncomfortably on his feet. “Look, man. About what I said –“

“Don’t worry about it.” He’s ending this shit before it even begins.

Sam frowns, twitching a little in a way that says he’s clearly not comfortable with letting things hover between the two of them. Like always. “It’s just that… it’s been a long time, Dean. You know? I just… we just have to get back in the swing of things.”

“Sam.” Dean looks up and hopes that Sam can see the finality in his face and hear it in his voice. “Like I said… don’t worry about it.”

Sam breathes out a sharp exhale but nods his head, and then he’s taking a seat at the opposite side of the table.

The silence that fills the room seems to echo.
Dean takes another deep drag of his brandy, swishing the liquid around a bit in his glass. “So, this dickwad coming back or--“

“You know, with all the insults, if I didn’t know better I’d say you didn’t like me.” The voice is accompanied by another soft flutter.

Dean realizes it’s the sound of wings as he turns, and he's more than a little curious when he realizes Balthazar doesn't have any. “I thought you guys were supposed to have wings.”

Balthazar’s brows lift as he drinks from a dainty champagne flute, the pale gold liquid within quickly drained. He gives a little ‘ahh’ when he’s done, and refills with a slender dark glassed bottle that has a gold label on the front with some fancy writing. “I do, indeed, have wings.”

When he says nothing else Dean gives his best bitch face.

“Oh you can’t see them, of course.”

The urge to tip back his head and sigh is almost unbearable. “And why is that? Are they invisible or something?”

“Hardly. They just exist within a plane of existence that your pathetic human mind is incapable of ever seeing let alone understanding.”

“That’s it. I refuse to believe this douche is actually an angel.”

Balthazar rolls his eyes. “I assume you expected something else?”

“Yes!” Dean stands and stomps his way over to refill his brandy, angrily pouring himself another glass. He takes a drink before twisting around, motioning to Balthazar with a swing of his hand. “I thought angels were supposed to be guardians. Fluffy wings, halos -- You know, Michael Landon. Not dicks!” The words fly out of his mouth quicker than Dean seems to even think them, and for some reason they tug at something deep within his memory. For a split second something flashes behind his eyes, but before he can really get a good look it’s gone. His heart stutters in his chest, and his breath catches in his throat. He has to get it back, tug that glowing thread up from the dark
recesses of his mind. He tries, searching his memory, and once again a soft tingle spreads just under his skin before... it fades.

Sensing someone approaching Dean looks up and see's Sam moving into his space, his face heavy with worry. His mouth is moving, but Dean can’t quite hear any words. He glances over Sammy’s shoulder and finds Balthazar watching him closely, his eyes narrowed and lit with interest.

“… you okay? Dean?” Sam’s hand is a heavy weight on his shoulder, his head bent as he searches Dean’s face.

Dean finally snaps out of it. He grunts, pushing Sam’s hand away and putting some distance between them. “I’m fine.” He clears his throat, lifting the brandy with a crooked grin and hopes he sounds convincing. “Haven’t had the good stuff in a while. Guess it’s getting to me quicker.”

Sam searches his face, looking for any trace of dishonesty. Dean doesn’t give him the chance to find it and turns, taking a seat again. “So. Apocalypse. Tell me more.”

Balthazar regards them both a moment, his brow arched. “Yes, down to business, then.” He sits his champagne flute and Dom on the table, clapping his hands together. “So long story short, the Big Bad from down under has somehow found a secret door leading upstairs. Gotta say, it’s causing quite an uproar.”

“Okay, how about dropping all the snark and bullshit first and laying it out plain. You’re telling me that demons somehow found a way to – to what, break into Heaven?” The word sounds so strange on his tongue, and Dean feels almost childish saying it.

“That’s exactly what I’m saying.” Balthazar acknowledges, and says nothing else.

The room falls into silence, and Dean is having a hard time accepting that this is going to be his life now. That a smug ass angel was going to most likely be zapping in and out for the unforeseeable future. He shoots a glare to Sam, who actually has the decency to look just as done with the angel as Dean feels. He tries for a deep, calming breath, and forces a stiff smile at the angel. “So. Some demons have managed to slip through Heaven’s crack. Awesome. How about you tell us why the hell you seem to think we can help out, huh? Cause, and maybe it’s just me here, but that sounds like more of a Heavenly problem.”
Balthazar stares down at him like he can’t believe the words coming out of Dean’s mouth. “Are you really this stupid? Tell me this, if Hell were to fully defeat Heaven’s ranks, what do you think that would mean for the human race? Do you think you’ll all just be passed over? That Hell would be happy with control of Heaven alone? Hell fire will reign down on Earth. No one will be safe, and as weak as humans are, it would only take mere weeks until you’re all either dead, or enslaved.” Balthazar breathes out a condescending laugh. “And don’t think death will be an escape. With Hell in control of Heaven, souls face an eternity of torture.”

Fuck. That’s… so much more than Dean had been expecting. Suddenly he finds it hard to hold up his usual ‘I-don’t-give-a-shit-about-anything’ expression and shifts in his seat, looking away. So. It's literally looking like ‘Hell on Earth’, then (Heaven too for that matter).

Unless they could somehow stop it from happening.

Which, honestly, is more than a little overwhelming.

“All right, I get it, okay?” Might as well admit it. “We’re all in some deep shit unless we stop this. But that still leaves the question of how the hell we-” He motions between Sam and himself. “Are supposed to do that. I mean we’re just two regular guys!”

Balthazar snorts. “Two regular guys that have averted the Apocalypse numerous times already.”

So he had a point there.

“Also, Heaven is aware that you have a certain… relationship, with a particular demon in power.”

Dean sputters, looking between Sam and Balthazar. “Crowley? Are you serious? You want Crowley’s help? How the hell do you know that he isn’t the one behind this, huh? He’s not exactly known for his loyalty.”
“Dean’s right.” Sam speaks up for the first time, and Dean gives him a bitch face because yeah, he could have gotten to it a little earlier. “Whatever ‘relationship’ we may have with Crowley isn’t something so substantial that he would actually help us stop this. Besides, why would he? Controlling Heaven and Earth sounds like something right up his alley.”

Dean nods in agreement.

The angel tilts his head, his lip twisting wryly. “Let’s just say that the demon you once knew is… well, all things change, right?” He shrugs. “So, boys, this is what you’re going to do. You’re going to put that lovely dungeon to use again, call you’re good friend Crowley, and find out if he knows anything.”

“And what if he won’t talk?” Dean grunts out.

Balthazar rolls his eyes, sighing like he is talking to children and quickly losing his patience. “So you do what you’re best at.” And then he’s gone.

Dean grinds his teeth a few seconds before turning a glare at Sam, who just shakes his head with a sigh. “Well,” Dean drowns the rest of his brandy in one go. "Look's like we're having a chat with the King of Hell.”
FYI: Dean's Hayden Christensen reference was to the movie Jumper, a sci-fi where actor Hayden Christensen plays David Rice, whose character can teleport.
This chapter was... hard. lol. Would appreciate how I did with Castiel's POV.

- Two Years Ago -

- 1 hour before The Cleansing -

He didn’t want to do this. Every instinct within Castiel screamed otherwise, and the urge to just… fly out, was so strong that his vessel was left shaky - - muscles twitching anxiously. Logically, he knew that it was the right thing - - or at least he thought he did, he had been wrong before. But if it were right, why did his entire body ache with the need to leave? To deny Hannah’s hard fought offer and turn down the opportunity from Crowley to for once actually help; along with Rowena and her usual ‘tit for tat, darling’ lifestyle.

But they had been planning this for so long, working so hard to make it happen; Castiel right alongside them, and if he were to turn away now he would be no better than... well, no better than a man desperately holding onto something he knew he shouldn’t. It would make him a man so selfish that instead of ensuring safety to the ones he loved, would instead jeopardize them for a chance to stay alongside them.

No. He couldn’t do that. He had fought so hard to keep the Winchesters alive over the past few months.

... Fought so hard to hold onto Dean …

“Castiel…”

The voice was deep and unfamiliar still, and Cas tensed; instantly on guard. It was hard remembering that Hannah no longer resided in her familiar vessel, and instead now wore the image
of a man – young, mid-twenties – with features so different from the old Hannah they were like night and day.

He forced his body to relax, his gaze scanning over pale, short hair and hazel eyes, before offering a smile that he knew looked as weak as it felt.

Hannah gave a sad smile of his own and moved to stand directly in front of Cas. “How are you?”

Cas fought to keep his features as neutral as he was able, swallowing hard. “I am fine, Hannah. And you? How is Heaven? Are they…”

“Heaven is well. Everything is falling back into order, Castiel. We’ve come such a long way.” He reaches out to lay a reassuring hand on Castiel’s shoulder. “And there is still a place for you there.”

Castiel still found it hard to believe sometimes that the other angels would want anything to do with him. But things had begun to change, with Hannah and Seraphiel now in charge. The two had somehow brought all the angels together in a way that Heaven had not seen in centuries, and they had found their selves once again following the plan that God had always intended - - ensuring the safety of the human race.

The warehouse door opened then, metal scraping against concrete echoing in the wide open space, and Castiel steps away from Hannah, the other angel’s hand dropping back to his side. Rowena sashays into the room with more flare than needed, the skirt of her long, satiny blue dress billowing behind her in a wind that Castiel knew was far from natural. He resisted the urge to roll his eyes.

She stops a few feet away from them, the smug smile that had covered her face slowly fading to an irritated scowl as she scans the warehouse. “We seem to be short one, yes?” Her tone is buttery sweet, and looks so at odds with the glare on her face.

Castiel gives an inward sigh. “I’m sure Crowley will be here soon.”

Rowena finally turns, her eyes moving up and down him in clear mistrust. “And how do I know that my dear, sweet boy isn’t locked away at the mercy of some angel even as we speak?”
Castiel’s patience is quickly dwindling, but a slight shifting in the air to signify Crowley’s appearance actually brings him relief, for once. Let him bother with her.

“As always, mother, you’re faith in me is staggering.”

Rowena twist’s around with wide eyes, and an instant – if not put on – smile catches her lips when she sees Crowley behind her. “It’s just my motherly instincts, Fergus. I’ll always feel the need to protect my own.” She turns a glare to the angels behind her, completely oblivious (or ignoring) Crowley’s condescending snort and the roll of his eyes as he shuffles past her. “Besides, I know full well how quickly those that call themselves ‘friends’ can turn on you.”

“Good thing we’re not friends, then.” Crowley points out as he looks up at Castiel and scowls. “What’s with you, then? Someone just kick your puppy?”

Castiel tries to remind himself that he was (usually) a calm and controlled heavenly being. “That makes no sense. I don’t even have a dog.”

Crowley regards him with a dry stare before shaking his head and clasping his hands together. “Well then! We’re not here for chit chat, are we?” He looks at Hannah. “Well? Where is it?”

Behind him Rowena inches closer, her eyes wide and eager.

Hannah pauses, looking first towards Cas as if for silent acknowledgement. At his nod, the angel closes his eyes briefly, head tilted slightly back. A soft flutter of wings sound and another angel is suddenly at their side. She draws tense at the sight of Crowley and Rowena, but Hannah lays a comforting hand on her shoulder and the girl’s smile is one of pure affection. She hands over a large item wrapped in thick black cloth.

Rowena was practically vibrating with eagerness.

“Thank you, Ester. You may go.”

The angel nods before vanishing on another flutter of wings.
The room falls into silence.

Hannah carefully sits the item down on the table before him, and after hesitating a second, begin to unfold the cloth, until a large, old tome is revealed.

Rowena gasps, the sound breaking off to a slightly choked whimper. “It’s really here.” Her hand reaches out towards it.

Crowley slides forward, blocking her path with a chiding stare. “Uh-huh. No touching.”

The shift in the witch it nearly gives Castiel jet lag. Her glare is murderous, and her body tense -- drawn -- as if readying for battle. Crowley stands a little taller, tilting his head back and all but sneering down his nose at her in clear challenge. The witch’s eyes narrow and the two of them regarded one another silently a moment, but in the end she heaves a heavy sigh and takes a step back. “It’s just been so long.” She whispers, and the emotion in her voice is honest for the first time that night. “I’ve missed it so, Fergus.”

“Yes, well….” Castiel looks down at the Book of the Damned. “If you hold up your end of the bargain, so will we.”

Rowena holds his gaze a moment, and when Crowley finally backs away with a slightly worrisome sigh the witch is at the book in the blink of an eye.

He wasn’t going to lie; he had conflicted feelings about handing the dangerous book over once again to Rowena, and if there were any other way he would have destroyed the thing once and for all. But they needed Rowena, and though she had always been a powerful enemy – still was, really – they had joined together just this once to stop the Darkness and cleanse the world of the wounds that had been done to it.

And then there was Crowley.

Cas cuts his gaze to the King of Hell as Rowena lovingly brushes her hand on the books surface with a sigh of utter content, before seeking out the spell they would soon all invoke.
In all honesty Castiel was still suspicious of Crowley’s motives, despite his assistance so far in fighting Amara, and while Dean had always had a soft spot for the demon (though he would down right refuse it), Cas knew that Sam at least had always shared his genuine distrust for the demon who had so often made their lives living Hell.

But what was there to gain from Crowley doing this? Castiel had asked himself that question hundreds of times over, and had come up with nothing. It was unsettling. By nature the King of Hell was a selfish man, and Castiel found it hard to believe that he did anything without an ulterior motive.

But they needed him. It was true that without Crowley present the spell would be useless. So what was it that had convinced the demon to close the gates of Hell forever?

“Castiel.”

Pulled from his own thoughts, Castiel turns to Hannah. The other angel has a patient, if not slightly worried, expression on his face, and Cas gives what he hoped was a reassuring nod to dissuade any questions.

Hannah eyes him a moment before stepping forward, so close that their chest’s almost touch, and Castiel yet again finds himself ironically noticing that it feels so different somehow with Hannah standing so close while inhabiting a male vessel. It was nearly laughable, and he can’t help but wonder if this is what Dean felt like whenever Castiel invaded his personal space; as he so often did.

“You aren’t -- having regrets, are you?” Hannah’s voice is hushed, not wanting the other’s aware of his words.

Castiel opens his mouth to deny it, but no words come out.

Just heavy silence that somehow thunders.

Hannah’s eyes softened, and Cas tenses at the sight of pity shining so clearly in their depths. “I know you don’t want to do this; but you aren’t abandoning them, Castiel. You are saving them.”

He glances over to Crowley and Rowena. Rowena isn’t paying them the least bit of attention, still completely rapt in lovingly turning the frail pages of the Book of the Damned. Crowely, though, is
watching them in clear exasperation, his arms crossed over his chest. He’s currently rolling his eyes and mumbling something about ‘bloody angels and their heart to hearts’.


Hannah nods in understanding, grasping his arm and squeezing gently. He didn’t say anything, though, and Castiel was at least glad for that.

“There is more at stake here than the Winchesters, though.” Cas says with conviction, begging his voice to stay strong. “If we succeed in this spell, then we’ll be saving all of the people of earth.” It was the only thing that gave him the strength to go through with everything, because as much as Castiel wished he could for once just take what he wanted, he knew he could never be that selfish. He hated that about himself, sometimes.

“Then again he hated many things about himself.

“Ahh.”

The hushed, awed whisper brings his attention back to the present, and he looks down to see Rowena lovingly touching a page she had rested on. The page. She looked up at them all after a moment, her smile slightly feral and wicked.

“Well, lovelies, if there are any last words, now would be the time.”

Crowley rolls his eyes again. “Yes, because we’re obviously the sentimental type.”

Funny thing is, Cas was the sentimental type. He wanted nothing more than to fly back to Dean and Sam, and simply be in their presence one more time. To tell Sam how sorry he was for the way he had treated him in the beginning, for ever believing that there could be any evil intentions scarred into his body when every step of the way Sam had done nothing but try to keep his brother and the rest of the world safe. Had fought so hard to keep Cas safe countless times. Sam Winchester was a good man. A man who deserved so much better than the life he had been handed.
And Dean? Castiel’s heart aches painfully in his chest, a thing that should have been impossible given his status. But Dean Winchester had always had a way of making him feel things that were so completely... human. Once upon a time when the emotions he was experiencing were still so new and confusing, Cas had hated Dean for it. Just remembering the times early on when Cas had regarded the Righteous Man with such frustration, dare he say maybe even a little sass, made him smile a bit. He had been an honest mess back then, though compared to his present state, maybe not so much.

Remembering the last time he had seen Dean, just hours ago, makes his stomach coil tightly. The initial shock on Dean’s face, and the way his expression had shifted to something painful, nearly desperate, would be something that Castiel would never forget. And the hard bite of Deans fingers in the skin of his arms is like the ghost of a memory still heavy on his mind.

Something shifts within him, his grace stretching, seeking, and Cas draws in a deep calming breath to settle it, knowing that if he didn’t keep control Hannah would know exactly what he had done. And he couldn’t have that. As surely as Hannah said there was a place for him in Heaven, if he were to ever find out what Cas had done, that offering would be revoked. A lot of things would most likely be revoked. Maybe even his angel-hood.

No. No one could ever know.

Least of all Dean…

Cas looks up as Rowena begins to speak, and his eyes catch on Crowley’s. The demon is watching him with an expression that is far too knowing than Castiel would have liked. What was even more shocking is the shared sadness in his dark eyes, and in that moment Cas realizes that as indifferent as Crowley so often makes himself seem towards everything, Castiel had a feeling that the King of Hell wasn’t completely unaffected by all this.

“So. This is it, then.” Crowley mutters. “And to think, I never got to have that orgy with Lindsey Lohan after all.”

Rowena patted his arm. “Now, now, Fergus. I’m sure there’ll be lots of orgies waiting in Hell.” She grinned at Crowley’s grumpy expression and turned back to look upon the open book, set in the middle of the altar that Hannah had already set up before their arrival. “Once I invoke the spell,
we’ll only have a few hours before it takes effect.” When she looked up again, her eyes held a dark determination. “Let’s hope that’ll be enough to send that bitch back to where she belongs.”

Because if it wasn't, if they failed in defeating Amara, then everything will have been for nothing.

Cas will have damned himself, and maybe the entire world…

- Present Time -

The Men of Letter’s Bunker

“To think, the once mighty Castiel, lowered to sulking in the shadows. And are even we going to talk about how you’ve been basically stalking Dean Winchester?” Balthazar cocks his head, grinning. “It’s all a bit perverse, isn’t it?”

Cas sighs, making himself turn away from the Winchester brothers as they began to talk. Balthazar had flashed out moments ago after informing the brothers about Crowley, and Dean and Sam were still in the archive room, speaking to one another.

Castiel had been there the entire time, listening, watching. Struggling with the conflicting urge to reveal himself or continue to hide; because if he was being honest it was what he was really doing.

“It’s complicated.” He shakes his head, somehow finding the strength to pull his eyes away from Dean to face Balthazar. The other angel regards him with an expression that is so much like a parent regarding a wayward child. Cas lets out a huff of air. “Dean clearly doesn’t trust you, and after what happened the other night, I know he’ll never trust me.”

“You mean the night you saved his life?”

“It’s not that simple, and you know it.” He found his gaze once again drawn back to Dean, as it
always had. He stands in silence a moment, watching as Dean gave up drinking from his glass to instead just pick up the decanter of brandy and haul it back to the table, where he continues a heated argument with Sam about summoning Crowley. “Once he realizes that I’ve been watching over him these past few months, he’ll never let me close.”

Balthazar snorts. “Because he trusted you so easily last time?”

Castiel can’t quite meet his gaze. It was true that when he had first come into Dean’s life the hunter had kept a safe distance, always on guard around him. But as quick as Dean had been to not trust Castiel, what so few failed to realize was how easily Dean had grown to trust him. Thinking back now, it was a little surprising how quickly the two of them had grown to rely on one another.

“Not that I don’t immensely enjoy basking in the overflow of angst filled desolation that is the Winchesters.” The sarcasm in Balthazar’s voice is enough to make Castiel roll his eyes. “The thing is you’ve already shown yourself to Sam. How long before he starts to question you’re absence?”

It was a very compelling argument.

Castiel turns away from Balthazar, his eyes returning to Dean and Sam. He had caught most of their conversation while speaking with Balthazar, and the brothers have decided to give it a day before calling on Crowley. Castiel doesn’t blame them. Being together again after two years, they would need time to get used to being around one another day in and out again. And honestly Dean looked exhausted, his eyes burdened with dark circles and his muscles taunt, weary.

Castiel would make sure he slept the entire night.

“Okay.” He turns back to Balthazar. “But not tonight.”

Balthazar, realizing that’s all he’s going to get, rolls his eyes.

He’s gone with the flutter of wings.

Castiel tells himself to leave the Bunker. Return to Heaven. To Hannah. They still have much to discuss, after all. But he can’t. And maybe he had anticipated that, because as he watches Sam stand
and shuffle to his bedroom after bidding Dean goodnight, he finds himself staring down at Dean still nursing his brandy with the fleeting feeling of finally being where he was supposed to. As if he only feels whole when near Dean. And as frightening as that thought is, Castiel can’t help but realize it’s pretty much true.

Dean Winchester had influenced his life in so many ways. He was at the base of almost every major decision Castiel had made since the moment they had met. In all actuality, it was almost unnerving how Dean Winchester influenced him. Unnerving and… right.

Once upon a time Castiel had questioned everything; God, his own existence, and for a long time how he could be so moved by one single human. His mind had been in constant chaos back then, full of conflicting and unwarranted emotions that he couldn’t understand because he had never really felt them before. As time passed, and his relationship with the Winchesters grew more solid, he had stopped questioning things, and simply accepted the fact that Sam, and especially Dean, meant more to him than he could have ever imagined. For a bit it was easy to just let things settle on that one notion, and for a bit Castiel was happy, or as happy as he had ever been.

But once again things began to change…

Dean’s heavy sigh pulled Cas from his thoughts, and he watched as the hunter returned the now near empty container of brandy to its place before heading a bit unsteadily down the hallway towards his room.

Castiel naturally falls into step behind him.

He watches as Dean’s hand lifts to rest against the wall, steadying himself as he walks, and wishes he could move forward to offer support instead. Would have liked to wrap his arm around Dean’s waist and steer him to his room, Dean’s weight against his side something solid and real.

Before… everything, they didn’t touch that often. There were a few shoulder pats here and there, and the times Cas healed Dean, two fingers to his head, but other than that contact between the two of them was scares and far between. Actually, it was only when the threat of death was near that they had ever freely let their hands reach out to one another. As if the fear of the moment erased all notion of what was expected of them. And even though those instances made Cas’ gut drop a certain way when the memories resurfaced, he often found himself remembering the sensation of warm hands cradling his face, or reaching down to a beaten form and cradling a bloodied cheek longer than necessary.

He never really knew how to feel about the fact that the only time they felt free enough to actually
touch one another, was when there was pain involved.

Dean reaches his door, finally, and nearly falls inside after pushing a little too hard on the door. Cas is almost grabbing onto his shoulders to steady him before he remembers to pull away.

Dean stumbles into the room, slamming the door behind him, and Castiel stares at the wood a moment before flashing to the other side.

Dean’s made it to the bed, and he’s sitting on the edge, pulling his boots off with a grunt. He takes off his flannel overshit and pulls the tee shirt under over his head, his hair sticking up a bit from the pull. Cas can’t help but smile softly. Dean wobbles to his feet and his hands move down to his belt. Castiel thinks about leaving then. He doesn’t. So instead his eyes shift downwards for a beat as Dean pops the button on his pants. Cas hears them fall to the floor and waits for the sound of shifting covers before looking up again.

Dean’s lying on his back, staring up at the dark ceiling. The covers are pulled up to his waist, and he has a hand pulled up and resting behind his head with the other lying flat on his stomach. Cas stays where he’s standing, even though every bone in his body screams to move closer.

He’s afraid that if he does, it will affect his grace. He can see it reacting even now. Swirling and shifting like living fire.

It’s not much different than what a human soul looks like, really. It’s an energy, pulsing and radiant with life. Castiel thinks that’s the only reason Balthazar hadn’t noticed it; because the grace inside of Dean – his grace – has merged so fully with Dean’s own soul that their almost impossible to differentiate. But Castiel can recognize that bit of himself inside of Dean, and it calls out to him, just as his own grace reaches outwards; recognizing its own.

Dean shifts slightly on the bed, and then he’s looking straight at Cas. It’s so unexpected that Castiel sucks in a sharp inhale, his heart skipping in his chest. For a moment he forgets that Dean can’t see him, and doesn’t know how to react. Panic sets in, and he’s confused as to if he should fly away, or speak. But then he remembers that he’s hidden from Dean’s eyes, and the disappointment that thought brings is so confusing that his heart only speeds up.

Dean’s still looking his way, and even though Castiel knows he isn’t visible, it’s like Dean’s staring straight into his eyes.
The ‘stare’ goes on for so long that Cas is beginning to wonder if Dean really can see him, but then Dean abruptly looks away, and Cas suddenly feels unsteady on his feet.

Dean heave’s another deep sigh, and turns on his side, facing away from Cas.

Dean doesn’t fall asleep until hours later. Cas knows, because he doesn’t leave until then.
Dean was awake before dawn’s first light on the horizon, rubbing the sleep from his eyes and stretching out muscles sore from two days of driving. A glance at his phone confirmed that he had barely even gotten a full three hours, while the pounding of his head reminded him just how much he had drank the night before.

Despite the heaviness of his limbs and the ache of his body, he doesn’t linger in bed, and instead shuffles to the bathroom to seek the solace of a hot shower, hoping that it would at least ease some of the soreness from his bones.

Once upon a time he had been the type to prolong actually getting out of bed as much as possible; pulling the covers over his head in the hopes of catching at least a few more minutes of sleep. Within the last few years he’d broken free of that habit; though it had more to do with the way his mind strayed towards dark, self-defeating thoughts in the quiet rather than any sort of constructive development.

His mechanically goes through his morning routine, hardly even showing a wince as the water shifts from freezing to ninth level Hell. His skin is tinged red by the time he finishes, and the coarse stiffness of the towel adds to the sting, but he relishes the sensation, knowing that a little pain will at least wake him.

His eyes linger on the Dead Guys Robe hanging on the back of his door when he gets back to the bedroom, but he quickly turns away from it and pulls on some boxers and socks, followed by his jeans and the usual tee shirt covered by flannel. It’s a conscious decision to wear his boots, and after lacing them he leaves the bedroom that he can’t quite come to call ‘his’ anymore.

The kitchen is empty when he gets there, and he can’t hold in the sigh of relief that slips past his lips. He starts a pot of coffee, finding the grinds in the familiar old spot at the cabinet to his right. His stomach grumbling eventually leads him to raiding the panty, and he begrudgingly settles on some health freak cereal filled with way too many oats and ‘whole grain’. He thinks about filling his bowl with chocolate milk just to piss off Sammy, but there’s none in the refrigerator. Of course.
He’s sitting at the table and forcing himself to swallow down the cardboard tasting flakes when Sam walks in. They both pause, Dean with his spoon hovering just in front of his open mouth, and Sam standing there with a sort of deer caught in the head lights kind of look to him. Dean’s eyes dart over Sam, who looks nice and refreshed. It’s the look of someone who’s gotten more than three hours of sleep, at least. Dean can’t help but feel a bit slighted somehow. He pushes it down, shoveling the cereal into his mouth and quirking his head in greeting to Sam.

Sam blinks a moment, running his hand through a mess of hair. “Morning.”

Dean grunts, watching his brother with side eyes as he makes himself a cup of coffee and his own bowl of cereal. And then he’s sitting across from Dean at the table, and Dean realizes he has nowhere to look but straight at him.

“How’d you sleep?” Sam’s looking at him in a way that says he clearly knows Dean slept like shit, but figured he’d be polite and ask anyways.

“Peachy.” Dean says around his food, his knee beginning to bounce under the table.

Sam cocks a brow, still looking at him. “Awesome.” He starts to eat his cereal.

They both break off into awkward silence, and Dean can’t help but remember the last time he and Sammy were like this. The memory, as always, makes his gut clench and brings a sour taste to the back of his tongue. He pushes the half eaten bowl away, leaning back with a sigh.

Sam looks up at him.

This is usually the moment where he tries to get Dean to talk about his ‘feelings’, and Dean rolls his eyes and makes some lame sexist joke in order to hide the fact that he has feelings in the first place.

But it never happens.

Sam looks back down at his cereal and continues to eat in silence.

He should be happy about it, really. But for some reason it just makes his chest hurt. Draining the
rest of his coffee Dean pushes the chair back from the table and stands, taking his dishes to the sink. “Alright, Morning Glory, what say we get this show on the road? Get it over with and out of the way.”

Sam blinks up at him, his brows slightly higher. “Uh, yeah. Sure. Let me just finish this and I’ll be good to go.”

Dean nods, scrubbing a hand over his mouth. “Alright, we’ll I’m going to go ahead and get everything set up. I’ll meet you in the dungeon when you’re done.”

Sam gives a nod and Dean turns on his heels, leaving the kitchen with more gusto than he should most likely have. He just really wanted to get out of there.

He had known that the two of them together again wasn’t going to be easy, but there had still been some fleeting hope that it wouldn’t be as bad as this. It was like they didn’t even know how to exist around each other.

Dean knew that there was so much that had been left unsaid over the years, and logically he knew that a large part of the way they were now was because of him. Because that night in the bunker – when everything had been laid bare. But he felt sick to his stomach just thinking about that conversation, and pushed it down and away as his feet carried him along the familiar corridors of the bunker.

The archive room was dark, and Dean flips the switch, the florescence’s overhead struggling in dim flickers before growing more strong and steady. The room is cold; had always been cold and the fine hairs on the back of his neck and arms stand on edge as a faint chill rushes over his skin. The bookcases that hid the entrance to the dungeon room are shut, and Dean wonders when the last time Sam had used them had been.

He finds the secret stash of ingredients that he and Sammy had hidden away in the room for easy access, and after gathering them opens the entryway to the small cell. It’s the same as Dean remembers. Dark and bare, only a single chair in the middle of the room. The floor is still painted in sigils, and Dean drags in a small table from the room beyond to begin mixing the ingredients. He can’t help but remember the last time they had summoned Crowley as he works.

It’s a little ironic; how the same sense of helplessness is coming into play yet again and pushing he and Sammy to seek out help from such a source.
When he’s done mixing he takes a step back to survey his work, making sure all the ins and outs have been met and there’s nothing he’s leaving off. He doesn’t linger too long, though. It may have been two years since the last time he’d summoned a demon, but like they say… riding a bike and all that.

He pulls up a stool and perches on its edge, not quite able to let himself truly relax. He thinks about how he’s seen hide nor hair of Crowley since everything went down two years ago. He also thinks about how during his ‘time away’, he had come across only a handful of demons, and only within the past few months. Had Crowley done something? Worked his magick to get Dean off of the Hunter’s Most Wanted list? It’s the only solution he can think of, and one that leaves him even more confused.

As much as he denied it, Dean knows that he’s got (or had) some kind of fucked up relationship with Crowley. Something that was toxic but impossible to ignore – and as self-deprecating as it is he can’t help but feel like he and Crowley are alike in a lot of ways.

Not that he’d ever admit it aloud.

Bottom line was, the fact that Crowley has been MIA for two long years should have put a damn skip to his steps, but instead here Dean was picking at an old sore that felt stingingly familiar to rejection.

The sound of a door clicking in the next room rings like a choir of angels to Dean’s ears, and he clears his throat and takes a stand as Sam enters.

Sam takes a look at his handiwork and nods in what can only be approval, and Dean can’t help but feel a little irritated at that. As if Sam had expected him to mess up the summoning.

He pushes the sourness back, though, casting a look up at Sam. He stuffs his hands in his pockets. “When’s the last time you even heard from Crowley?”

Sam doesn’t look up from the box of matches he’s fiddling with. “Since Amara.”

The name makes Dean flinch. He only just resist’s the urge to clench his hands into tight fist’s.

“What about you?”
Sam’s looking at him now, and Dean hopes that his emotions aren’t written all over his face, because he’s worked so damn hard on getting past what that bitch did to him – what she made him do, and the last thing he wants is to reopen that mess. “Same.” He grunts, his voice sounding only slightly off.

Sam nods, takes a match from the box, and strikes it. A flame flickers and a faint whiff of sulfur reaches Dean’s nose.

“I mean, that’s weird, right?”

Sam arches a brow, looking at him like he’s lost his mind. “It’s weird that the King of Hell isn’t knocking on our doors every day anymore? Uh, yeah. No. I can’t say I really mind.”

Dean huffs, frustration itching at his skin. “Hey, I’m glad too, alright? I’m just saying it’s weird. I mean, where the hell has the guy been all this time?”

Sam gives a soft sigh and shakes the match until its flames vanishes in a plum of swirling smoke. The wick falls to his feet. “I don’t know, Dean. I don’t really care. Are we really doing this now?”

Dean rolls his eyes. He flings a hand out and twist’s away from his brother.

A few seconds later there’s the sound of another match being struck.

“It’s just… it’s Crowley!”

Sam spits out a low curse and this time throws the match to the ground, stomping it out as he swings around to Dean. “Yeah, it’s Crowley. The son-of-a-bitch that’s screwed us over more times than we can freaking count, Dean! What, are you worried about him or something?”

“Hey!” Dean jerks around, angrily pointing a finger at Sam to silence him.

Sam throws up his arms. “Well, what do you expect me to think? Besides, I thought that – “ He cuts
off midsentence, looking Dean over and shaking his head as he turns back to the table.

“You thought what?” Dean all but snarls, drawing forward. “You thought what, Sammy?”

“I thought that you’d have seen him! That you’ve been seeing him. Just like you always used to.”

Dean draws back like he’s been slapped, staring in stunned silence a moment. He eventually let’s out a bitter laugh of disbelief, scrubbing a hand over his face. “You can’t be serious.”

“Why not, Dean?” Sam’s advancing on him now, all stiff shoulders and scowling face. “The two of you were practically best friends while we were fighting Amara!”

“Stop saying her goddamn name!!” The stool shatters against the wall where Dean slings it and the sound of the wood splintering and crashing against the floor is so satisfying that it actually manages to ease some of the fury pulsing through his veins.

He stands there, chest surging with each deep breath he takes. His fists are clenched so tightly that he can feel his nails digging deep into his palms. Sam’s facing him, having somehow kept control of his own anger and only wears a dark glare. For some reason it pisses Dean off even more.

He can feel something rising up within him again. Something terrifying and yet so incredibly beautiful and he struggles with the urge to push it down or just let it free at last. The effort it takes to keep control literally has him shaking, and he’s just glad that Sam most likely forks it up to him losing his cool. Ha. If only.

He jerks around, his back to Sammy, and tries to hide his struggle by playing it off as frustration, running unsteady hands through his hair. The rooms suddenly way too small and the air far too stifling. A bead of sweat trails down between his shoulder blades in a slow decent.

He’s afraid that he’s about to start hyperventilating when suddenly something warm and soothing is crashing over him like a gentle wave. He sucks in a greedy gulp of air, his eyes flashing wide as his gaze darts over the room. The thundering of his heart slowly steadies, and the sensation of his own skin crawling ceases. He closes his eyes and just lets the sensation wash over him, for the first time not bothering to worry about where it’s coming from or even what the hell it is. All he knows is he needs it more than he had ever needed anything, and as daunting as that knowledge is he’s determined to not dwell on it until later. Right now – right now he’s just going to soak up all he can get.
“Dean? Are you okay?”

He opens his eyes, not even aware they had been closed. Sam is a few feet away, his face anxiously twisted and a hand stretched out but not quite touching. The realization that Sam doesn’t know where he stands with him anymore hits him hard, and he fucking hates it.

“Yeah,” He clears his throat, his voice unexpectedly hoarse. “Yeah, I’m good. Just… just tired man. Wanna hurry up and get this over with.”

Sam looks like he’s going to say something – or at the least looks like he’s thinking about it, but in the end he nods and takes another match from the box. “Yeah. Me too. So,” He shrugs. “Let’s do it, then.”

Before Dean can form an answer Sam strikes the match, and then tosses it into the bowl of ingredients. It catches fire instantly, a pop of sound and dancing flames, fragrant smoke trailing upwards. Dean follows its ascent, and finds himself staring into the dark eyes of the King of Hell.

Its jarring. Everyone is quiet, still, eying one another in the heavy silence. It’s highly uncharacteristic of Crowley to be so… silent, and Dean can’t help but wonder what that means. If it means anything at all.

He looks the same, wearing that familiar black suit without a wrinkle in sight, and a dark charcoal blue tie standing in blatant contrast. His dark eyes drag over Sam and then Dean, and the silence is starting to really get to him when Crowley finally speaks.

“Moose, Squirrel -- been a while.”

And there it was. For some reason Dean found himself almost laughing. He was careful to keep his features as tightly drawn as possible so one doesn’t bubble out, because even he knows how crazy that would make him sound. “Well, not to ruin the special reunion, but we’re got some business to discuss.”

Crowley’s eyes flick back and forth between them before letting out a snort and he rolls his eyes, his entire head going with the exaggerated gesture. “Of course. No hugs and kisses for us, hmm?”
“Not this time.” Sam’s entering the spelled circle, holding up a pair of familiar cuffs that Crowley scowls at. “Now we can do this the easy way, or the hard way. It’s your choice.”

“Please. As if you boys have ever done anything the easy way.” He tilts his head, pausing in his pacing. “We haven’t spoken in two years, and this is the ‘hello, how’ve you been’ I get?” He snorts. “Rude.”

“Yeah, well maybe next time we’ll remember the tea party.” Dean mutters.

Crowley heaves a heavy sigh, eying the handcuffs in Sam’s outstretched hands. He arches a dark brow and a bit of a smirk catches his lips before he snorts, apparently amused at something going on in his own head.

Sam’s clearly tired of the dramatics already. “Last chance.”

The demon rolls his eyes and holds out his hands. Sam doesn’t hesitate, moving forward and expertly clipping the cuffs into place, stepping back immediately after.

Crowley sits his cuffed hands on the his knees, looking up at them. “Satisfied now? Because I’m certainly not.”

“Sorry we can’t live up to your expectations.” Sam draws out in annoyance.

“Feeling sassy, are we Moose?”
“Alright, enough.” Dean moves until he’s directly in front of Crowley. “You’ve got answers we need, and you’re gonna give em.”

Crowley studies them with narrowed eyes and an intensity that’s just shy of being uncomfortable. “So, they’ve come to you, have they?” He snorts. “Always so predictable.”

Sam’s brows furrow. “You know. About the angels, about Heaven. You know everything. They were right.”

“Hardly.”

“Yeah, well you know something.” Dean pulls out the knife from his waistband, turning it back and forth under the harsh lighting. “So either you start talking, or we start carving.”

Dean had almost forgotten how put out Crowley could look, as if he had the right to be so vexed.

“I swear – you two. Don’t you ever get tired of this same old song and dance?”

“Don’t you ever get tired of losing?” Sam snarks out.

Crowley turns his gaze to Sam, his head cocked. “I see two years wasn’t enough time for you to grow out of being a complete waste of space. Shame. Nice hair cut, though.”

Dean see’s it coming a mile away, and Crowley definitely feels it as Sam lands a hard right to the demons jaw. His eyes squeeze shut at the impact, his head jerking to the side from the blow. Dean watches Silently as Sam takes a shaky step back, his chest heaving.

“Talk. Now.”

Crowley huffs out a soft laugh, and when he faces them again his tongue is steaking out to dab at the blood on his split lip. “Fine. I don’t know who the Big Kahuna is that’s broken through the ‘pearly gates’. But I know who does.” He leans back in the chair, crossing his arms over his chest with a
smug expression. “But you’re gonna have to do something for me to get that little bit of info, I’m afraid.”

Dean twist’s around with a swear, scrubbing a hand over his face. Of course this wasn’t going to be easy. Why the hell had he ever expected otherwise.

“We aren’t making deals here, Crowley.” Sam argues.

“Well, then, I suppose you won’t get those answers you’re feathered friends so desperately seek.” He pouts mockingly. “They’ll be ever so disappointed.”

Honestly, Dean should have realized that when the King of Hell was involved, things would never go their way. He looks at Sam, finding him furious, but there’s a sullen acceptance in his eyes that Dean recognizes from working with Crowley in the past. They’ll get nowhere unless they play along with the bastards antics.

“Alright,” Dean says, turning. “We’ll bite.”

Crowley’s narrowed gaze bores into them a long while before he speaks. “I need you two to break someone out of Hell.”

Dean’s sure he’s heard wrong. “Sorry? Say that again?”

“You heard me. Someone’s being help prisoner that I need. You want information, you’ll have to bring them to me, first.”
Dean shares a confused look with Sam.

“Crowley,” Sam draws out slowly. “You’re the King of Hell. You want us to – to break out your own prisoner?”

“They’re not my prisoner!” The demon spits out. The air’s thick with tension as he glares them both down, and then suddenly it’s like he… deflates. He slumps back in his chair and looks so forlorn that it’s a little shocking. “And my pay’s been docked.”

“I’m sorry, am I supposed to know what that means?” Dean sighs.

“I’m not the bloody King of Hell anymore, you idiots!”

Dean balks, shock and confusion racing through him. He turns a bit dumfoundedly to Sam and see’s him with a similar expression. “Are you telling me that… that you’ve been dethroned?”

Crowley glowers. “More like usurped.”

Sam stares dumbly at Crowley before turning to Dean, his eyes seeking some sort of answer. Hell, Dean doesn’t know what to tell him. He’s surprised that Sam would be looking to him for guidance at all.

Furthermore, he had no idea how to handle this new bit of information.

Sure, there was a sort of malicious glee over the fact that Crowley had been finally put in his place, but at the same time how often had he and Sammy used the demons position to their advantage? How many times had Crowley used his power and influence to get the Winchesters some rare artifact or valuable information?

“Well… while I can’t say this was unexpected,” Sam shakes his head. “I’m assuming that there’s some reason you can’t just waltz into Hell for this rescue mission?”
“Aside from how incredibly dumb it would be to single handedly stage a break in – and then out? Yeah. There’s people looking for me, you dim witted baboon! … A price on my head. I can’t show my face in Hell.”

“So you’re on the run.” Dean tilts his head and grins. “And what’s to stop us from letting them have your sorry ass? One name crossed off of our list.”

Crowley laughs. Actually laughs. The grin that spreads on his lips is wicked and far too smug. “Because, my prisoner? They’ll have all the answers you need. So, in order to get said answers –“ He draws off with a grin.

“Who the hell is this person, anyways?” Dean’s angry, frustration crawling over his skin with itching intensity.

Crowley opens his mouth, and then closes it almost immediately. He blinks, slouching in the chair again. He looks away from the Winchesters, his eyes drifting to stare at nothing, and when he speaks, his voice is almost hollow sounding. “My mother.”

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“You have got to be kidding me!” Sam hisses once their clear of the dungeon and in the hallway. His entire body is tense, shoulders drawn up high and brows reaching to his hairline.

“I don’t think we have much of a choice.”

“Uh, yeah, we do! We leave Rowena to rot and find another way!”

Dean shakes his head. “And what other way is there, Sammy? Crowley doesn’t know anything, and if the former King of Hell’s got nothing, what makes you think some other demon grunt will?”

“Crowley’s lying! He’s done it before!”
Dean bites the inside of his cheek, trying and failing to calm his frustration. It wasn’t that he was mad at Sam, because he hadn’t done anything, he was just… mad. At everything. He’s mad at the situation, mad that he’s been drawn back into this mess all over again, and most of all he’s mad about how sated some part of him feels. How it feels like something inside of him has slid and clicked back into place, making it to where he can finally run smoothly again. “Not this time, Sammy. Rowena’s our best bet, and you know it.”

Sam spits out angrily, throwing his hands out. “How the hell could you want to help her when she’s the reason for everything?! If it weren’t for her, you would have never –“

Sam’s cut off abruptly as Dean slams him hard against the wall. He’s got him pinned a full five seconds before Sam’s shoving him off and then there’s a fist in his face.

Dean jerks back, sucking in a deep, calming breath and feeling the sting to his cheek. He closes his eyes a minute, forcing himself to calm down less he do something he really doesn’t want to. When he finally opens his eyes Sam is standing a few feet away from him, glaring and still on edge. Dean gives a jerky nod. “Okay, yeah, I deserved that. I get it – I mean I imagine you’ve got a lot of bottled up rage for me right now, so that’s good.”

Sam stands his ground a few moments before he caves, his limbs growing heavy and slack, and he looks so freaking tired that Dean’s heart hurts.

“None of this is good, Dean.”

Dean licks his lips, feeling something painful swell in his chest. He gives a shaky, bitter smile. “Yeah, well not like that’s anything new, hm?” He sighs, suddenly exhausted. “So what do we do now? How the hell do we bring that douchy angel back?”

Sam shrugs. “He’ll hear us if we pray to him.”

Dean snorts at that, because really? “Awesome.”
Crowley arches his brow as he listens to the sound of fighting just outside of the room, unable to keep a pleased grin from his lips. “You know,” He says, sitting back with a sigh. “It’s obvious that I’ve got my own agenda as for being here. I mean, come on.” Because, yeah, he doesn’t really need to elaborate more than that. “But what about you?” His narrowed gaze turns to an empty spot in the room. “What reason do you have for creeping around in the shadows, hmm?”

The air shifts with a faint electric current, and then Castiel is there, standing a few feet away from the former King of Hell. He’s frowning deeply, his eyes narrowed. “Why did you let them cuff you? You could have gotten away if not for that.”

Crowley rolls his eyes. “Like I said, agenda.” He eyes Castiel, his head tilted. “But I must say, smart move on making the Winchesters try to summon me.”

Castiel’s eyes cut away, examining the room. “I knew if it were them you would actually show up.”

“Yes, well, what can I say. I’m nostalgic.”

“You’re desperate.” Cas draws out, his intense gaze locking on Crowley again. “Why do you want Rowena so badly?”

Crowley shrugs, trying to appear nonchalant. “Maybe I just miss her motherly affections.”

“She’s tried to kill you on various occasions.”

“Yes, well, love’s like that, isn’t it?” Crowley eyes Castiel knowingly. “Bloody.”

Castiel doesn’t answer.
Chapter End Notes

Full Castiel next chapter!!!
Highway To Hell

Chapter Summary

Dean & Castiel FINALLY meet again

Chapter Notes

It took me longer than anticipated to post this nxt chapter, so I made sure it was nice and long. Let me know what you think!

Castiel pauses in his pacing, his head cocking slightly as his eyes narrow. He's quiet for a moment before letting out a deep sigh. "They're calling Balthazar." He rounds on Crowley, who has been silently watching Castiel with an amused expression on his face. Castiel had always hated the little smirk. He was tired of playing Crowley's games. Surging forward he slams his palms onto each arm of the chair, caging the demon in.

Crowley winces at the unexpected action and draws back, but the look of surprise on his face is quickly shifting to one of annoyance and Castiel hates that too. Hates that Crowley isn't scared of him, or at the very least doesn’t let it show.

Because in all honesty he should be. Just as Crowley – Castiel was much changed as well.

"Did you do it?"

Crowley arches a brow, meeting his gaze once again. "Do what?"

It’s a struggle to keep calm. "Open the gates." He bites out slowly.

A look of surprise crosses Crowley's features, and Castiel can't tell if it's real or put on. Either way it isn't comforting. He pulls away with a tsk, shaking his head again. "You are the only demon with the connections and power to find a way to open the gates again. We know it was you."
Crowley rolls his eyes and holds up his hand as if his chair were a desk, and the dungeon a class room. "Uh, excuse me, but did you not get the memo? Not the bloody King of Hell anymore!"

Yes. Castiel had heard almost immediately after the gates had reopened that the demon had lost his crown. Castiel had no doubt though that Crowley still had connections to powerful people. "Don't lie to me!"

"I don't lie!" Crowley spits out with more venom than ever before, leaning forward in his chair and glaring up at Castiel.

Not for the first time he's a little surprised by the truth in the words. Crowley has always made it more than clear that his word is his bond, and considering the lying nature of demons, that's quite a feat.

But it couldn't be true. Castiel needed Crowley to have been the one that opened Heaven and Hell’s gates again, because if he wasn't – then he and the rest of his brethren were even more lost than before. They had nothing to go on, no lead what so ever - and Heaven was already chaos. Since discovering pieces of Hell had somehow made their way to Heaven, the angels were anxious and afraid, suspicious of one another and not sure who they could trust. They had even begun to grow weary of Hannah, who had always done nothing but stand by Heaven’s side, time and time again.

If Crowley wasn’t behind the gates being reopened months ago, then Castiel had to find out who was, and fast.

“"You really think Rowena will know who is behind this?"

“It’s Rowena. Believe me; this is right up her alley.” At Castiel’s firm frown Crowley rolls his eyes. “I’m saying that with Hell under new rule, the conniving bitch will have tried to sleaze her way into some sort of partnership. Make herself appear valuable while taking full advantage of whatever poor sod she’s managed to get her claws into.”

“You said she was being held prisoner,” Castiel states. “That’s a far cry from having a place beside the new King of Hell.”

Crowley sighs like their conversation was the most taxing thing he’d ever had to be part of. “Look, Hot Wings, all I know is when someone ‘Open Sesame’d’ the place, my first priority was finding who could be powerful enough to hoodoo up that level of magick? So, yes, I tracked Mother Dearest
“She must have some kind of idea of the person responsible though. She’ll know other witches powerful enough…”

Crowley eyes him, his mouth primly shut and his eyebrows raised. Holy anger surges through Castiel like fire. Every instinct in his bones scream to just smite the demon, to finally put an end to years of repressed resentment and frustrated jealousy over how the Winchesters had time and time again sought out the demon for help. It’s a very human way to feel. Sometimes, though, Castiel believes that the moment he had first set foot within that barn all those years ago, the angel within him had begun to slowly fade, and humanity bloomed in its place. In the beginning he had thought it the same as poison spreading through his system, but being alongside the Winchesters had shifted that way of thinking. Now, though, he can’t help but feel wrong. He had fought so hard to find himself again after Heaven’s gates had closed. In the beginning it had been near crippling – unable to keep the feelings of being useless at bay. After all… what was he without the Winchesters? For so long keeping them safe had been his sole purpose, and with the absence of that Castiel had found himself more lost than ever before.

His inadequacy had alienated him in Heaven, despite Hannah trying to get him to stand at her side and help lead the angels. After having had a hand in riding the world of the Darkness and Ascending, the other angels had begun to look at him in a new light – as if he were a savior. But Castiel didn’t want their adoration. He was not deserving of it. He was not deserving of a lot of things that had been gifted to him…

“It’s a little funny, don’t you think?”

Crowley’s words draw Castiel from his thoughts, and he turns to find the demon watching him with a curious expression. “I don’t understand how our current conversation could be funny.”

Crowley barely blinks in reaction, so used to Castiel’s over literal way of thinking. “I’ve been kicked down a few notches, and you’ve seemingly climbed the Heavenly ladder.” Castiel’s pauses before his eyes shift away, and Crowley grins. “Oh, yes, I’ve heard all about it. Got to say, I was a bit shocked.”

“Yes, well you aren’t the only one.” Castiel mutters.

“Why you, though?”
Castiel frowns at him, confused. “What?”

Crowley shrugs. “I mean, you weren’t the only angel that helped in sealing away the Darkness again. What about that other one? Hmm… what was his name?” Crowley cuts his eyes up to Castiel with a wicked grin. “You know; the replacement?” He pauses for dramatic effect, tapping his finger against his chin. “Hmm, do you think that’s why they chose that vessel? Because it looks similar to him?”

Castiel is on him before Crowley can even finish his sentence. He grabs a fistful of the demon’s jacket and shoves him backwards. The chair hits the floor with a loud slap, and the sound of Crowley’s skull smacking against the concrete is so satisfying to Castiel that he wants to smile. “Shut. Up.” He bites out through clenched teeth, hand still fisted in cloth and his face only inches away from Crowley’s own.

Crowley grinds his teeth and sucks in a deep breath, and Castiel knows he’s trying to stop himself from lashing out. It’s a wise decision.

“Tell me what I want to know, or I’ll hand you over to Hell myself.” It’s a lie, and one that Crowley likely knows as well. As frustrating as it is, Castiel needs the demon. If they were truly going to break Rowena out of Hell, they would need Crowley to bend her to their own will. As poisonous as Crowley and Rowena’s relationship was, they both seemed to have a knack for getting what they wanted from one another.

“Rowena did a spell.” Crowley spits out, glaring up at Castiel. “She said that whoever opened the gates again left behind traces of themselves – a sort of residual power. She thought she could trace it back to the owner.”

“Did she?”

“Yes!” Crowley’s lips peel back in a snarl. “Now if you wouldn’t mind!!”

Castiel’s nostril’s flare and he thinks about keeping the demon right where he is, laid out on his back and powerless, but he has a sinking suspicion that Crowley won’t talk unless he’s sitting again. Crowley has always been a prideful demon, and Castiel has seen enough of the sin to know that Crowley is as good as useless to him in this positon.

He draws back and pushes the chair upright again with ease.
Crowley simmers and fumes a bit, taking the time to straighten out his suit – or as best he can with his hands cuffed. “Is it just me, or do all angels lack any manners what so ever.”

Castiel rolls his eyes. “I don’t have time to play your games, Crowley. Tell me.”

Crowley eyeballs Castiel in obvious disdain before continuing. “As I was saying… the spell lead a trail back to Hell. Rather that means whoever opened the gates was already in Hell to begin with, or entered afterwards, I’m not sure. Either way, I wasn’t too dead set on finding out.”

Castiel frowns.

Crowley huffs and rolls his eyes. “Forgive me for wanting to ensure my own survival! I’m not a bloody idiot. Anyone with that kind of mojo has got to be a powerful adversary. So I decided to take my time. Put a few feelers out there. Not that it did me any good.”

“And Rowena, then?”

“Well, apparently I don’t get my sense of survival from her. I heard rumors after leaving Hell that she had been imprisoned. As I said, she probably tried to cozy her way into a partnership, and got herself in over her head.”

Castiel turns away from Crowley, staring down at the floor in thought. “And you’ve heard nothing about Hell’s new ruler?”

“Of course I have.” Crowley snorts. “It’s the hottest topic.”

“I don’t understand, why did you not tell Dean and Sam earlier, then?”

“Because it’s nothing but rumors and whispers in the dark.” Crowley tilts his head, eying Castiel for a moment. “I did hear one thing, though. Something… alarming.”

Castiel strides forward, his head lowered, listening closely.
“There’s a word that keeps going around among demons. I’m not sure if it holds any truth, but if so, your precious Winchesters will need to be prepared before entering Hell.”

“What?”

Crowley’s eyes narrow, drifting slightly as if in thought. A sense of tension coils between the two of them, cold and leaving the sour taste of dread in Castiel’s mouth.

“Cambion.”

**********

Dean refuses to be the one to pray to Balthazar. It’s just not gonna happen. Sam doesn’t seem to expect anything less, though, because he just closes his eyes and tilts his head and a few seconds later Dean hears that tell-tale sound of wings flapping and when he looks up Balthazar is standing a few feet away wearing a familiar shit eating grin.

And he’s not alone.

Dean tenses at the sight of another guy – angel, whatever. He’s a little taller than Balthazar, but not quite as tall as Dean, and has dark blonde hair with an angular face. Dean decides he doesn’t like him right off the bat. He’s simple like that.

Casting a quick glance sideways Dean see’s that Sam doesn’t seem to be surprised by this new guy’s appearance, which means Sam already knows him, and it bugs him that Sam hadn’t said anything about another angel.

“And who’s this joker?” He nods angrily at the angel.

The guy blinks rapidly, like he’s confused, and then he jolts, moving forward with his hand outstretched. “Oh, yes. I forgot that you don’t know me. I’m Hannah.”
Dean arches his brow and stares from the guys outstretched hand to his face a few times. When he doesn’t move forward to shake his hand the angel takes a step back, looking slightly awkward. “Hannah?” Dean draws out. “Isn’t that a chicks name?”

Sam curses his name behind him, but Dean ignores him.

The angel – Hannah, shrugs. “Well, typically, but angels are genderless, so whatever vessel we may be in at the time is of little importance.”

“Genderless?” Had he heard that right? “You saying that you guys are…” He glances down to the guys hips. “Junkless?”

Balthazar finally decides to speak, making a show of rolling his eyes and sighing deeply. “Not that this isn’t all very amusing, again, but I believe you called me for an actual reason?”

Sam pushes his way past Dean, cutting a glare into him as he does, and Dean flashes one right back. “Yeah, yeah we did. We’ve talked to Crowley.”

Hannah stops frowning deeply at Dean and jerks her – his… whatever, gaze to Sam with wide eyes. “Did you find out who’s behind tainting Heaven?”

Sam licks his lips, glancing sideways briefly. “Not exactly. Crowley doesn’t know anything. Or at least that’s what he says.” His eyes briefly turn to Dean as he says that. “But he thinks he knows who can tell us what we need.”

“Yeah, only problem is they’re in Hell.” Dean cut’s in, crossing his arms over his chest. “And seeing as Crowley’s trying to keep a low profile that leaves us.”

“Hell.” Balthazar says, giving a bitter laugh. “Of course.”

“But that’s no big deal for you guys, right?” Dean gestures with his hand. “I mean, you guys can just fly down there and grab them.”
“Unfortunately we can’t.” Hannah sighs. “We’ve sent several angels to Hell to try and gather intel, but few have returned, and the ones that do have been… different.”

“Different? I don’t – what the hell does that mean?” Dean scoffs.

“It means that whoever’s pulling the reigns in Hell is powerful.” Balthazar states.

“And I’m not jeopardizing anymore angels.” Hannah shakes his head, his voice hard.

Dean frowns at the words, his head cocking. “You’re not? Now who are you again?”

“Hannah is the one that lead’s the angels, Dean.” Sam says softly beside him.

Dean just arches a brow, taking that in. “Lead’s the angels? So what, you’re like… in charge up there or something?” He looks at Hannah again, his eyes scanning his form in clear assessment.

“Not me alone,” Hannah says. “Seraphiel stands at my side as well.”

“Seraphiel, huh?” Dean mocks, ignoring the dirty look that Sam throws his way. “Well that’s great and all, but I don’t suppose he’d know how we’re supposed to break someone out of Hell’s dungeon, would he?” He holds up a hand, his brows raised. “Or her. No offense.”

Yeah. He’s being a dick, he knows. He just can’t help it. He’s so goddamn pissed off at everything he just can’t resist the urge to lash out. Balthazar throws him a glare to equal his own while Hannah just looks lost, and Dean ignores them both, turning to grab a glass of brandy. He drowns it in one go and then all but slams the glass on one of the tables. He takes a moment to collect himself, taking a deep breath with closed eyes and getting ready to continue this craziness.

“There are very few ways in which a living soul can enter Hell.” Hannah says behind him.

Dean nods his head. Of course. When he finally turns back around Sam is giving him the dirtiest look Dean has ever seen cross his brother’s face, and Dean doesn’t give a rats ass. He crosses his arms over his chest again. “But there’s still a way, right?”
“There is, yes. But it’s extremely dangerous, and you’ll need some assistance.” Balthazar turns away from them, his eyes going towards the ceiling with a grin. “Cassie, dearest, don’t you think it time to show your face, now?”

Dean glances up with arched brows, looking between everyone in the room. “I’m sorry, what?”

Sam’s opening his mouth to say something when there’s a subtle shift in the air and the sound of flapping wings grab his attention. Dean twist’s around with wide eyes and finds himself looking at a familiar face.

He’s frozen all of five seconds, and then his gun is out of his waist band and pointed at the man in the black trench standing across from him.

“Dean!” Sam yelps by him, holding his hands up. “Stop! He’s an angel!”

Dean locks his jaw, his lip twisting. The man – angel, hasn’t broken eye contact, just keeps standing there with a closed off expression, but those deep blue eyes all but burn through Dean. It makes something inside of him shift and swell, and his heart races faster with each second that ticks by with unwavering eye contact. “I knew you were real.” He grunts out, his hand tightening on the guns grip. “Why the hell have you been following me?!”

Sam does a double take, while behind them Balthazar rolls his eyes and Hannah’s face shifts to something almost sad.

“What’s going on?” Sam draws out, looking now between the two of them.
Dean nods his head at the dark haired angel in the black suit. “Some werewolves got the jump on me the other night. I would have been kibble if this Bond Villian look-a-like hadn’t stepped in.”

Sam takes a moment to react to that, his eyes widening in surprise at the mention of Dean almost getting killed. When he’s pulled himself together again he shakes his head sharply. “So Castiel saved you? Why the hell are you holding a gun on him again?”

Castiel? The name rushes over Dean and he wavers a moment, his hand beginning to shake. The dark haired angel’s eyes finally shift from his face down to the gun, and Dean hates that he’s seen the moment of weakness. “And why the hell was he there in the first place, Sammy? Like I said, he’s been following me!”

“For your own safety.”

Dean’s heart speeds up almost painfully at the sound of the angel’s first words. His voice is deep, gravely almost, and it rubs against Dean in all the wrong and right ways and he’s far too sober to think about that right now.

“Since coming to the conclusion that we would need you both, I’ve watched over you.”

Castiel takes a step forward, his trench shifting slightly, and Dean’s eyes are drawn to the movement like a magnet. When he raises the gun higher, the angel once again pauses in his steps.

His eyes narrow and his head tilt’s slightly to the side. “You’re human weapons will do little good against an angel, Dean, as you should remember. You stabbed me just the other night.”

“You stabbed him?!” Sam hisses at his side.

Dean grins, leaning his head back like he’s proud of himself. “Damn right I did.”

Balthazar is between them suddenly, a look of clear frustrated on his face. “Enough. We have more pressing matters to attend to. The two of you can glare at one another afterwards, yes?”

Dean finally lowers his gun, though he keeps his eyes trained over Balthazar’s shoulder on the other
“So, Cassie, care to share what you’ve learned?”

Castiel’s eyes slowly shift away from Dean to Balthazar, and he draws a bit straighter. “I’ve talked to Crowley. He has a reaper that will be able to get us into Hell.”

“A reaper?” Hannah says in clear disbelief behind them.

Dean turns as Castiel steps past him and Sam to approach Hannah.

“It’s the only way to enter undetected. This is the safest route.”

“Okay, first off,” Dean holds up his hand. “Last I heard Reapers had a new policy. One where they’ve stopped chartering people into Hell – or anywhere, for that matter. And second, what the hell?!’” He glares at the angels, irritation crawling under his skin. “Mind telling me again why you needed us to question Crowley when Neo over there seems to have done a bang up job?”

“Actually, if you remember correctly, I said I needed the two of you to summon him.” Balthazar answers with a prim grin, his hands folded behind his back.

Dean spends a full ten seconds trying to reign in the urge to throttle the bastard. In the end he’s still so frustrated he just swings around to Sam, his face pinched in frustrated anger.

Sam actually has the decency to give an apologetic wince before frowning at Balthazar. “Uh… okay. And why couldn’t you guys have just summoned him? I mean, why need us?”

“Oh, don’t you think we’ve tried?” Balthazar rolls his eyes. “It was clear in the end that the only way he’d actually show up if it were you two calling. Yes, apparently he’s quite nostalgic, for a demon, at least.”

Dean scrubs a hand over his mouth and counts to ten.
Sam gets that look again, the one that says he clearly thinks Balthazar is insane, but he doesn’t want to offend him by coming out and saying it. “But it’s a summon. He kind of... has to show up, you know?”

“Yes, that’s what we thought, too. Imagine our surprise when it wasn’t so.” Balthazar brows rise in clear delight, as if he’s thoroughly enjoying driving the Winchesters crazy.

“We’re not sure how he’s doing it.” Castiel cuts in, looking a little put out by Balthazar’s dramatics himself. His blue gaze goes first to Sam, and then shifts to Dean, lingering.

Dean has to force himself to ignore the urge to look away. He locks his jaw and stares right back. Castiel’s eyes narrow and suddenly it’s like a silent battle is being waged between the two of them.

“We imagine Rowena had something to do with it, though.” Hannah says with a sigh. “She must have discovered some spell to free him of that obligation.”

“So what’s to stop him from leaving, then?” Sam’s already turning his body to head back to the dungeon.

“ Summoning him may no longer work, but the cuff’s he’s currently wearing do.” Castiel eyes don’t even flick to Sam as he speaks.

Sam relaxes with a sigh, and also notices for the first time the highly intense, if not awkward, staring contest that’s going on between his brother and Castiel. He arches a brow. “Oh. Well, that’s good.”

Dean feels like the room is spinning, and the only point of steadiness is standing a few feet across from him with a narrowed glare. His palms begin to sweat, and he resists the urge to rub them against his jeans. The fine hairs on his arms are standing and there’s something inside of him clenching yet spreading outwards at the same time. He imagines it must be aggravated tension, and sucks in a deep, calming breath through his nose, willing his nerves to stop zig zagging through his body.

It’s been a long time since he’s had such an intense reaction from someone. It’s almost alarming, how immediate it is that Castiel has managed to get under his skin, and he’s struggling with the urge to puff out his chest and proclaim his alpha maleness like a damned caveman, while at the same time get the hell as far away from the guy as possible.
Either way, his body is freaking surging with energy – readying itself for whatever decision he makes. It’s such a rush that he’s a little breathless, honestly.

Castiel’s eyes widen suddenly, his gaze lowering from Dean’s face to roam over his body, and that was something that Dean hadn’t been expecting. He doesn’t have time to process any type of reaction, though, because suddenly Castiel’s gaze is back on his, and Dean sucks in a silent gasp when he sees a new type of darkness there. It’s a look he’s all too familiar with, and apparently his body is as well, because his cock twitches in his pants.

He feels hot embarrassment creep up his neck, and is about to give in and look away but Castiel does it first; turning his head and looking downwards, his brows furrowed.

With the angel’s gaze finally off of him, Dean realizes for the first time that Sam is talking, has apparently been talking, cause Dean comes in at what sounds like the end of a conversation. He blinks stupidly, shaking his head to try and clear the haze there. “What?”

Sam turns to him with a deep frown.

Dean clears his throat, careful to keep his gaze on Sam and Sam alone. “I didn’t catch that last bit.”

Sam eyes Dean closely, clearing knowing that something’s going on, but luckily he doesn’t call Dean out on it. “I was asking Balthazar how we know we can trust this Reaper to not just leave our asses in Hell.”

Oh, yeah. Good point. Dean arches his brows and swings his head around to Balthazar, trying to look like he hadn’t just zoned out while staring into some douche angel’s eyes.

The look on Balthazar’s face makes him think that he’s not as convincing as he’d like to be, though. Dean’s so mortified at this point that he can even feel his ears burning.

“You can’t.” Balthazar finally says, shrugging. “But at this point we don’t have any other options.”

“So this could very well be a suicide mission.” Dean let’s out a sharp, bitter laugh, shaking his head. “Of course.”
“It gets worse.” Castiel draws out deeply. “The best chance at getting into Hell undetected mean’s you’ll have to choose a more roundabout route.”

Dean doesn’t look at the angel. He just fucking can’t. So instead he finds himself glaring at Hannah. Yeah, maybe it’s a little undeserving and honestly out of the three of them the guy seemed the less douchy, but it was what it was. Hannah, luckily, wasn’t paying him the least bit of attention, and was instead looking at Castiel. The look on the guys face is so surprising, though, that Dean feel’s his glare slipping away into a frown. If he didn’t know any better, he’d say that look was one of longing. Pining at the very least. “I’m assuming this way isn’t gonna be a field of flowers we can all go frolicking in.”

He feels Castiel’s eyes on him again.

“I’m afraid not. In fact, I believe you’ve used this same way before, years ago.”

Dean’s head snaps up at that, his eyes wide. He takes one look at Castiel and knows.

“Wait… are you talking about…” Sam’s voice is tight, weary.

“Purgatory. Yes.” Castiel looks between Dean and Sam, searching their expressions.

Dean’s gut clenches and he turns around before anyone can see the pained expression on his face. Purgatory. Jesus Christ. He runs a shaky hand through his hair; letting out an unsteady breath as memories was over him. Memories of fear and desperation, of running and fighting for survival, of a world of constant gray and desolation.

He had known in the back of his head that it would come to this. It was how they had gotten into Hell all those years ago to rescue Bobby’s soul, after all. Dean had just assumed that the angels would have something else up their sleeves. Some grand plan that would make this easy somehow.

_Ha, because their lives were ever easy._

“Dean?”
Sam’s voice is close at his back, and Dean casts a glance sideways, seeing Sam standing there with a concerned expression on his face. Dean pulls himself together and clears his throat, turning around with a grin that’s slight and bitter. “I’m good.” He mutters, slapping Sam on his back a few times like everything is normal. He looks over at the angels, who are all watching him silently. He can’t help but feel a little unnerved. “Purgatory, huh? Well, I’ve never been one to turn down a chance at playing Wack-A-Mole with some Leviathans.”

“Wait…” Sam is suddenly twitching, eying Dean like he’s got something to say but not quite sure how to say it. He licks his lips. “Are you sure you’re ready for that?”

Dean does a double take, Sam’s words hitting him as hard as a punch. “What?”

Sam lets out a huff of air and throws his hands up. “I just mean, well you’ve been gone for two years, Dean. Two years. That’s a long time to go without hunting. What if you’re…”

Dean vaguely hears Balthazar make an overly delighted sound as he swings on Sam, his body tensely coiled. He takes a moment to process Sam’s words, and his own before speaking. “Are you… saying that I don’t got what it takes anymore, Sammy?”

Sam clearly realizes that he’s teetering on dangerous territory now, and he tries for a non-threatening look. “I’m just saying that you’re out of practice, Dean.”

This is all reminding him so much of that time in their lives when Sam had been soulless and after Dean had left Lisa, and just relieving those memories is making him even more pissed off. “I am not useless.”

“Whoa! I’m not saying you are, Dean.”

“Oh yeah? Then what the hell are you saying, huh? Cause it sounds like, to me, you’re saying that I can’t hold my own anymore.”

Sam lets out an aggravated sigh, running his hands through his long hair. “Dean when is the last time you’ve actually been on a hunt? The last time you actually fought something that wasn’t just the occasional monster of the week stumbling across your path? I mean, you yourself said that a werewolf got the jump on you. How the hell do you plan to stand up against some Leviathans?”
“Oh, I’ll show you how…” Dean’s stomping forward with furious intent when Castiel suddenly appears between them, and Dean barely manages to catch himself before he walks right into him. He stumbles back with a frown. “What the hell, man?!”

“We don’t have time for this.” Castiel says plainly, turning his glare from Dean and around to Sam. “Every minute wasted is a minute more that Heaven feel’s Hell’s dark taint. I refuse to stand around and watch the two of you argue over who may or may not be inadequate for our journey.”

There’s so many things that Dean wants to say in that moment, and most of them start with a good ‘F You’, but the angel’s words hit him then, and he pauses. “Our journey?”

Castiel turns to him again, and their close proximity makes Dean even more jittered than he had been before when the angel’s eyes locked on him. “Yes. I am going with you.”

Dean doesn’t even have time to protest, because Hannah beats him to it.

“What? Castiel, this was not as we planned.” The angel looks frantic with worry, his eyes wide.

Castiel releases a deep sigh before taking a step away. “Yes, well given the danger of the mission I can’t very well allow our charges to attempt this alone. With me at their side their chances of success will be far greater.” Hannah looks like he’s going to argue more, but Castiel cuts him off with a stern expression. “The mission is what’s most important, is it not?”

Dean watches the two, feeling like the silence in the room is loaded with unspoken words, but he can’t imagine what they are. Balthazar is the one that finally breaks the tension, moving forward to lay a hand on Hannah’s shoulder.

“He’s right, Hannah.”

Hannah all but sags, his shoulders and head lowering as he nods. “Alright. But Castiel, you must understand that you’ll be even more of a target given your status.”

Castiel nods. “I understand.”
Dean feels like he’s the unpopular kid at school suddenly, cause he can’t help but feel that a lot of what the angels say have double meaning that only they understand, and he doesn’t like it one bit. In fact, it down right pisses him off. “So are we doing this thing or not?”

Castiel turns to him, his gaze yet to weaken in intensity. “Yes. We will give you time to prepare, but the sooner, the better.”

Dean swallows, bobbing his head and twisting around. “Awesome. I guess I’ll go prepare then.” He walks past Sam towards the doorway, and feels the tension still there between the two of them, thick and heavy. He doesn’t say anything to him.

The sound of fluttering wings reaches his ears just as he takes to the hallway, letting him know that the angels have left.
Dean’s sure if he spends one more second in the bunker he’s going to either go nuclear on Sammy, or start breaking shit. So he leaves. Pushes his way past a frowning Sam with a grunt of ‘going out for a bit’, and all but stomps up the winding staircase, slamming the large door behind him before Sam can call him back. Once he’s sliding into Baby’s welcoming embrace he rev’s the engine and guns it, tires squealing as he makes his escape. A part of him is ashamed that he’s taking his frustration out on Baby, but given the alternative of taking it out on Sam, he figures it’s the more healthy decision.

After the angels had left, he’d paid Crowley another visit, trying to push for more information. He had hoped that the demon wasn’t being completely honest with them earlier, and had more intel on who the newest Big Boss was, and more importantly who was responsible for tainting Heaven, but Crowley had given him nothing but more grief, and in the end Dean had decided that taking some time to calm down would be a good idea.

*****

The old dive bar is familiar, and he pulls into the lot with more excitement than he thought they’d have. It’s been two years since he’d chased his troubles away with the bottom of a bottle at the local bar, and he’s suddenly curious if he’ll see the familiar face of the bartender/owner. When he pushes past the door, his eyes scan the area, going over the dark, smoke filled room. There are a few people shooting pool, old timers with nothing to do and nowhere to go. It’s still pretty early in the day, so the bar is all but empty, and the bartender is leaning over the wood with a small, worn book in his hands. It’s not the face he was expecting to see, and Dean can’t help but feel a bit disappointed.

As he approaches, the guy glances up from his book and his gaze lands on Dean. He looksto be in his late twenties and has a mop of light brown hair and deep set blue eyes. As he draws straighter, Dean notices with vague amusement that he’s pretty short.

“What can I get you?” The guy asks, shutting his book and slipping it under some cubby beneath the bar.

Dean traces his tongue on the back of his teeth as he looks up at the shelf holding a wide variety of alochol. "Uh, beer’s fine. Whatever’s on tap.” Probably not the best idea to get plastered on the good stuff at the moment, Dean figures as he climbs on a stool.
The guy nods and turns to fill his request, and then Dean’s picking up a cool glass and gulping down the familiar taste. He gives a little ‘ahh’ when he’s done, and licks his top lip, where he can feel left over beer remaining. He narrows his gaze and takes in the bartender, who’s begun to wipe down the surface of the bar while humming what sounds like a Metallica song. “What’s your name?”

The guy glances up at him with an arched brow, and Dean quickly shakes his head, feeling his face heat slightly. “No, man. Not like that – I just… I used to come here a lot, you know? And I’ve never seen you before.” Jesus, could he be anymore awkward?

The bartender continues to eye him a moment and Dean squirms in his seat. He laughs then, shaking his head in a way that shows he’s clearly amused. “Don’t worry about it. I know what you mean.” He shrugs, tossing the rag over his shoulder and leaning back against the equipment behind him. “Uhh, I just started not too long ago, actually. When’d you used to come in? I haven’t seen you before.”

Dean gives a silent sigh, grateful that the awkwardness was over. He picks up his beer for another drink. “Bout two years ago.” The guy gives him a look and Dean nods. “Yeah, I know. I was wondering what happened to the regular bartender? Josette?”

“Ah, well you know, she’s still around, just not as much.” He takes Dean’s now empty glass and refills it. “She’s got a grandkid now. I think she just wanted to spend more time with family.” He sits the glass in front of Dean, and holds up his hand. “Chip, by the way.”

It’s Dean’s turn to arch a brow this time. “Chip?” He says as he shakes the guy’s hand. “I’m hoping that’s short for Charles?” Chip’s lips twist and he shrugs. Dean shakes his head, huffing out a laugh. “Damn man, I’m sorry. Well nice to meet you anyways. I’m Dean.”

“So two years is a long time,” Chip states, pointing at the beer in Dean’s hand. “Hope this isn’t you falling off the wagon.”

Dean snorts. “Nah, man, it’s nothing like that. I just left two years ago.”

“And now your back?”

“And now I’m back.” He sighs, playing with the condensation on his glass.
“I’m taking it you’re not too excited about that?”

“Oh, yeah? What gave it away?”

Chip shakes his head and laughs, turning to grab a shot glass and filling it with some Jack. He sits it before Dean. “I’d say you’re entitled to a bit of self-indulgence. On the house.”

Dean chuckles and takes the offering, throwing it back and wincing slightly at the burn. “So you give away all your booze? Can’t be very good for business.”

Chip laughs. “Only to the ones who I can tell really need it.” He leans on the bar again with a crooked grin. “What can I say? I’m a bit of a bleeding heart.”

Dean huffs and looks up. He’s opening his mouth to say something witty but suddenly his words are lost. He’s overcome with an overwhelming sense of familiarity. He frowns, tilting his head a bit and trying to figure out where he could have possibly seen the guy before. “Hey, do I know you?” Even as he says the words he realizes how horrible of a line it sounds like, and sure enough Chip’s brows shoot up. Dean quickly shakes his head, sputtering a moment. “No! I don’t mean it like that. I was just – son of a bitch.” He scrubs a hand over his mouth, embarrassment creeping hot into his face.

“Relax.” Chip’s full on laughing now, which only makes Dean blush harder. “I know you’re not trying to hit on me, man. But no, I don’t think we’ve met before. I’m pretty new to this place myself.”

Dean can’t quite meet his eyes, and he’s really wishing he had another shot of Jack. “I bet you’re glad I walked in, huh?”

“Believe me, I’ve had much worse.” Chip shrugs like it’s not a big deal and sits another beer in front of Dean. “So tell me, Dean. What brings you back to Lebanon?”

Dean gratefully hides behind the beer, internally screaming at himself to stop acting like such a jackass. It’s obvious he’s off his game with all the shit going on. “Family.” He grunts out simply.

“Ah, well I certainly feel you there. Same reason I’ve come to Lebanon.” Chip pauses, a slight
frown on his face. “Well, sort of.” He rolls his eyes at Dean. “It’s complicated.”

Dean snorts. “Tell me about it. I haven’t seen my brother in two years, and honestly I’m not sure how I’m supposed to handle being around him again.” The words roll off his tongue without pause.

“Really? Why so long?” Chip’s face is relaxed and seems almost indifferent to the conversation.

“Some shit went down between us and a few other people. In all honesty it was pretty damn bad. I did some things that I’m not very proud of, and all because of some - -“ He finally pauses, beer hovering just in front of his lips. His eyes jolt left and right in panic a moments before jerking to Chip. He slams his beer on the bar top and surges off of his stool. “What the hell are you?!”

Chip blinks in confusion, taking a step back. “What?”

“Don’t play with me!” Dean is overly aware of the fact that he doesn’t have any weapons on him. He takes a very quick second to scope out the bar, but no one is paying them any attention. No monster closing in at his back.

“I’m a little confused here.” Chip holds up his hands innocently. “And you’re kind of giving off some major psycho vibes, no offense.”

Dean glares. “Yeah, like you didn’t slip me some kind of damn truth serum or some shit! Are you a witch?!” He’s charging towards the bar again.

Chip yelps and stumbles back, his hands now up to ward Dean off. “Dude! I have no idea what you’re talking about!”

“Yeah, sure, cause I just have heart to hearts with complete strangers all the damn time!”

“I’m a bartender!” Chip cries out in a high pitched voice. “It’s kind of what we do!”

By now a few people have begun to notice the commotion. As much as Dean wants to get to the
bottom of this, he knows that he can’t so publically. “This is not over.” He points angrily to Chip, who stares at his finger like it’s an actual gun. Dean twist’s around and storms out of the bar.

*****

He’s in a foul mood when he gets back to the bunker. He takes his time parking Baby in the garage – if they’re planning a trip to Hell he wants to be sure that she’ll be safe and out of the weather in case things go downhill.

He passes Sam on his way to his room, and he’s not alone. The other angel – Castiel, is standing there with him, and from the looks of it Dean had just interrupted some sort of conversation. It pisses him the hell off. Sam’s eyes go over him and Dean knows what’s coming before the words even leave his mouth.

“Dude… have you been drinking?”

Dean pushes past them, telling himself that he does not slide a little further out of the way as he passes Castiel, even though his arm brushes the wall. “There’s something here.” He bites out, ignoring Sam’s question.

Sam frowns, turning so he can continue to watch Dean. “What?”

“There’s something here!” Dean swings around with wide eyes, trying his best to look at his brother and his brother alone. He can feel Castiel’s eyes burning a hole in his face, though. “Yeah, I went to a bar, okay? But the bartender there was some kind of monster, or a witch at least.”

Sam draws closer to him. “How do you know?”

“Because I do, okay?” Realizing that he’s sounding like even more of an ass then usual Dean sighs heavily and runs a hand over his eyes. “Look, man, he had me telling him things. I mean personal things that I wouldn’t ever tell anyone, Sammy.”
“There are currently no witches residing in Lebanon.”

Dean turns to look at Castiel through narrowed eyes. “What?”

Castiel’s gaze shifts back and forth between Dean and Sam. “There are no witches residing in Lebanon,” He says again. “I would have detected one otherwise.”

“De- Detected?” Dean’s lips twist in disdain as he turns to Sam, whose own expression seems just as perplexed. Sam shrugs and turns back to Castiel, and Dean finds himself doing the same. “So what, angels can detect monsters or something?”

The angel in question has the gull to actually look put out, like the conversation is somehow tiring. “Not exactly, no. But I would be able to feel the energy from any type of spell work crafted by a witch, and at the present moment Lebanon is free of any such energy.”

Why is it that Dean feels the overwhelming urge to drink while in the angel’s presence? He scrubs a hand over his face and turns away from a deeply frowning Castiel, because Dean just can’t face the guy right now. Theurge to scream is almost overwhelming and he hasn’t been this worked up in a long while. For some reason he finds it funny, and the next thing he knows his shoulders are jerking with silent laughter.

“Uh… Dean?” Sam’s voice is careful and slightly confused.

Dean leaves them there in the hallway so he can change his clothes. He’s fully aware of how crazy he sounds as his laughter echoes against the surrounding walls.

*****

Dean can’t remember the exact sigil used all those years ago in Greybull that Alistair had drawn to trap Tessa and another reaper, but Crowley does. He begrudgingly jots down the design on a piece of paper, scowling at Dean all the while. Dean hands it off to Sam, who gets to work drawing the design on the floor of the dungeon. It’s a tight fit, and they have to work hard to make sure the sigil lines don’t cross, but by the time Sam’s done there’s a nice little four by four square that’s just big enough for a person to stand in.
Castiel vanishes on the soft whisper of fluttering wings after, and the silence that fills the dungeon as they wait is thick and uncomfortable. Dean looks at his brother from the corner of his eyes, finding him standing still and quiet, arms crossed tensely over his chest. The expression on his face is hard and closed off, and Dean’s chest aches from it. He forces himself to look away, and his eyes land on Crowley, whose watching him with a smug little grin. Dean glares at the demon, shame blooming swift and full in his belly when his thoughts go back to that time in his life when he and Crowley had played for the same team. He remembers all those nights spent chasing violence – *howling at the moon.*

The returning flutter of wings is like music to Dean’s ears, and he looks up to see Castiel standing with a very familiar woman.

“Billie?” Sam steps forward with a frown.

The reaper – Billie, looks between Sam and Dean with a narrowed gaze as Castiel steps out of the Reaper Trap. When her gaze lands on Crowley, though, rage burns hot in her eyes. “You sold me out!”

Crowley shrugs a lazy shoulder, a bored expression on his face. “What can I say? Former King of Hell.”

Billie bares her teeth in fury and surges forward, only to come to a hard, abrupt halt when she gets to the edge of the sigil. She frowns and looks down, a look of panic flashing over her face. It only last’s a moment before being once again replaced by anger. “Let. Me. Out.” Her words are slow and bit out between clenched teeth.

“Yeah, sorry, Billie, but we can’t do that.” Dean sighs and turns fully to her.

Billie’s gaze jerks to him, full of righteous disbelief. “I helped you. I helped all of you! Without us, the Darkness would never have been sealed and all of you would be wiped off the face of the earth!”

“We know that.” Sam says softly, stepping forward with a hand outstretched. “And we appreciate what you did, what all the reapers did. You’re right, we couldn’t have defeated her alone. But we need your help again, now.”

Billie’s laugh is bitter and hard. “And this is how you ask for it? I told you both; I am done meddling in the affairs of humans. I’ve been slighted by the two of you so often I’ve got whiplash, and the only
reason I chose to help you defeat the Darkness was for my own survival!”

“Oh, enough with the dramatics!” Crowley snaps from his place within the sigil, and it’s obvious his presence was all but forgotten by the wide eyed gazes that snap to him. He huffs in aggravation and fixes a glare on Billie. “You owe me. It’s time to collect.”

Billie’s eyes narrow and she crosses her arms over her chest. “I suppose this is what I get for making deals with demons.”

Crowley arches a brow, silently waiting.

Billie’s shoulders fall as she gives in. “Fine. What do you want?”

“We need you to get us to Purgatory so we can enter Hell.” Castiel joins the conversation for the first time, moving forward.

Billie assesses him a long moment, her eyes going up and down his form before recognition colors her gaze. “I was wondering how you found me. Makes sense now, angel.”

“Okay, are we the only ones that didn’t know angels existed?” Dean grunts out grumpily, feeling like he’s pulled the short straw in life.

“Don’t take it personal.” Billie barely casts a glance at Dean before her eyes lock again on Castiel. “Reapers are one of the few that are aware. You could say we’re like cousins.”

“Cousins?” Sam’s skepticism is clear.

Billie shrugs carelessly. “Twice removed.”

“Reapers aren’t quite angels, but they are built as we were, driven by a common goal.” Castiel’s eyes shift to Dean and Sam. “To protect humans.”

There’s something so hilarious about those words that Dean can’t help but laugh. “Really? Cause last
time I checked they offed humans.”

Billie’s lip curls. “We help souls cross over, saving them from an existence where they’ll eventually be hunted by hunters like you.”

“Oh, yeah? And if they aren’t ready to cross over?” Cause yeah, Dean knew all about that.

“There is a balance that must remain. Without it there would be chaos.” Billie arches a brow at him. “You Winchesters should know this more than anyone.”

Dean’s ready for a full on debate, and by the looks of it so is Billie, but Castiel cuts in before either of them can continue arguing.

“We don’t have time for this. There’s no telling how long it will take us once in Purgatory to find the portal to Hell. We need to do this, now.”

Dean glances briefly towards Castiel, finding the angel watching him yet again. Bitterness sits heavy in his belly, and he thinks about telling him that they’ll have no trouble finding the portal, that Dean knew Purgatory like the back of his hand after having spent a year endlessly fighting his way through the oblique forest. In the end he says nothing, though. After all, Dean had a reputation to uphold. He couldn’t let slip that he was always far more affected by the shit that happened to him than he let on.

“What’s got the three of you in such a hurry to visit the land of eternal brimstone anyways?” Billie’s gaze is curious, if not a little condescending. “Lot’s has changed down there, you know. You thought it was a dangerous place before, you can’t even begin to fathom what kind of trouble you’re in store for.”

“Told you.” Crowley mutters snarkily under his breath.

Dean rolls his eyes. “Yeah, yeah. We heard all about the new management. Don’t worry, I think we’ll be fine.”

Billie’s eyes fall heavily on him, and Dean sucks in a sharp inhale when he sees them shift slightly, growing more dark, turbulent. Something cold washes over him, and he only just resist’s the urge to rub the chill bumps from his arms.
“You think that will save you? All you’re condescending camouflage wrapped up in insecure misogyny? You have no idea what’s waiting for you.” She draws off, eyes clouding slightly as her thoughts seemingly drift elsewhere. “I can feel it, whatever’s down there. And it’s strong. Stronger than you’ll ever understand.”

The room is silent, tension thickening the air. Dean’s jaw aches from how tightly it’s clenched, and he wants to yell and fight, to slam his knuckles into the wall until they’re bloody, but he can’t help but feel like if he were to do so it would just be further prove that her words are true.

Sam apparently senses his struggle, and steps forward, nearly blocking his sight of the Reaper. “We defeated the Darkness. I think that proves what we’re capable of.”

“You didn’t defeat the Darkness. Not alone, at least, because it couldn’t be done. Where I’m taking you, you’ll be alone. Sure, you’ll have your angel, but an angel in Hell might as well be shining beacon. He’ll just draw them straight to you. The same goes for Purgatory.”

Dean and Sam turn to Castiel. The angel’s eyes are locked angrily on Billie, but shift to skim over them before he looks away with a sigh, his shoulders falling slightly.

“Is that true?” Dean demands. “Are you doing more harm than good going with us?”

Castiel turns to him with a look that’s almost shameful, and Dean’s so thrown off guard by it that he can’t do anything but stand there stupidly with his mouth open. He didn’t know much about angels, but he had a hard time believing them to be anything other than colossal dicks that ran on pride and righteousness. There was nothing prideful in the expression on Castiel’s face. If anything, it’s almost painful.
“I will be an angel in a land of abominations, Dean. There will be things hunting me, yes, things drawn to me.”

Dean shakes his head, turning away from Castiel.

“Are you sure you should be coming with us, then?” Sam’s voice is cautious, trying his best not to sound insulting.

Dean guesses he can’t blame him. He’s basically telling an angel he’d be a liability.

“I can’t let the two of you go alone.”

“Can’t or won’t?” Dean swings back on him with a glare, his muscles tense. “Cause I can’t help but feel like you’ve been keeping tabs on us this whole time. What, do you think we’ll mess it up? That we won’t be able to do it?”

“That’s not it.” Aggravation settles over Castiel’s features. “You’ll need protection. If the two of you were to… you have to understand you’re role in stopping this is very important.”

“Oh, yeah? Why?” Because dammit he’s tired of feeling like a ragdoll, tossed around by the entire world. For once he’d just like answers.

Castiel doesn’t give them, though, just stares long and hard at Dean, and for the life of him Dean can’t look away. Castiel’s eyes are so vividly blue, and even from their distance Dean thinks he’s never seen a color so bright. It’s confusing, the pull he feels from Castiel’s eyes, and he doesn’t know how to react towards it.

It’s Billie that finally breaks the silence.

“Fine. I’ll take you.”

Everyone breaks from their standstill and turn to the Reaper, whose gaze is flickering between Dean and Castiel with something close to intrigue. She eventually looks to Sam. “You’ll have to set me free first, though.” She motions pointedly down to the sigil painted on the floor.
Sam licks his lips and glances down at the symbols before turning to Dean for acknowledgement. Dean glances briefly to Crowley, whose leaned back in his chair with an arched brow. He shrugs carelessly.

“Do it.”

Sam nods and moves forward, using his shoe to scuff at the concrete until the painting blurs slightly. Billie steps out immediately.

Dean tenses, his muscles readying him just in case Billie decides to take out some anger on them, but all she does is glare lightly at them before clearing her throat and straightening her jacket.

“Well,” She flicks the hair back from her face with a crooked grin, her brows arched. “This has all been very unpleasant.” She holds out both her hands, palms up. “Now Dean, why don’t you grip that impressive bicep of Sam’s.”

Dean’s brows lift. Billie just sighs and cocks her head, waiting. Rolling his eyes he wraps a hand around Sam’s bicep, ignoring the smug grin that Sam isn’t even trying to hide from his face.

“Groovy. Now Sam, you and Angel Cheeks over there take my hand. And hold on.” The last words are said with a devilish grin.

Sam glances sideways at Dean before moving slowly forward and placing his hand in Billie’s. The Reaper grins and turns to Castiel, who hasn’t moved from his spot. “We haven’t got all day, Blue Eyes.”

Dean watches as Castiel takes a deep breath, and then steps forward. When his hand reaches Billie’s, the world falls out from under his feet and all he sees is darkness.
Chapter End Notes

More cowbell...
Hallowed Be Thy Name

Chapter Summary

The brothers & Castiel make their way through Purgatory.

The skyline’s as majestic as Dean remembers, but his breath catches in his throat from the sheer beauty of it anyways. The blushing lights bend and break from buildings and the dark purple and blue edging the horizon reminds him of photos from the science books he had looked at as a kid. The ones that had galaxies of swirling colors and shining stars, and which had left him breathless and longing for a world where his own future was as vast with possibilities and beauty.

“I get it, you know.”

The voice is sudden and unexpected, and Dean’s so surprised by it that he nearly topples backwards as he swings around. He teeters back and forth before someone darts forward and jerks him to safety by the material of his shirt.

“Whoa! Careful there, Dean-O.”

He’s still reeling from the fact that he almost nosedived for the cement way below that he doesn’t react to the sudden man intruding his dream. His heart feels like a jackhammer in his chest and he’s pretty sure if this had been real life he’d need a change of pants. It’s strange, though, how the thought of jumping headfirst off of the building doesn’t scare him, but almost falling leaves him terrified. What the hell is that supposed to even mean?

“Oh, calm down, it’s not like he would have actually died, it’s a dream!”

Dean finally swings around and his eyes narrow on a short man with overgrown blonde hair and blue eyes. The guy’s staring up at the sky as he talks, like there’s someone actually floating around up there, and Dean doesn’t know whether to keep away from the obvious crazy in front of him or kick his ass. “Who the hell are you?!”

The guy looks at Dean with wide eyes before a slow but exaggerated grin climbs his face. “Well
"obviously I’m the man of your dreams.” Dean doesn’t even have time to react on that before the guy
snorts, slapping his hands against his thighs. “Man of your dreams, ’cause of the whole dreaming
thing. And you’re not laughing. Of course you’re not laughing.”

“Try about to kick your ass.” Dean growls, stomping forward.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa!” The man dances backwards on his feet with a hand held up, but despite
Dean’s furious expression there’s a devious grin on his face, like he’s not the least bit intimidated.
“Easy there, tiger. I’m just here to talk.”

“Talk? How the hell are you here in the first place?!” Cause despite everything, Dean knows
that this is a dream. He’s always known. “I sure as hell didn’t whip you up from my imagination.”

“Let me guess, you like ‘em a bit taller…brunette?”

There’s a sort of knowing gleam in the guy’s eyes that Dean doesn’t get, but it annoys the shit out of
him none-the-less. His fist is all but itching for skin on skin contact but Dean doesn’t close the
distance between them and he honestly doesn’t know why. Something at the back of his mind knows
that for the guy can’t be human, or at the very least normal.

So why is he just standing there?

Something clicks into place in his thought process. “Are you the -- the presence that I’ve been
feeling lately?”

The man’s brow lift ridiculously high and his smile is almost pitying. “Oh, bucko, not even close. I
was never the silent watcher type. Kind of a ladies man, myself.” The eyebrow wag is nearly
obscene. “Don’t get me wrong though, we’ve been trying to get through to you for months. I swear
only a Winchester can be so hardheaded.”

Dean grits his teeth. “Who the hell are you? And what do you mean ‘we’?”

The guy opens his mouth but snaps it shut almost immediately. He looks up and his face scrunches in
a frown so exaggerated it seems almost painful “It was an honest slip up, so sue me!”
“Who are you talking to?!”

He waves the question off like it’s not important and steps right up into Dean’s personal space. “That doesn’t matter. None of this!” He motions jerkily around him before turning a narrowed glare back up at Dean. “It doesn’t matter. Don’t get me wrong, I love the symbolism. The whole teetering on the edge thing, brilliant! But this isn’t what you’re supposed to be doing!”

“And what the hell am I supposed to be doing?” More importantly why the hell was Dean even talking to him? He’s somehow made his way backwards towards the edge of the building again, and Dean can’t help but glance behind him – more so at the lack of solid foundation just behind his feet. His heart speeds up and once again he’s left confused as to how he can be so ready to willingly step off the ledge one moment and terrified the next.

Hands fist in his shirt and drag him forward. Dean grunts in surprise, looking down at the short blonde man with wide eyes.

“You’ve got it all wrong, you dumbass! Now quit playing with the idea of leaping and actually do it!”

Dean shakes his head, trying to dislodge hands that are surprisingly strong. “I don’t know what the hell you’re talking about!”

Dean

Dean jolts hard, his eyes widening. He looks around the empty building top.

The grip on his collar tightens as the blonde man all but drags their faces together. “Wake up, Dean!”

His thoughts are suddenly fuzzy, incoherent, and there’s that feeling of something stirring to life just under his skin again. “What?”

“Wake up and freaking remember!”
The blonde man releases him, and Dean stumbles backwards – thankfully clear of the ledge, and sucks in deep, shaky breaths. There’s a voice calling to him, and it’s familiar and warm and all Dean wants to do is close his eyes and sigh. He feels empowered just from hearing it, his skin prickling and the hairs on the back of his arms stand on edge. There’s a sort of power to the voice, a subtle, underlining living thing that makes something deep inside of him swell and reach.

The world around him is beginning to blur, like melting paint on a canvas, and the last thing he sees is the blonde man standing a few feet away from him. He’s got a sort of shocked look on his face and his blue eyes are wide in what Dean thinks is horror. He’s not sure, but he thinks he may have heard a softly whispered ‘No’, but then the world falls out from under his feet.

The first thing Dean see’s is blue. It’s deep and startlingly clear, and in Dean’s waking mind he vaguely thinks that he could see the whole of the cosmos in that color. He imagines that the subtle variations of hues are the galaxies and stars, and the broad black circular outline the darkness of space, pulling him forward.

When he finally realizes that it’s not cosmic beauty he’s staring at, but rather Castiel’s eyes, he jolts, pushing the angel away with a harsh hand. “What the hell, man?” He can feel himself blushing, and scrubs a hand over his face, willing the color away as he sits up.

“I’m sorry; you just weren’t waking up and I…”

Castiel’s words drift away and Dean shoots him a quick glare before climbing to his feet. His anger quickly fades when he takes in his surroundings.

They’re back.

Tree’s surround him as far as the eye can see, and a somber gray colors the world. His eyes sharply take in the shadows of the forest, searching for any sign of danger. He doesn’t see anything, but he knows it’s out there; monsters lurking in the woods, glowing eyes seeking out their next victim.
He swings around to find Sam and make sure he’s alright, only he’s not there. He’s not anywhere.

“Sammy?” Panic seizing him. He rushes about the tree’s, his head jerking left and right. Sam is nowhere in sight. The angel is still standing there, though; eerily quiet with his head cocked slightly to the side. Dean strides to him instantly and grips the lapels of his trench. “Where the hell is he? You were supposed to be watching out for him!”

Faint surprise shift’s over Castiel’s usually carefully drawn features, and blue eyes dart from Dean’s fist back up to his face, their eyes locking.

Dean sucks in a soft breath. He’ll never get used to how intense the angel’s eyes are. He licks his lips self-consciously. He doesn’t release his grip. He needs this small bit of control, at least.

“Your brother is in Purgatory, but has somehow manifested in a different location than us.”

“What do you mean different location? How’d you let this happen?” Castiel blinks down at Dean’s fist clenching his trench and Dean swallows, slowly uncurling his hand. He stands his ground, though. “Where is he? You better start talking right now, man, or so help me…”

“By all accounts he should have been with us. The only explanation would be that the Reaper purposefully placed him in a different location.”

“What? Why the hell would Billie separate us?”

Castiel frowns and tilts his head. “I’m not sure. Regardless, it should be easy enough for us to track him.”

“Awesome. Do that teleporting thingie and let’s get out of here.”

“Actually, it would be best if while in Purgatory and Hell, I refrained from using too much of my power. Doing so will just draw enemies to us.”

“You can’t be serious? Dude, did you forget the memo? I’ve been here before, okay! Whatever comes our way, I can handle, trust me.”
“I’m sorry, but I can’t. The risk is too great.”

Dean’s voice has steadily been rising from his first hushed whisper, and he’s close to full on screaming now. Frustration and anger course like fire through his veins, and he’s nearly at his breaking point with the angel; with all of them. He didn’t want this. Hell, Sam hadn’t even wanted it. So why the hell was it always them that got stuck with this bullshit? When were they ever going to catch a godforsaken break?

There’s this tension between him and the angel, and it’s momentously significant in a way that usually means he’s either about to get laid, or blows are about to start landing. And honestly, he’s so wound up that he would readily welcome either.

Suddenly the tree’s behind him come to life. Dean swings around, narrowed eyes locking in on the general vicinity of where the sound is coming from. He doesn’t see anything in the shadows, but he’s not going to stand around just waiting for something to jump out and take a bite at them. “Let’s get the hell out of here, Cas.” He turns around and finds the angel standing there with an almost stupefied expression on his face. Dean’s opening his mouth to ask what the hell his problem is when Cas’ expression changes in an instant to something once again closed off and hard. He gives a stiff nod, and then turns on his feet, heading south.

Dean looks behind him one more time and then follows.

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When Dean had beheaded Dick Roman six years ago, he had somehow been sucked right along with the Leviathan into Purgatory. Every second afterwards had been a struggle to survive. It was every hunter’s nightmare; to be surrounded by the souls of monsters, many that he had killed himself. In all honestly he almost hadn’t made it. There were so many close calls brought on by sheer exhaustion because he had been too afraid to close his eyes even for a minute. Meeting Benny and agreeing to team up with him had only proved just how desperate he had been. The vampire had surprised him, though, and after long Dean trusted him enough to sleep a few hours each day, Benny waiting his turn to do the same.

It was a strange partnership, but fighting side by side Dean had begun to feel a certain type of…

pureness. In Purgatory he was free to kill without conscious, to release years of coiled rage and hidden grief. If he took more thrill than usual in ganking a werewolf Benny didn’t judge, hell if
anything they’d share a gleeful grin and then be on their way.

Dean never stopped fighting to get back to Sammy, but when he and Benny were finally standing in front of the portal home, he’d be lying if he said he hadn’t feel a certain hesitation. It wasn’t like he didn’t want to return, it was just a part of him knew that he would never again have the sense of freedom that Purgatory had given him. The thought of losing that had left him equal parts remorse and guilt.

Now, being back, he finds that fleeting pureness returning.

He and Cas have been walking for the better half of an hour trying to get to Sammy, and they’ve yet to run into a monster. It’s almost worrying how disappointed Dean is.

Cas keeps a constant distance between them, a good five or so feet of ground separating them. Not that Dean’s objecting. The angel has a way of getting under his skin. It’s only the slight to his masculinity from allowing Cas to lead that really itches at him. He just isn’t the following type of guy, and constantly staring at the back of the angel’s black trench is slowly but surely beginning to drive him crazy. Who the hell even wore trench coats?

“Hey, Feathers!” Cas looks over his shoulder with a deep scowl and Dean barely suppresses a grin. “It’s occurred to me that we’re got roped into a battle we know squat about.”

Cas’ steps actually slow until Dean’s a mere foot away. The frown on his face is deep and curious. “I don’t understand. We’ve told you what’s at stake already.”

“Yeah, yeah, I’ve got the one page summary. I’m talking details man.”

“The information you’ve been given is more than enough to warrant understanding on the cause.”

“Alright, you know what? Screw this bullshit!”

Cas turns with a frown when Dean stops walking. Wide blue eyes observe him before the angel releases a small sigh, apparently seeing just how frustrated and so completely done with this bullshit Dean is. “What do you want to know, Dean?”
“I don’t know, maybe for starters you can tell me why we’ve never heard anything about angels being real before. Why now? I mean we’ve had our fair share of Apocalypses, let me tell you, buddy. So what gives, huh?”

Cas’ gaze is on the ground, his shoulders stiff and his stance even more so. There’s sadness in his expression though, and given the near neutrality of the angels’ face Dean has no idea how he can tell, but it’s there. “Tell me, Dean,” Cas says softly, finally looking up at him as their eyes lock. “Tell me about your previous experiences with the Apocalypse.”

Dean baffles, shaking his head in confusion. His memories automatically return to all those years ago. “Lilith was trying to open the Hellgates. Raise armies of demons on Earth.”

Cas’ eyes never leave his. “And how did you stop her?”

He frowns, his head feeling suddenly fuzzy. “We almost didn’t. Bobby managed to find a spell that would trap her and stop the other seal’s from breaking.”

“And it worked?”

Dean scowls. “What do you mean? Of course it worked, obviously.”

Cas draws closer, until there’s merely a few inches separating them, and Dean straightens. “Lilith led the demons, yes, but did you never question why they never continued her work after she was locked away?”

He’s speechless. It wasn’t like he didn’t understand the question, because he’d thought about it more than once himself during the time. Or had he? Everything’s suddenly so unclear. Grunting Dean closes his eyes and digs the heel of his hand into his eye socket, trying to ease the sharp pain there. A splitting headache has come out of nowhere, and his head throbs. “Look, we stopped it, that’s all that matters.”

Cas’ eyes soften, and Dean’s so surprised by the sight that his breath catches in his throat. The angel’s hand is lifting to his face suddenly and Dean can’t find it in him to step away. Soft fingers barely graze the skin of his cheekbone and tingling warmth gently flows into him. Just like that the pain is gone.
“What…” He swallows and licks his lips, unhappy with how uneven his voice sounds. “What was that?”

Blue soulful eyes search his gaze before dropping abruptly. The angel steps away from Dean. “You were in pain. I healed you.”

Dean’s brows rise. “You can heal someone with the touch of a hand? Of course you can. Must come in handy.”

“It has its uses.” Castiel side eyes him, zoning in as Dean absentmindedly rubs at his chest. “How do you feel?”

The question feels loaded somehow, and Dean can’t understand why. The pain in his head had subsided, but now the strange tingling warmth that had rushed into him from Cas’ touch seems to be traveling the length of his body. It’s strongest in his chest, where he can feel something swirling and building. “I’m fine.” His steps start up again. “We need to get a move on. We haven’t run into trouble yet, but I don’t wanna stand around and wait for it.” The words haven’t even finished leaving his tongue when he feels it. Cas shout’s out his name seconds before someone barrels into his side.

Dean hits the ground hard, barely able to get his grip around the neck of the Leviathan hovering over him, its gaping jaws snapping at his face. He hears the sound of fighting a few feet away and shoots a glance over to see Cas fighting off two more. It’s almost a thing of beauty, the way the angel moves.

Foul breath reeks over his face and Dean’s violently jerked back to the reality of the situation. He grunts, pushing up against the monster to widen the distance between its razor sharp teeth and his face. His blade is tucked into his waist band and he knows he can’t risk making a grab for it. He looks back over to Cas, and catches as the angel beheads one of the Leviathan. His blue gaze darts quickly to Dean, and Dean’s surprised at the desperate fear in their depth. Two more Leviathan blast in on a billow of black smoke and charge Cas, and the angel’s focus is pulled away again.

It’s illogical, how caught up Dean is on that one given the circumstances, but somehow he can’t get it out of his head. He grits his teeth so hard that his jaws aches and pushes again at the Leviathan. He’s got to get to Cas. The guy may be an angel, but an angel up against three Leviathans is still a fight that Dean isn’t sure he’ll win. He knows nothing about the strength of angels, but he’s went up against the Leviathan and he doesn’t want to risk it.

It’s surprisingly how quickly strength fills him, a burning rage that burst’s from within his chest outwards, and the next thing Dean knows he’s flipping the Leviathan over and straddling the
monster. His blade is drawn with a quick sleight of hand and then all it takes is a swift downwards slash and his blade slashes through skin and bone and embeds itself into the earth below.

He jerks the weapon free and surges to his feet. Another Leviathan’s gone down in the time it took for Dean to kill his, and Cas is fighting the last two. He surges forward, grabbing the back of the shirt of the one about to bite into Cas and forcefully pulls it back. The monster swings around to him and Dean’s blade meet’s it, cutting clean and sharp. Another head rolls.

“Dean!”

Sam’s shout catches his attention and he swings around just in time to defend himself against a Leviathan that had been coming at his back. He jumps backwards, feeling the air just in front of him shift from snapping jaws. Lifting his leg he kicks the Leviathan in its chest and sends it flying backwards. The monster stumbles back but doesn’t go down, but before it can advance on Dean again Sam grabs ahold of its shoulder to keep it in place and someone else swings to its front, chopping off its head with a large makeshift blade of bone and stone.

Dean spares the man a shocked look before twisting around to Cas. Another Leviathan body lies at his feet; the last one -- the fight is over. Both their gazes rake over the other before their eyes meet. Dean lingers only a moment before turning to take in Sam, making sure he’s okay as well. When he realizes that he is, he finally looks at the other man standing a few feet away. The breath leaves his lungs and before he knows it a disbelieving laugh is bubbling up from his throat.

“Son of a bitch.”

Benny gives him a crooked grin. “Hey there, Hauss.”
Benny grins good heartedly. “Me as well, brother. Guess Lady Luck was on my side.”

“Yeah well thank God for that.” Dean pats him on his shoulder and let’s his hand curl tight and steady around the bone. Seeing Benny again makes him near ecstatic with happiness, and it’s a relief to have a moment of light in what he knows is a dark situation. Dean has many regrets in life, but one of his biggest was ever letting Benny stay behind in Purgatory. He deserved to be out there, in the real world, fighting alongside him and Sam. Hell it would have been that way if Sam would have ever taken that stick out of his ass about working with the vampire.

“Sam’s filled me in on the little endeavor the three of you got going on. Is it just me or do the two of you get dragged into every holy war?” Benny glances over Dean’s shoulder to Castiel, who for some reason looks anxious. “What mess you gotten yourself into now, Hot Wings?”

Dean and Sam pause at the same time, confusion flickering over their faces. Dean glances from Benny to Castiel and back again. “You two know each other?”

Benny’s brows rise. “You hit your head on your way down?”

Before Dean can say anything Cas is marching forward, his body tense. “He can sense that I’m an angel.” Cas glances between Dean and Sam before his gaze settles heavily on Benny. “Things are different in Purgatory, as I’ve told you.”

“Wait… so you knew angels were real?”

Sam’s voice is thick with doubt, and Dean can understand. Not once had Benny said anything about the possibility of the Feathered Dick Brigade being real. Granted it wasn’t exactly something that just came up in conversation.

The four of them stand in tense silence, Cas and Benny still locked on one another. Eventually Benny slaps on a lazy grin, but his eyes are sharp. He shrugs and glances over at Dean and Sam. “You hear things, you know? Hell, being stuck here I figure you got nothing else to do but gossip.”

The senses that he’d spent years honing are presently scratching on the walls of Dean’s conscious, and it’s impossible to ignore them. But why would Benny lie?
“We shouldn’t stay here.” Cas scours the tree’s around them before turning to gaze pointedly between the three.

“Yeah.” Dean licks his lips, forcing the suspicion down and away. “The sooner we get to that portal, the sooner we can be done with this.”

“I can sense the energy from the portal.” Cas brushes past Dean to take the lead again, their arms grazing one another. “If my calculations are correct, the Reaper seems to have dropped Sam off relatively close to its location, which only makes my previous theory of being purposefully split up that much more logical.”

Benny turns to Dean. “Say what now?”

Dean rolls his eyes, slapping a hand to his brother’s back as they fall into step behind the angel. “Cas here seems to think that Billie separated us on purpose.” He turns to Sam. “Was she with you when you got here?”

“No, it was just me. Why would she separate us, though?”

Dean sighs. “I got no damn clue. Reapers are weird to begin with, and Billie’s been known to have a mind of her own. Hell, for all we know she was just following Crowley’s orders.”

Sam frowns. “I don’t see her following anyone’s orders. Let alone Crowley’s.”

“Yeah, well we’ll probably never know.” Dean turns to Benny, raking his eyes over him. Damn it’s good to have him back again. “You said you’ve heard rumors. Have you heard anything about what’s going on in Heaven?”

Benny bobs his head. “While back some Wendigo soul flashed in, started talking bout some holy war it’d heard word of. Whole lotta fire and brimstone.”

“So other monsters know about this?” Dean throws out to Cas, his voice raised so the angel can hear him from their distance, and even though Cas isn’t facing him he can tell that the angel sighs.
“Demons are known to be prideful, Dean.” Cas slows his steps yet again until the three of them are closer. “We can’t keep them all silent.”

Dean narrows his eyes and turns to Sam. “Did you know about this before the angels paid you a visit?”

Sam scowls at him, obviously not pleased with being accused. “What? No. I didn’t know anything until Balthazar came to me.”

“I dunno,” Dean muses as he walks. “I just find it strange that all the monster’s I’ve ganked in the last few months never let it slip.”

Sam glances over at him with a deep frown, but otherwise says nothing.

“Maybe they hadn’t caught wind.” Benny tilts his head as he studies Dean with a curious grin. “Jealous that you the last to know?”

Dean gives him his most serious bitch face, huffing when Benny chuckles at his side. Looking ahead his frown deepens as he takes in the back of Cas, and before he knows it he’s quickening his steps until he’s passing the angel, who looks at him with a confused frown. “We should be there soon. I’ll lead the way.”

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Castiel releases a deep, inward sigh as he follows after the three. It’s been twenty minutes or so since Dean’s taken the lead, and Castiel can feel how close to the portal they are.

He watches as Dean and Benny walk side by side and talk, grins on both their faces. Its
unwarranted, the jealousy he feels, and try as he might he just can’t force the emotion down and away. When he realized they were going to have to go through Purgatory to get to Hell, he had never considered reuniting with the vampire again. In all honesty he thought Benny would be dead by now, and it had nothing to do with the secret rivalry he’d always felt towards the Cajun. Survival in Purgatory was not the easiest feat, especially for a vampire. Everyone knows the Leviathan’s are at the top of the food chain in Purgatory and anything else more often than not couldn’t stand their own in fight.

Castiel’s eyes drift from the back of Benny’s head to Dean’s, and his gut clenches painfully when he remembers the sight of a Leviathan holding the hunter down, it’s razor like jaws snapping dangerously close to his face. He’d nearly forgotten how helpless he could feel while in Dean Winchesters presence. If Dean hadn’t turned the tables on the Leviathan Cas didn’t know what he would have done. Well, he does, and it’s an outcome he dreads to see even now.

After the bloody battle with Amara, and when the gates of Heaven and Hell had been shut, power had surged through Castiel, the likes of which he had never before felt. All of Heaven stood by in silent shock as his grace raged like fire in his veins, purifying him and making him over once again. Within that moment of holy chaos, Castiel realized with a broken sob that he was forgiven; for everything. His sins were wiped clean as if they had never existed, and when the light burning from within had finally receded, he stood brand new.

It was unheard of.

Even though Castiel had been a Seraphim, in all honestly that wasn’t so different than any other angel. Sure, he had a bit more power and command, but at the end of the day they were all but one in the same. So when he ascended to Archangel his world was turned upside down. As were other’s, because there was only one being with the power to change a run of the mill ang

angel into an Archangel; God.

Castiel had been adamant for so long that his Father had not left them, despite other angel’s lack of belief as well as Dean Winchesters near vehement hatred on the matter. In the end, though, he had found himself sinking into a pit of undeniable despair. God had abandoned them all long ago. He was nothing more than a craftsman who had created this beautiful, ugly world, and then left his creation to rot; perhaps to move onto something better.

There at the end Castiel liked to believe that all of them, angels and humans alike, were nothing more than a failed experiment, a missed attempt at perfection.

It was a dark place to be, but Castiel found a certain comfort in it. Who ever knew that giving up all sense of hope could be so freeing?
Then even that was ripped from him with his transformation.

Now Castiel has no idea what to believe, and he’s maybe too bitter to even begin to figure it out.

In front of him Dean reaches out and clasps a hand tight around Benny’s shoulder, and Castiel’s eyes drop to the ground. In the past, the touches between Dean and him had often than not been so timid. There had always been a sort of climatic tension between the two of them, something charged and heavy, and while at the beginning Cas couldn’t even begin to comprehend it’s meaning, he had eventually come to understand it for what it was. He had often found himself gazing at Dean in bewilderment, questioning how a simple human man could have brought about such strong emotions within someone like himself. And despite the metaphorical walls that Dean had long ago built and continuously hardened, Castiel has always had the ability to read his soul like an open book.

The moment he realized that Dean Winchester cared for him more than he let on was in Purgatory; as ironic as that is. Contrary to popular belief, angels cannot in fact read minds; they just have the ability to hear whispers of the soul, especially when a soul lounged for them. All those years ago in Purgatory, when Dean had finally tracked him down by the Creekside, the hunter’s soul had all but been screaming for him. And when Dean had spoken those familiar three words, ‘I need you’, Castiel had heard what Dean’s soul had truly spoken. Words that had made something swell and ache in his chest, because now that he knew Dean’s heart, Castiel could no longer pretend that his own feelings were flawed. Some part of him had half hoped that he was defective somehow, that this ache that grew daily was nothing more than bad programming. The knowledge that his feelings were returned only made him grieve more, because it was one thing to feel something, but another thing entirely to act upon it. And Castiel had never been surer of anything than the fact that Dean would never allow himself to actually reach out and touch him.

The years that followed were nothing but chaos between the two of them. And then, as if the world mocked him, he had become human. So often Castiel had mistaken his need to be with and protect Dean as duty, and while he had come to consciously realize that it was something more than that, he had also held a certain sense of detachment – be it from their differences in species or his sense of responsibility, Castiel wasn’t sure, but when he lost his grace suddenly things were different.

For the first time ever he dared to hope that there could be something more between them. His entire being was overwhelmed with emotions both raw and thrilling. For the first time, he came to understand what it was to long for something so powerfully that your entire body quivered.

Castiel’s eyes cut to Dean again, raking over his broad shoulders and down to his narrow waist, further still over muscular thighs and appealing bowlegs. He may be an angel again, but that longing had never left him, if anything it may have only intensified.

Lifting his gaze Castiel notices with chagrin that Benny is staring back at him, his brows furrowed
deep. The vampire turns to Dean and Sam, who have begun to speak amongst their selves, before falling back until he’s walking alongside Castiel. Castiel’s been trying to prepare himself for the inevitable questions that he knows Benny has, but now he finds he had no idea what to do.

The spell that Hannah had dug up from the deepest recesses of the Heavenly archives had erased the angels from the minds of every human and creature on Earth, but its influence had encompassed only earth.

“So, you wanna tell how it is that the Winchesters forgot their favorite angel?”

C astiel’s eyes shoot back to Dean and Sam, but their thankfully both still deep in conversation. He turns cautiously to Benny, his mind racing for possible lies that the vampire would find believable.

“It was a spell.” It’s simple, and even more so the truth.

“Okay, I’ll bite.” Benny flashes a grin that’s all teeth, and Castiel cringes, looking away. “So how come you ain’t told them, then?”

“It’s simpler this way.”

“Mm-hm. For who?”

Castiel cuts a sideways glare, telling himself that the more attention they draw to each other, the more suspicious Dean will be. And he’s already so suspicious. “Given the circumstances, we don’t have the time to lose sight of our true goal, which is finding out whose controlling Hell and stopping the demons that have made their way into Heaven.” Castiel draws off with a sigh, his shoulders slumping slightly. “When this is all over… I will tell Dean everything.”

“Sam as well, I suppose?”
Castiel’s head jerks up and he narrows his eyes at the cocky grin on Benny’s mouth. He wants to lash out, to drive the vampire away until he’s out of Dean’s life completely, even if it is for insincere reasons.

“Hey! You two done flirting back there?”

Turning away Castiel finds Dean and Sam watching them. Dean’s face is anything but pleased and Castiel’s heart clenching when he realizes it’s because he doesn’t trust him alone with Benny.

“Hot Wings and I were just getting to know one another.” Benny winks at Castiel before turning to Dean and Sam. “We here, then?”

Castiel notices for the first time the familiar arrangement of boulders and the three large trees growing together.

The portal. They’ve made it.

He moves forward, stopping until he’s standing just beside Dean. Dean looks up at him and frowns, but surprisingly does not move away. Castiel tries not to let that feel like an accomplishment.

“Benny?” Dean’s voice has gone full soldier when he turns to the vampire. Clipped and to the point.

Benny nods. “I’ll keep an eye on the portal, make sure no creepy crawley try to keep you in; just like we discussed.”

Dean nods sharply and then turns to Sam. The brothers look at one another a short moment, communicating in that silent way of theirs, before Dean turns to Castiel. “What about you? Ever been to Hell?”
Images of rescuing Dean from the pit all those years ago flash through his mind. It hurts more than he dares acknowledge that Dean most likely doesn’t remember it – or at least not for how it truly happened. He briefly wonders what false memory has fallen into place that would explain Dean’s resurrection. Maybe he’ll ask him one day. “I’m more worried about the safety of you and your brother.”

Dean’s eyes dart over him and he licks his lips before turning back to the portal. “Yeah, well here’s to hoping that your angel shine doesn’t give get us into more trouble than we can handle.”

Castiel has thought of that on more than one occasion as well. But if Crowley’s words are true, then what waits for them on the other side will be something Dean and Sam have never faced before, and he won’t risk losing them.

Not when he just got them back.
Knocking On Heaven's Door

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

All it takes is the shifting of a boulder and suddenly the three of them are sucked into a raging abyss, the wind pulling eagerly at their clothes and bodies as if it wants to swallow them whole. Dean experiences a brief moment of disorientation, a sort of sinking feeling in his gut and tightness in his chest, and then he becomes aware of cold stone against his back.

Its pitch black and he can’t see anything. He reaches out his hands to find some kind of contact, going only three or so inches upwards before he hits wall, and panic blooms when he realizes he’s all but closed in. “Sammy?!”

There’s some shuffling to his right and a large hand patting against his arm and shoulder, feeling. “Dean? You alright?”

*Sammy. He’s okay.* Dean lets out a shaky breath and squints against the darkness, trying to see his brother’s face. “Where the hell are we?”

There’s more shuffling at his side. “If I remember right, last time I came out of a hole in the wall. We just have to follow the wall… Where’s Castiel?”

“I’m here.”

The angel’s voice is shockingly close to Dean’s ear, and he shivers at the sensation of hot breath ghosting along his neck. Instinct has him wanting to turn his head, but he has a feeling that Cas is even closer than he thinks, so he edges as close to Sam as he can get, ignoring the urge to rub at the back of his neck which tingles.

“This is… very uncomfortable.”

Dean snorts at Cas, following Sam as he begins to saddle sideways. “Don’t tell me angels are claustrophobic.” He tries to make it come off as a joke even though his own heart is stuttering in nervous bursts.
“I wouldn’t say that; although we are used to the wide open expanse of Heaven.”

“Hear that, Sam? He’s just used to the wide open expanse of Heaven.” Even in the darkness Dean can all but feel the judgy look that Sam shoots him. Dean knows it’s most likely not the smartest thing he’s ever done; talk trash to an angel, but he just can’t help it. He’s so fed up with everything and everyone and he wants this to be over and done with already. The heat of Cas’ body is closer at his side than before, and Dean’s glad that he can’t see anything because he has a feeling that if he could, he’d most likely be met with a face full of righteous vexation.

“Shh! I can see a light.” Sam whispers in front of him, the red of a flickering torch up just ahead.

Dean snaps his mouth shut and straightens a little. He may talk shit but when it comes to their own safety he isn’t so dumb as to give away their position. He follows after Sam until he can see the dancing flames as well, growing larger by the second, and then Sam’s popping his head out of the wall to check for danger, and the next moment the three of them are stumbling out into an underground tunnel.

Torches line the walls at each side of them, and there’s no one in sight.

“I remember this from when I rescued Bobby.” Sam scans the tunnel through narrowed eyes until he nods to where there’s a curve in the wall not far from them. “Up ahead are dungeons.” He glances in the other direction behind them. “I don’t know where the other way leads.”

“Okay, so which way do we go?” Dean looks back and forth between each choice, before turning to Cas, whose brows are drawn in a deep scowl. “Can you sense her? You know, with your angel powers or whatever?”

Cas’ brow furrows even deeper before he shakes his head. “I can’t. But it’s not just her. It’s like… I think something is blocking my ability to find her.”

Dean balks. “You saying you’ve got no juice down here?”

“No, I have all other capabilities, just not this one.”

Of course; because life would never be finished screwing with them. Ha. If anything it’s to be expected, really. “So we know for sure the dungeons are that way.” Dean approaches the curve in
the tunnel and peeks his head around to make sure the way is clear. It is. “If Rowena is a prisoner, chances are she’d be down here, right?”

Cas comes to stand just at his back, looking down the tunnel way. Dean’s starting to think that the angel really doesn’t get the idea of personal space. “Normally I would agree, but this is Hell.” His vivid blue eyes shift to Dean’s and hold. “This whole place is meant to be a prison.”

Dean curses and backs away, as aware of the distance between them as he had been the close proximity. “So you’re saying she could be anywhere.”

“We won’t find her just standing around.” Sam glances once more behind and in front of them before heading around the bend and down the tunnel. “This is as good a start as any.”

They’ve drawn their weapons, and as Dean glances down at Ruby’s knife in Sam’s hand he realizes that his own blade with have no such luck against the demons. He looks back at Cas’ and finds him with the strange smooth silver blade that he had used that night in Seattle when he had saved Dean from the werewolves. Cas must see him eyeing the thing because suddenly he’s holding it out to Dean. Dean’s eyes shoot up questionably but the angel isn’t even looking at him, his gaze instead fixed ahead.

“Take it.”

Dean glances at Sam, who’s watching them with an intrigued frown. For some reason it makes him shuffle uncomfortably. “What?”

“Your weapon will be ineffective against demons. Mine isn’t.” He states it so simply and without a note of mockery.

Dean still finds himself getting irritated. “What, you got more of those sissy looking blades hidden up your sleeve or something?” So what if he’s just trying to lash out. So what if Cas’ blade is actually kind of cool looking and Dean maybe wants to reach out and take it, examine it closely and feel it’s weight in his hand.

“I only have the one.” Cas voices, his eyes fluttering over the tunnel for any signs of danger before finally landing on Dean.
He’s not sure why, but the fact that the angel is offering up his one weapon makes something in the pit of his stomach grow warm and tight. His mouth opens and he struggles for words a moment, Cas’ head tilting and a slight frown ghosting over his features. “Dude,” He’s finally able to stutter out. “I’m not going to take the only weapon you have.”

“He’s right, Dean.”

Dean jerks his head to Sam, whose nodding at the knife in Dean’s own hands. “That will do nothing, and we both know it. Just take his blade. He’s an angel, I’m sure he can fend for himself.”

“And I can’t?” Dean spits out angrily.

Sam rolls his eyes. “You know what I mean. Stop being stubborn and take it.”

Dean lets out a loud huff through his nose and slides his knife back into its holster at his belt. He glares down at the strange blade like it will bite him. Cas twirls it in his hand with an impressive flip of his wrist until the handle is pointed at Dean. Dean glances up at the angel one more time before slowly reaching out and grazing his fingertips along the strange metal of the hilt. He half expected something strange to happen, but all he feels is the coldness of the handle beneath his fingers and he curls his hand more firmly and gently takes it from Castiel’s hand. He’s aware of Cas watching him as he examines the blade, turning it this way and that. He had thought it made entirely of silver, but he can see now that’s not right. It’s clearly not metal, though. “What is this thing, anyway?”

“It’s an Angel Blade.” Cas says softly, his eyes tracking the motion of Dean’s hands.

“Of course it is.” Dean mutters. “What’s it made of?”

When he glances up Castiel has a closed off expression on his face, and Dean realizes that it’s not an answer he’s going to get. Annoyance flashes through him again and he sighs. “Well, whatever it is, I hope you got more stored away somewhere. I’d feel like kind of an ass taking your only weapon.”

“They are easily attained.” Is all the response Castiel gives before he’s heading down the tunnel again, this time taking the lead.

Dean frowns sternly at his back before looking at Sam, whose eyebrow is arched in a way that clearly says ‘I don’t know either, man’, and then he’s turning and following after Cas. Dean sighs
and shakes his head, glancing back down at the blade.

It’s strange but he has this confusing thought that the blade fits so well in his grip, that it’s familiar almost. The weight and feel of it in his palm tugs at something at the back of his mind, and Dean gets the feeling of trying to remember a dream from long ago that’s faded with time. He shakes his head to clear the fog there. *Can’t space out now.* Not unless he wants to get killed. Which he doesn’t, thank you very much.

He straightens his spine and pushes all thoughts but their mission aside, his eyes taking in the surroundings.

He’s been to Hell before, but despite that, the sheer *wrongness* will never be anything but shockingly unfamiliar. It’s hot in the tunnels, and sweat is already forming on his brow and the back of his neck. It’s to be expected though, isn’t it? Almost every book, movie and TV show on Earth detailed Hell as fire and brimstone, and while it was true what so many don’t realize is that just as Hell can be scorching hot, it can also run bitingly cold. It’s a cold so intense that you can hardly breathe, overcome with the sensation of a thousand needles stinging your body and lungs. Having experienced the deathly cold and raging fire both, in all honesty Dean would much rather spend any day in the fires of hell rather than the freezing bleakness.

The further into the tunnel they go the more the heat intensifies, and soon the floor is riddled with wide open cracks that bleed vicious red light, like a raging volcano is just under their feet. Dean wouldn’t be surprised if that were true.

The walls on either side of them have begun to widen slightly, and Dean’s grateful for that, his claustrophobia easing just a bit and allowing him to inhale without his breath shuddering noisily in the back of his throat. He’s noticed another new addition to the walls as they continue on, and it’s one that both deeply disturbs and fascinates him all at once. There are faces built into the wall, hundreds upon hundreds frozen in pain and horror. A part of him hopes that they’re nothing more than decorations to strike fear in the hearts of the souls here, but he can’t help but wonder if they are the faces of actual people trapped there within the brick. In the end he has to look away, unable to handle the possibility.

Suddenly Cas is pausing in his steps, holding a hand out to motion for them to stop as well. Dean frowns as he comes to stand just behind him, wondering what the angel’s noticed, and then he hears the voices.

*Or screams.*
They’re low, seemingly from further down the tunnel, but they echo off of the walls and rush into his ears with maddening intensity, and just like that Dean’s taken back to his own time in hell; because he recognizes those screams. They’re the sounds of souls being tortured, of voices crying out in agony and hopelessness.

He’s not had an ‘episode’ from his time in Hell for years and yet suddenly all he can think about is how often he had been the one making those souls scream out. How he had been the one tearing into them with his blade, and sometimes his own fucking hands. His vision swims and a loud roaring fills his ears. Dean sways on his feet, a cold sweat rushing over his body until he’s shivering. Suddenly he’s not in the tunnel anymore, but instead standing over a crying woman strapped to a dirty table. She’s pleading at him, begging him to let her go. Just to let her go. She’s naked and dirty, her hair a tangled mess and her eyes blood shot and gleaming with tears.

Jesus Christ, Dean wants to let her go! He wants to rip off the binds from her hands and ankles and scream at her to run as fast and as far as she can. It doesn’t matter that she’ll never find a safe place to run to. It doesn’t matter that she’ll most likely be caught within minutes and dragged right back to the table. All that matters is he will have prolonged this moment just a bit more. That he’ll have the time to realize what it is he’s about to do and fucking kill himself over it. He’ll come to his senses and spit in Alastair’s face, telling him to shove it where the sun don’t shine.

But as brave and righteous as he wants to be, all he can think about is what Alastair will do to him afterwards. Years of torture flash behind his eyes, and Dean’s knees tremble and his hands shake holding the blade. Something foul and sour threatens to come up from the back of his throat, acidic and sharp, and Dean sobs because he can’t. He can’t take it anymore. Alistair has broken him in every sense of the word, broken him in ways that if Dean allows himself to think about will have him curled on the floor in the fetal position, nothing but a slobberly mess.

He just wants it to stop. Please, make it stop!

Suddenly warmth rushes through his body, the likes that he hasn’t felt in years, and Dean sucks in a sharp breath, his lungs almost bursting from the intensity of it. He feels something tugging at his conscious, pulling him out and away and with a cry he realizes that the knife in his hand isn’t real. The memory leaves him with a sharp jerk, as if forcefully yanked away, and it leaves Dean gasping, shaking like a leaf on his feet as his stinging eyes blink rapidly in the low flickering light of the tunnel.
He’s aware of Sam just at his side, calling him name over and over, his face twisted with worry. He’s even more aware of the warm, firm grip on his shoulder, and the deep blue gaze staring holding his own. Dean feels shamefully exposed. He grunts and tries to pull away from Cas’ grasp, but the angel’s grip on him only tightens, his deep frown conveying a level of concern that Dean for some reason can’t stand.

“Dean, what the hell?! Are you okay?” Sam’s rushing out, drawing closer with wide eyes.

Dean finally snaps out of it. He forcefully swats Cas’ hand away and takes a few steps back, trying not to think of how suddenly cold his body feels from the distance he puts between himself and the angel. “I’m fine.” He grunts out and swallows hard because his throat is as dry as cotton. “I just… I’m fine. We need to go.”

Sam regards him silently a moment, his gaze unsure. But when Dean shoots him a firm glare he gives a small nod. “Yeah. Yeah, okay.”

It’s clear he wants to say something more, but Dean doesn’t give him time and pushes past the two of them, heading down the tunnel as the screams become louder. He grits his teeth and hardens himself against the sound, forcing himself into a cold detachment. Up ahead is another bend in the tunnel, and Dean takes it slowly, carefully, sliding his back against the hot stone and shooting a quick look around the corner. His heart hammers painfully in his chest at what he sees, but there’s no demons in sight at least. He’ll take what he can get.

“Is it clear?” Sam’s whispers at his side.

Dean nods and pushes away from the wall, turning the corner.

The first one he sees is in one of the many cells that line the wall on either side of them. He can’t really tell if it’s a man or woman, because their crouched down at the far corner of the cell. They’re naked, and are rocking back and forth with arms wrapped around their knees. Dean can hear garbled words coming out in quick repetition, and he unknowingly steps a bit closer to the bars, trying to understand what the person is saying. Their voice is high pitched and quiet, and lead’s Dean to thinks it must be a woman, despite the lack of hair on their head. There’s just something about the bone structure of the back that makes him think so, the way the waist is thin and the spine a pronounced bone almost.

“She should have…knew I would…so pretty…”
A shiver shoots up his spine at the mindless ramble. His feet carry him a step closer to the bars, something akin to morbid curiosity driving him.

“Shouldn’t have touched them….get in trouble…”

There’s a hand on his shoulder again and Dean jumps about a mile off the ground.

Sam gives him an apologetic look before turning to the cell and shaking his head. “Come on. We need to keep going.”

Suddenly a high pitched, animal like shriek rents the air and Dean jerks around just in time to see the person, the skeleton of a man, ram his body against the cell in front of Dean.

“I SHOULDN’T HAVE TOUCHED THEM! I KNEW I WOULD GET IN TROUBLE BUT THEY WERE JUST SO PRETTY!”

Dean jerks back as if slapped; the shrill scream of the man’s voice like nails against chalkboard to his ears. He stares in wide eyed horror at the man as he reaches out through the bars towards Dean, his own eyes wide and crazed, mouth gaping and rotting teeth on display.

“KNEW I WOULD GET IN TROUBLE! KNEW I WOULD GET IN TROUBLE! KNEW I WOULD GET IN TROUBLE!”

Dean swings around and stumbles away from the cell, holding back the sharp taste of bile at the back of his throat. He makes it only a few steps when someone suddenly rushes at him from the shadows to his right. He lets out a yelp and jerks away just in time before a woman covered in severe burns and wearing a tattered, filthy dress reaches for him, held back by shackles.

“I’m innocent!” She screams so forcefully that Dean wants to clamp his hands over his ears. “I’m innocent, I swear!”

He stumbles past her, feeling a type of shock take hold of his body as he looks around with wide eyes for anyone else hiding in the shadows. Suddenly Sam is right at his side, a comforting presence pressing into him as they walk, and before Dean can say anything Cas is on his other side. For once
Dean doesn’t protest about the angel’s closeness.

They pass an old man with a sort of large silver piercing going straight through his eyes, the kind that Dean usually see’s in cow noses on TV. The man is moaning, reaching out through his bars at them, but he makes no further attempt at contact, and Dean’s thankful for that.

He glances up at Sam, noticing for the first time the hard, closed off expression on his face, but there’s something wild and slightly panicky in his eyes that Dean recognizes and he curses himself for his own selfishness. Sam’s clearly just as affected by everything as he is. Dean grits his teeth and draws a little straighter, instantly going into Protect Little Brother mode. He’s so preoccupied looking at Sam, in fact, that he doesn’t notice the demons until Cas is shouting out a warning, and then he’s busy fighting for his life.

There are three of them, and Dean finds himself up against a woman in a dark suit with pale blonde hair. She’s fast, he’ll give her that, but Dean can read her body language like an open book, and when she makes a swing at him with her blade he easily dodges, grabbing her arm and jerking her body forward until she’s impaled on his angel blade. There’s a flicker of red just under her skin before she goes down like a sack of potatoes. He looks up and see’s Sam rushing his knife through his own demon, and then realizes that Cas is still fighting with his, bladeless.

The angel seems to be holding his own pretty well, though, and a strange part of Dean wants to stand back a moment and watch in amazement, but then Sam’s rushing forward with his knife and suddenly Dean realizes that they can’t kill the demon.

“Wait!” He grabs a hold of Sam, and his brother stares at him with wide eyes. “We need him!” Realization crosses Sam’s eyes after a moment and Dean digs into his back pocket to pull out a pair of iron shackles. He had grabbed them last minute, thinking that they may come in handy, and apparently he was right. “Hold him!”

Cas briefly looks up at him before understanding dawns and the next second he has the demon shoved up against the wall, it’s face pressed hard against the brick. The demon hisses and glares at them and Dean hurriedly moves forward and snaps the shackles onto its wrist. The skin there starts to sizzle and burn instantly, and the demon cries out.

Dean grabs ahold of the demons shoulder and swings him around, glaring in his face. “Take us to
Rowena.”

The demon narrows his black eyes defiantly, before they dart over Dean’s shoulder to Cas and then back to Dean again. But Dean had seen something for a brief second in that look. He turns to look at Cas, a slow grin forming on his lips when he realizes what it is. “You’re scared of him.” He muses smugly and the demon bares his teeth with a growl. Normally Dean would be all kinds of pissed off if he failed to intimidate a monster, but somehow he finds himself almost gleefully longing to hand the reigns over to Cas and see if he can get the demon talking. So he just goes along with it. He turns to Cas with an arched brow. “What do you say? Wanna have a go?”

A brief look of surprise crosses Cas’ features before the angel’s eyes narrow and then he’s moving forward, taking Dean’s place. Sam gives Dean a curious look as he moves to stand beside his brother, but Dean just shrugs. Who better to interrogate a demon than an angel, right?

“Where is Rowena.” It’s not even a question. Cas has somehow shifted from intimidating to downright murderous in the blink of an eye, and the funny thing is it happens with only a subtle shift in his body language and a blazing glint in his eyes. There’s something in his voice, though, some type of power that even makes Dean tremble slightly, and he has a sudden thought that maybe he should stop talking smack to the guy.

“You don’t scare me, angel.” The demon spits the word out like it’s a disease. “How long before more of us lock onto that shining ball of light and come for you?” He tips his head back, laughing long and loud. “You can’t fight all of us! They’ll get to you, and then they’ll make you watch as they gut your pathetic humans! They’ll rip them open and pull out their insides and you’ll be powerless to stop them! You can’t fight us all! You’ll -- “

Whatever words the demon is about to shout are cut off as Cas suddenly rips the angel blade from Dean’s hand and slices a long glowing mark across the demon’s chest. The demon screams, eyes rolling back in his head and thrashing to get out of Cas’ grip. Cas tightens his hold on the demon’s neck and shoves it even harder against the brick, the blade pushing just into the flesh of the demon’s stomach.

“Tell me where she is!”

“Okay!” The demon trembles in Cas’ grasp, his eyes wide and begging. “But I have to show you! You’ll never find it on your own. She’s being kept in one of the deepest parts of Hell. You need me!”
Dean knows the demon’s just trying to bargain for his life, but he has a point. “It’s the easiest way.” He approaches Cas. “We’re walking blind, here. At least this way we won’t run into anything we can’t handle.”

“He could be leading us into a trap.” Cas growls out.

“I’m not! I swear I’m not!” The demon pleads, shaking his head as much as he can given Cas’ death grip on his throat. “I’ll take you to her!”

“Dean’s right, Cas.” Sam lays a hand on the angel’s shoulder.

Cas stiffens slightly at the touch before looking back at Sam. He turns back to the demon and gives a stiff nod, drawing close until his face is almost directly in front of the demons. “But know that if you are deceiving us, I will end you.”

And okay. Honestly, that should _not_ do something to Dean’s nether regions, but heat coils low in his belly none the less and he’s so mortified and ashamed that his face burns. _What the fuck was wrong with him?!_ Before he has time to even begin to figure it out they’re moving again and Dean pushes the thought as far to the back of his mind as possible. Hopefully to never be brought up again.

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They move deeper and deeper into the maze like tunnels for nearly an hour straight, the demon directing them with a blade to its throat the entire time. Somehow they’ve only stumbled into trouble a few times, and there’s never more than a few demons for them to take care of, which they do with a quickness and ease that’s almost suspicious. They’re captor has tried to run during each of those times, but he’s easily chased down again by one of them and after a few snarls and hisses is back to leading them to their destination.

Dean begins to wonders if the demon is just leading them on a wild goose chase, but then they come to a wide open room that has a good five demons standing guard in front of a large stone door. The demons look up and notice them, and everyone’s still for a full three second before they surging forward. The fight lasts longer than the previous ones, and by the time they’ve finally killed all of the demons they’re all a little worse for wear. Dean and Sam are covered in both their own and the demons blood, and Cas is panting, looking more than a little disheveled and rumpled in a way that
Dean finds strangely amusing. There’s something so satisfying about the angel’s usual straight laced, *prim* look blown all to hell. Hell, even his hair is sticking up a bit wildly.

Their demon hostage on the other hand looks *pissed*. Clearly he thought that the guards would have gotten the upper hand, and he’s back to spitting hellfire and baring his teeth in a look that’s nothing short of feral. Cas looks like he *done* with the bastard, and Dean imagines he’ll be glad when they finally get to Rowena so he can kill the guy once and for all.

Sam approaches the large stone door, studying it with narrowed intensity. There’s no door knob, but there *is* a sort of glowing sigil near the wall to it. “Open it.” He demands, turning to the demon.

The demon grins wickedly. “I can’t.”

Sam scowls and jerks the man forward by the material of his suit. He swings him around and wrestles his hands up, even though the position draws of sharp hiss of pain from the demon, and presses the demon’s palm against the sigil. Nothing happens.

The demon begins to laugh, wide black eyes shifting from each of them in glee. Dean can tell that Sam’s on the edge, and he knows that if he doesn’t think of a solution soon Sam will just kill the bastard to shut him up. He glances at the bodies lying on the ground and an idea strikes him. Rushing to the nearest one he drags it over to the door and lift’s its hand to press against the sigil. Nothing happens.

The demon laughs louder.

*He was so sure!*

“I think I understand.” Cas says suddenly, his eyes looking over the sigil and then turning to the lifeless body at Dean’s feet. He approaches and kneels in front of it, holding his palm out to Dean. Dean frowns down at him a moment before he realizes what Cas wants and he hands over the angel blade. Cas nods in thanks and proceeds to rip the suit jacket and button down shirt open on the body, and then he’s carving into the dead man’s chest.

Dean squawks in surprise and Sam is staring down at Cas like he’s flipped his lid.

“What the hell are you doing?!”
Cas doesn’t answer, just continues to carve and cut until a large intricate sigil covers the dead man’s chest, and then his eyes shut and his mouth opens and he starts chanting. The words are unfamiliar and strange, and Dean has no idea what they are, but apparently the demon does, because he suddenly starts thrashing in Sam’s arms, screaming as if in pain, and then his head tips back and black smoke shoots out of his mouth.

Dean watches with wide eyes as the smoke surges past him and into the mouth of the body lying at Castiel’s feet.

“The shackles!” Cas shouts at Sam, and Sam quickly unlocks the cuffs from the body that is now slumped at his feet and tosses them to Cas, who makes quick work of detaining the demon as the black smoke vanishes from sight within its new vessel, and then the demon’s eyes jerk open.

He lashes out in his new body, but Cas stills him instantly with a blade to his throat and narrowed eyes. “Open it.” He demands.

The demons glares up at him before Cas drags him to his feet and then his hand slaps over the sigil and the large stone door quakes and trembles before it slides open.

Dean turns wide eyes at Cas. “What the hell was that?”

Cas glances sideways at him. “A sigil to expel the closest demon within reach and force it’s possession of a new body. It’s all very simple, really.”

Dean arches a brow and looks at Sam, who’s just as bewildered. “Simple. Yeah.” He shakes his head and chuckles, turning to look at the set of stairs leading down into darkness. “I don’t suppose anyone has a flashlight?”

Sam snorts at his side, rolling his eyes.

“Yeah. Thought not.” Dean sighs. Well. It wasn’t like he expected this to be easy anyways. Licking his lips he starts his decent.
Thankfully they don’t go very long before flickering lights glow in the distance, torches making their presence known. Castiel’s handed over the angel blade again, and Dean holds it in a firm grip out from his body, his eyes trying to adjust to the dim light and search for any sign of trouble. Cas is just behind him, and Sam holding up the rear with Ruby’s knife, just in case they get attacked from the back.

It’s strange, but Dean feels a certain sense of rightness from the three of them together. Don’t get him wrong, he still doesn’t trust the angel, not completely, at least, but the guy’s kind of proved himself during this Hell trip and Dean is a little alarmed at how strongly he wants to trust him. The realization is more than enough to cause a slight but luckily not visible panic. Dean doesn’t trust people. Trusting people is what gets you dead. Aside from Sammy there’s no one alive that he trusts, and even in the past it isn’t like it was something he just tossed around freely. But there’s just something so… so familiar about the angel that he finds himself automatically opening up to him. Sure, he’s still an ass to the guy, but even Dean know enough about himself to recognize actual insults from teasing mockery. And he’s pretty sure Sam has begun to notice it, too.

Dean resist’s the urge to moan aloud, because if he knows his brother, he knows that the bastard will up and say something about it sooner or later. He just hopes it’s later, or at least when the angel has fluttered off somewhere.

After what seems like forever they make their way to the bottom of the steps. Dean looks around the incredibly large space with wide eyes, taking in the stone columns that run from floor to ceiling, and the stone slabs that sit before them, and he tries to think of anything else than what the place obviously is, but he can’t.

“Is this… a crypt?” Sam’s the one that voices it, looking around with wide eyes.

Dean sighs. “Of course it is. Because, why not?” He moves forward, his eyes raking over rows and rows of sarcophaguses. There has to be a hundred at least. “What the hell is this place?” He swings around to the demon with a glare.

The demons grins with teeth coated in blood from where it’s vessel had fought earlier. “It’s where you wanted to be!”
Dean swings around to look over the stone graves again with a pinched expression. “Are you saying… is Rowena in one of these things?!”

“Which one?” Sam gets right up into the demon’s face with a deadly glare. “Which one is she in?!?”

The demon’s grin just deepens, twisted and half crazed suddenly, his eyes wide. “He’s coming. He’s coming for you all! You won’t be able to run! He’ll swat your little angel like a fly and then cut you open and eat your entrails!”

Sam’s eyes widen slightly as he shares a look with Dean. “Who’s coming?”

The demon strains forward against Castiel’s hold with eager eyes. “Him!” He hisses with glee. “He’s more than you’ve ever seen, so much more! You can’t run from him. HE’S EVERYWHERE!” The demon cuts off into hysterical laughter again, and Sam’s so taken aback that he just stands there with wide eyes and stares. Apparently Cas is caught off guard as well because when the demon jerks against his hold this time he actually breaks free.

It happens too fast for anyone to stop.

The demon shoves Sam against a pillar directly behind him, and then flings himself onto the knife in Sam’s hand.

Sam stares down at his knife embedded in the demons stomach with wide eyes, while a flicker of red flashes under the demons skin, and then its body slumps lifelessly to the floor.

For a moment the three of them stand there silently, surprised at what just happened. Then Cas turns to them, and his eyes are deadly serious.

“We need to hurry.”

There’s an underlying edge of worry to his voice that kicks both Dean and Sam into gear, and then their rushing to the stone slabs and pushing open the tops, grunting with exertion. Cas quickly joins them and the three of them go through at least twenty of the tombs before Dean jerks away from the one he had just opened with a cry of frustration.
“How the hell are we supposed to find her with so damn many?! Half of the one’s I’ve opened have been empty, and the other half are filled with nothing but bones! Who’s to say that she’s not bones herself?!”

“We gotta keep trying, Dean.” Sam grunts, pushing the lid off of another and peering inside. He sighs heavily and then moves on to the next, but Dean can see the look of hopelessness sneaking into his features.

“Can’t you do something?” Dean swings on Cas this time.

The angel frowns down at the tomb he had just opened and goes quickly to the next, not even looking up at Dean. “Whatever is blocking me is still in place. Even more so the room seems to be nullifying all magick. I’d assume it’s why they have her here in the first place.”

“Great.” Dean throws his hands up, looking helplessly along the tombs.

“He’s gritting his teeth and pushing it slowly open when something at the back of his mind awakens. You could find it. He pauses, his eyes raking over to Cas and Sam. You’re different now. If anyone can find it, it’s you. It’s a ridiculous notion. Even with his new ‘abilities’, Cas had said that the room was warded against magick. Even more to the point Dean had no damn idea what he could do was even called, if there was even a name for it, and honestly, how the hell would he even begin? It’s not like he had real control of… whatever. It just came and went on its own violation. Sure, it tended to come out when he actually needed it the most, but that didn’t mean it would this time… did it?

Dean glances over at his brother and the angel again, but they’re distracted, hurriedly opening up the tombs and looking inside.

If there’s ever a time to try it… it’s now.

Licking dry lips Dean turns back to the slab under his hands. He grips tight on the stone, so tight that his knuckles bled white. Closing his eyes and takes a deep, steadying breath. And then he reaches.

He’s not sure if it’s because of the direness of the situation or what, but he’s met almost instantly with
a burst of white hot... something. He sucks in a silent gasp, feeling something surge and build within him, stretch and fill until his body feels incredibly small and pulled too tight. He jerks his eyes open and stumbles away from the tomb, sucking in yet another gasp when he sees a faint, underlining glow laid out on everything before him. It’s red like the flickering flames of the torches, and there’s something so unnerving and wrong about it that he almost shuts his eyes against the sight.

Something at the edge of his vision catches his eyes just before he does, though, and turning his head he notices that there’s another color in the room. It’s like a storm cloud, almost, containing hints of black and swirling gray, and it vibrates faintly over a tomb at the end of the room. And just like that, Dean knows.

He stumbles forward, his steps quickening until he’s all but running. He hears Sam call out his name but ignores him, sliding to a stop in front of the tomb with the swirling storm over it. He stares at the strange aura a moment, a part of him itching to reach out and touch it, to see if it has any feeling, if it’s somehow solid.

“Dean.”

The deep voice jerks him out of his thoughts, and Dean looks up with wide eyes to see Cas standing only a few feet from him. Dean is blinded. He shuts his eyes with a gasp at the light pouring out from Cas, but only a second later they surge open again, because he wants to look, he needs to. His breath leaves his throat and his heart pounds within his chest.

Beautiful.

There’s no other word to describe the glowing light surging within Cas. It’s both white and blue at the same time, and so electric that Dean feels the hairs on his arms stand on edge. Dean could stare into that light forever, could lose himself in it, but he can feel that whatever he’s doing is taking a toll on him, making his muscles sluggish and his body tired. As if on cue, the colors begin to slowly fade. Dean lets out a tragic whimper, wanting to hold onto Cas’ light as long as possible, and as if giving one last desperate attempt the thing inside of him flares in one final spark, reaching out, and at the edge of his vision Dean realizes that he’s glowing too. He gets only a faint image of the same white blue before everything’s gone.

He slumps against the slab with a groan, and Sam is suddenly there, pulling him up and checking him over.

“Are you okay? What the hell, man? What happened?” Sam looks worried, but nothing else. He’s not confused or shocked and it’s clear that he hadn’t seen anything out of the ordinary.
Dean almost sighs in relief, because he still wants to keep this from Sam as long as possible. He swallows hard and chances a glance up at Cas, flinching when he finds the angel watching him with eyes wide with shock and something Dean can only call awe. He turns away, pulling away from Sam’s hands and reaching for the lid of the sarcophagus in front of him. His arms feel like limp noodles, though, and he barks at Sam to help him.

Sam snaps into motion, bending down to help push, and then their staring down at Rowena.

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She looks… bad. In all honesty she looks dead. Her face is deathly pale and her hair a dull mess. Her lips lack all color and her dress is torn and faded, nothing more than rags. It’s obvious she’s been in the tomb for some time, and Dean’s so sure she’s dead, but then Sam reaches out to check her pulse and after a silent moment that seems to drag on forever he turns wide eyes up to them.

“She’s alive. I mean her pulse is almost nonexistent, but it’s there.”

Dean sighs in relief, wanting to slump down on the cold ground and just sleep for days. But he can’t do that. Not yet. “We gotta get her out.”

Sam jumps into motion, carefully checking her over first before gathering her into his arms. She hangs limp and lifeless against him, and the sight is so shocking from how he remembers Rowena that Dean almost feels sorry for her. Almost.

“We need to leave. Now.” Cas is already on his feet, looking around the room with wide eyes. “If what the demon said is true…”

Dean snorts, struggling to his feet. “Yeah. I don’t know about you guys but I’d rather not wait around and have my entrails eaten, thank you very much.”
Sam grunts in agreement and then they’re heading back through the large room towards the steps. Dean tries to keep up with his sasquatch of a brother, but he can feel himself dragging behind, out of breath. Cas glances over his shoulder at him and Dean schools his features, forcing himself to pick up the pace.

They’re almost at the bottom of the steps when the demons come.

There’s a lot, this time. More than they can handle.

Dean swears, stumbling back as they all pile in down the steps, black suits and black eyes surrounding them.

Sam flickers a panicked look over them, looking for some kind of way out of this mess, but Dean can’t see any.

“Knew you were here, angel.” One of them hisses with a feral grin at Cas. “We could see your glow a mile away.”

Cas glowers at them as the three of them press in close together until their backs are all but touching.

“Please tell me one of you has something up your sleeve.” Dean mutters darkly, eyeing the demons as they close around them, caging them in.

“I was hoping you did.” Sam says humorlessly, somehow holding Rowena with only one arm while wielding his knife with his free hand.

Dean groans and turns to Cas. “Come on, man. Angel mojo would be good right about now.”

Cas darts his eyes down at Dean, his gaze skittering over his body before lifting to the demons. “Let’s just hope it doesn’t get us killed.”

And then Cas is swinging around, both hands lifted. Dean feels a grip on his shoulder before the
world falls from under his feet.

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He hits land again with a hard stumble, nearly losing his balance and falling on his ass. He hears a heavy thud somewhere beside him and then Sam grunt, and can’t help but grin when he realizes his brother actually did bust his ass. He remembers that he was holding Rowena then and searches for him, finding Sam on the ground with a still unconscious Rowena lying across his lap. Dean stumbles to them and checks Rowena’s pulse, sighing when he realizes she’s still alive. He gives Sam a shit eating grin. “Having a little trouble there, Sammy?”

Sam glares up at him before he starts to struggle to his feet. His gaze moves past Dean and he stiffens, eyes shooting wide. “Dean.” His voice is nothing more than a whisper.

Dean knows that look. He’s seen it one too many times when life decides to kick their ass, and he tries to mentally prepare himself for whatever behind him as he straightens and turns around.

The first thing he realizes is that they are back in Purgatory. The second is that Cas is standing a few feet away from him, with his back at Dean.

And then Dean sees Benny. And he sees the blood. He’s covered it in, his face nearly painted. Benny’s eyes are wide and the white of them nearly blinding against the dark crimson coating his face and neck. There’s long, black claws dug deep in his throat, and Dean can see blood slowly seeping out past the part of the wound that isn’t completely plugged.

“It took longer than I thought, you know.” The voice comes from someone young, hardly even a man, and there’s something so familiar and shocking about him that Dean’s momentarily caught up in trying to place his face. “Of course, I felt it the moment you entered Hell. I mean,” He flicks his free hand towards Dean and Sam. “They were easy enough, but you?” He laughs mockingly, shaking his head almost as if he’s disappointed. “You should have known better, Castiel.”

Dean finally snaps out of whatever damn trance he had been in and fully takes in the situation. Benny. Someone has Benny. Someone’s trying to kill Benny. He lets out a growl and surges forward.
“Ah, ah, ah!” The man sing-songs, holding a hand out towards Dean while digging his black claws a little deeper into Benny’s neck. Benny lets out a pain filled groan, his eyes darting to Dean. Despite the pain that he’s obviously in, Dean sees the fire behind his eyes, and he understands the hard determination there.

Benny is silently telling him to risk’s be damned, he’d better gank the bastard. But Dean knows if he moves a step closer Benny’s throat will be ripped out. And he can’t. Not when he’s just got him back!

“There’s a good boy.” The man purrs at Dean, his eyes darkening with wicked intensity. “Dean Winchester. I never thought I would see you again.” He starts to laugh. “Life’s funny like that, isn’t it?”

Dean grits his teeth. “Who the hell are you?!”

The man turns his grin back to Castiel. “I suppose that’s the question, isn’t it. *Who am I?*” He laughs, shaking his head. “Do they even know?!” He flicks his gaze to Dean again, his eyes wide. “How about it, Dean? Do you remember me? Alliance?” He leans forward, his head sneaking over Benny’s shoulder to whisper. “You told me I was a superhero.”

Dean’s still struggling when he hears Sam’s soft gasp at his side. He turns and sees his brother staring at the guy with wide eyes. “Jesse?”

The name strikes Dean’s memory instantly and the pieces fall into place. He jerks his gaze back and his eyes widen. Jesse Turner. He and Sam had taken a case in Alliance, Nebraska years ago when people started up and dying in weird, slap-stick wacky kind of ways. They had been lead back to Jesse Turner, who had unknowingly been killing everyone with nothing but his mind. They’d found out that Jesse was a Cambion, a child born from both demon and human; and that he was ultimately all-powerful. Jesse had up and vanished on them at the end, and they hadn’t seen or heard any word of him afterwards.

Until now.

Dean feels his stomach drop to the ground, and in that moment he realizes this is *his* fault. He had been so sure that Jesse was *good*, that they didn’t have to stop him. *He had seemed so good!*

“I’ve got to say, this is a reunion I never saw coming.” Jesse asks with a wicked grin, his gaze lazily
moving from Sam to Dean and back again. “I thought the both of you would be long dead by now.”

Dean grits his teeth, his eyes breaking away from Jesse to rake over Benny and assess the full extent of his wounds. It’s obvious he’d put up a fight against the Cambion, his clothes ripped and torn in various places and Dean can just make out bruises forming under the blood on his face. The sight of it makes his stomach twist painfully. He chances a glance over to Cas, finding him standing ram rod stiff, his eyes narrowed to dangerous slits. “I’m assuming when you flashed us out of Hell you didn’t mean to make a pit stop back here.”

Cas shakes his head, not tearing his eyes away from Jesse. “We were forcefully pulled here.”

Dean nods, having expected nothing less. A thought strikes him then, and he jerks his gaze to Jesse again. “You’re the new King of Hell, aren’t you?”

Jesse rolls his eyes, lifting his hand to pet at the hair on Benny’s temple like he doesn’t have a care in the world. Dean watches as Benny flinches and shuts his eyes, and he hates that he can’t do anything to help. “King. That word is so pretentious. Not my style at all.” He pursues his lips in thought, dragging the pads of his fingertips over Benny’s cheek before turning a wicked grin to them. “I’m just helping the demons come into their own. And Hell? There’s just so much potential there. It was wasted on Crowley, honestly.” Jesse’s eyes flicker down to Rowena with clear distaste. “But I see he’s still alive. Why else would you have gone on this pathetic little rescue mission.”

Before Dean can even come up with a response the angel blade is jerked from his hand by an invisible force, flying outwards to land in Castiel’s open palm. The angel surges forward and Dean opens his mouth to scream at him to stop but he doesn’t even get that far before Jesse flicks his wrist and Cas goes flying backwards and into a tree. The angel goes down with a grunt, crumbling on the ground.

An exhilarated look comes over the Cambion’s face. “This is the most fun I’ve had in ages! Demons die so quickly! They’re no real challenge. And you two,” He flicks his fingers at Dean and Sam. “are even more pathetic. Even more so than when we first met. But you!” He motions to Castiel before closing his eyes and sucking in a deep breath, his face nearly euphoric. “There’s just something about angels that does it for me. Here I was thinking that I’d never see another of you. You haven’t sent any Heavenly scouts in so long! Imagine my surprise when I finally sense another, and it ends up being you, Castiel!”

Suddenly his crazed grin falls, his eyes narrowing to barely open slits and his claws dig deeper into Benny’s throat. “I remember how you tried to kill me, you know. I remember it like it was yesterday. You were so sure of yourself. It was almost like you knew.”
Benny gurgles, blood beginning to seep out of his mouth, and Dean panics. “Stop! Please, just... just stop!”

All trace of fury leaves Jesse’s face as he turns with full confusion on Dean. His wide eyes blink almost innocently before he looks down at Benny. “Oh. Do you know each other?” It’s obvious that they do, though. Jesse had to have been watching them for a long time, the moment they stepped through the portal to Hell at least. “Are you friends?” Jesse continues, turning now to look at Benny in his grip. His lips pull to a deep frown, and then, without warning, his claws close around Benny’s throat and pull.

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Time moves slow. Blood rushes out in a thick spray, a vibrant red against the grey of Purgatory. It paints the ground and rolls down Benny’s front in thick rivulets, and Dean can’t look away. Benny’s somehow still on his feet, despite the fact that Jesse has stepped away, and Dean hears a strangled whimper bubble up from his throat and quickly fading dull eyes drift weakly up to his own. It only last’s a split second, but Dean see’s sparks light up in those eyes, see’s impulses surge and life echo, and Benny opens his mouth, as if to say something… and then he crumples to the ground in a lifeless heap.

Dean’s aware that he’s screaming. It’s a cry of fury and retribution the likes he’s used only a few times before in his life, and he’s running, pushing past Sam and charging at the evil in front of them. For what it’s worth he gets close, so close, but maybe Jesse had let him. And then he’s sailing through the air, the world rushing past him with startling speed before he hits the ground again. For a moment he can’t breathe, the pain taking his breath away, and then he sucks in a shocked gasp, gulping in air greedily and rolling to his side. He sees Sam rushing Jesse with blurred vision, and then his brother is sent flying too, landing only a few feet away.

“Sam.” Dean whispers harshly, his lungs still stinging. He tries to crawl to him, to grab onto him, because if this is the end, he wants to be holding onto his brother at least.

“THEY’RE JUST SO WEAK!” Jesse cries out madly to the trees above, and then his chest is shaking with silent laughter, his shoulders bouncing up and down. He looks every bit the maniac, with blood covering his face from Benny’s death, and when he lift’s a hand to lick at the stick substance there Dean shuts his eyes with a whimper. When he opens them again all laughter has faded and Jesse’s expression holds murderous intent. He begins to march towards them.
This is really it...

Suddenly a flash of light momentarily blinds him, and Dean covers his eyes with a hiss, the sound of a struggle filling his ears. He forces his hand away, squinting and trying to make out what’s happening.

Cas and Jesse are fighting.

*Cas is fighting Jesse!*

And it actually looks like he’s holding his own.

The angel’s body glows as they trade blows, and Dean realizes that Cas doesn’t have his angel blade. He searches the ground, thinking that Jesse must have knocked it out of his grip again. If he can get to the blade maybe he can kill Jesse. Dean doesn’t know if it works against Cambions, but he could try at least!

He begins crawling on his hands and knees, his eyes jerking up every other second to check on the battle raging a few feet away from him.

“*You’ve gotten stronger, Castiel!*” Jesse’s voice is unmistakably thrilled, as if there’s nothing in the world that makes him happier.

Dean crawls desperately along the ground, trying to keep his gaze focused in front of him but he can’t help but keep looking up at the fight to make sure that Cas is alright. He hears a deep grunt and jerks around to see Cas with his back on the ground, Jesse kneeled over him with a hand tight around his throat.

“But you’re still not strong enough.” The Cambion purrs as he squeezes Castiel’s throat.
Castiel’s eyes bulge helplessly and Dean cries out, fumbling along the ground to stand and as he does his hand brush over something smooth and hard. *The blade!* He jerks it up and runs.

Castiel sees him coming and his eyes go larger, fear creeping into their depths. Dean doesn’t care. He knows there’s a slim to none chance that this will actually work, but he’s not going to just stand by and let Cas die! He surges forward, right at Jesse’s back now, lift’s the blade, and swings down.

It happens faster than the blink of an eye. Jesse twists around with a wicked grin, grabs Dean’s hand, the one holding the blade, and with swift steps he’s at Dean’s back.

The pain is sharp and deep. Dean lets out a shocked cry, his eyes shooting wide and his body trembling. He slowly looks down at his hand, at Jesse’s hand over his, and at the blade embedded deep in his belly. He can feel Jesse’s breath at his ear, hot and wet, and he shivers from it.

“Always so typical, Dean.”

Dean grunts when Jesse releases his grip, and he’s unable to look away from the sight of his own fist curled around the blade’s handle. Blood seeps out, coating his hand and quickly staining his shirt.

Suddenly Jesse is blasted off of his back, sailing through the air, and Dean blinks dumbly at the sight before Cas is crowding his vision. His eyes are huge and incredibly blue, bluer than normal and his mouth is moving but Dean can’t quite hear the words. He feels a painful *rip* from his stomach then and cries out, his legs crumbling out from under him. Cas eases him down to the ground and his hands are all over Dean, and Dean feels something warm and soothing rushing through him.

“No…..o…."

He blinks up at Cas in a daze, wondering why the angel looks so *wrecked*. The dim around his vision is growing wider, and there’s a loud ringing in his ears.

“No, no, no, no, no!”

He coughs, feels blood splash to coat his lips and that just makes Cas freak out even more. There’s something so unsettling about the look on the angel’s face that Dean lifts a trembling hand up,
weakly grabbing onto the angel’s wrist at his stomach. Cas freezes, wide eyes shooting to Dean’s face again. Dean’s lips twist weakly into a smile. “So’kay. It’s… just a… scratch.”

Cas stares down at him like he’s insane before suddenly his face breaks off into a laugh. It’s unexpected, and Dean finds that he rather enjoys it, but then he sees the sadness in Cas’ eyes and it tugs at something painful within his chest. He licks his lips, opens his mouth to speak again. “Sammy…” He rasps. “Get him… out…”

He’s going to die. He more sure than he’s ever been in his entire life. But if he can save Sam, if there’s even a slim chance that he can save his brother, then he’s going to take it. Even if it means all Jesse will have left to play with is him.

Something comes over Cas then. His eyes harden, and his spine draws straight. His face shifts, his jaw clenching tight and his lips folding to a thin line and Dean has a confusing moment where he somehow knows that everything is going to be alright.

“CASTIEL!”

Dean jerks at Jesse’s voice, struggling to turn his head and see’s the Cambion standing from where he must have fallen unconscious on the ground. His eyes are huge, his mouth twisted almost painfully wide, and Dean feels a shiver of dread shoot down his spine.

“CASTIEL! YOU’VE BEEN KEEPING SECRET’S FROM US!” He stumbles forward on uneven steps, and it’s clear that whatever Cas did to him actually hurt him, but Jesse seems thrilled by that.

Cas draws away from Dean and stands. His body is tense, his back straight, and his head lowered. “Let them go, and I will stay.”

Dean makes a weak noise of refusal, but apparently it’s not needed because Jesse tips back his head and laughs loudly.

“YOU ALWAYS WERE SO FUNNY!” He bares his teeth in an animal like fashion, all but hissing. “They are mine! My flies to swat!”
Cas narrows his gaze, looking every bit threatening, but Dean can somehow sense that despite his show, Cas *can’t* win against Jesse. As if on cue Cas cuts a look down at him, and Dean can see the fear there. He turns his gaze back to Jesse after a beat, and when he speaks his voice is convicting. “I may not be able to stop you… but I can slow you down at least.”

And then he’s an explosion of light. Dean gasps, holding a hand over his eyes to shield from the glare. Electricity surges through the air, thick and heavy, and it’s so lively against his skin that Dean groans from the sensation, twitching helplessly.

He’s aware of Jesse shrieking madly again, laughing once more. “*I KNEW IT! ARCHANGEL! I KNEW IT!*”

And then even that’s gone.

There’s only darkness.
Soooo.... I'm sorry lol

I know the obvious choice for the song is Guns n Roses, but I find Bob Dylan's version to be so soulful and sad, almost hopeless, and that's kind of the feeling I get of this chapter.

Also, I've started using breaks (***) in the story. Sometimes I have trouble with transitioning from tense situations. Like expressions and dialog and I'm just worried that it doesn't flow as smoothly as I'd like it. I've read a few other stories that have breaks, and I like that it kind of gives a pause to reassemble if you will lol Plus I kind of look at it like maybe if the chapter was actually the TV show the breaks would just be ACTUAL breaks leading to commercial lol And that makes me laugh...sooooo yeah.

haha

In all honesty, I hadn't planned on killing Benny. There were still many scenes I wanted to have between him and Dean. I hate when TV shows bring back a character just to kill them the same episode, and actually, this chapter got away from me completely. It just played out that way before I knew what was happening. And while I was hesitant in the beginning about whether or not to allow it, it made me realize that it majorly influences the plot in a way I need, which will be explored in the next chapter. Hope you guys don't hold it against me too much and let me know what you think in the comments.
Castiel all but crashes back into the bunker. He lands in one of the larger sitting rooms, the one where the Winchesters had usually spent their nights in front of the large plasma screen TV that they had bought not long after moving in. He’s carrying a lot of weight, more than he’s used to when he takes ‘flight’, and he nearly drops Sam, who is at this point nothing but dead weight. Castiel had gathered him and Rowena in similar positions, with an arm under their belly and their limbs hanging lose towards the ground. He’d managed to throw Dean over his shoulder somehow, but he can feel him beginning to slide even now and Castiel has to choose quickly which burden to let go of less Dean drop to the ground. He lets Rowena fall.

He tries to set her down as careful as he can, but it’s still not the easiest landing and Cas hopes that he hasn’t further hurt her more than she already is. He hurriedly slaps his free hand to Dean’s legs, hoisting him back up over his shoulder and holding on, feeling Dean’s chest bump back and forth against his back and his arms hit the back of his thighs. Cas tries not to panic.

He shoots a gaze to one of the large couches and rushes to it as quickly as he can with the dead weight of both Dean and Sam in his arms. Once there he kind of just flops Sam down onto one couch. He nearly turns from the younger Winchester but he knows that if Dean were awake he’d make him take care of Sam first, always Sam first. So instead he lays a few fingers to Sam’s head and heals him in a hurried rush of grace. He maybe pushes a bit too hard because Sam jerks awake almost immediately, all wide eyes and panting.

Cas turns abruptly from him and goes to the other couch, vividly aware of the warm sensation of Dean’s blood soaking into his jacket. His hands are shaking as he lays him down, and when he sees how pale Dean is his stomach clenches painfully.

“Cas? What the hell happened?”

Cas opens his mouth but nothing comes out so he snaps it shut again, hands working to push up Dean’s bloodied shirt. He shuts his eyes briefly from the deep wound on his stomach. Dean’s bleeding a lot, and if the wound isn’t closed soon then he’ll bleed out completely.

“You can help him, right? I mean you helped me!” Sam urges from where he stands above them, his face pale with fear.
“He was stabbed with an angel blade.” Cas says, aware that his voice is all but a hoarse whisper.

“Okay, so? What does that mean?!”

Cas grits his teeth, his hand hovering just over Dean’s wound as he tries to heal it again. He can feel the atoms begin to strike and fuse, tissue starting the process of repairing itself, but just like back in Purgatory the wound pulses hot, infectious almost, and his grace fades away pitifully.

Cas fist’s his hand in into the meat of his thigh so hard that it aches. It wasn’t working. His grace was failing and Cas knew it was because Dean had been stabbed with an angel blade.

The thing is; the blade honestly shouldn’t have affected Dean like it did. What Cas hadn’t taken account for was the fact that Dean carried bits of Castiel’s grace inside of him, which had fused so fully with his own soul that the two were practically one in the same. So when Jesse had stabbed Dean it was almost like an angel being stabbed.

Not that Dean Winchester was an angel.

He was just a human with a small amount of grace inside of him, which is why the wound hadn’t instantly killed him, but also why it wasn’t healing. But time was running out, and Cas had no idea what to do.

“Cas!”

He flinches and turns wide eyes up at Sam, and there must be something in his expression that gives away the seriousness of the situation because Sam’s eyes widened and for a slight second his body shakes, as if a wave of disbelief and horror crashed over him. And then he’s pushing past Cas, digging into the pockets of Dean’s jacket.

Cas pulls away numbly, watching as Sam fishes out the keys to the Impala. “What are you doing?”

“If you can’t fix him, we’ve got to take him to the hospital. There’s no way I can just sew him up, not with a wound like that.” He runs a hand over his face, shaking and pale. “But we need to try and stop the bleeding as much as we can until we get there.” His gaze shoots around the room, and he pauses a moment on Rowena before instantly turning away. “I’ve – I’ve got to get some towels. From the bathroom. I’ve got to go get some towels from the bathroom.” And then he’s swinging
around and rushing from the room.

Sam’s mannerisms have always been telling, though, and Cas knows that he’s really headed down to the dungeon. To Crowely.

The funny thing is Cas almost jumps up to join him, to demand Crowley help Dean, even though asking would no doubt only give Crowley sway over them all. In the end he can’t leave Dean, though, and falls back at his side, shoving his hands over his wound to try and slow the bleeding as much as possible.

He stare down at the blood coating his hands a moment, his body feeling strangely detached and cold, and he realizes with startling clarity that he’s kind of shell shocked. He looks up at Dean’s face, which is pale and sweaty. His gaze lowers to Dean’s lips, which are parted and tinged blue. Dean’s breathing, but very shallowly, and Cas focuses in on his pulse, which is slow and growing fainter by the second.

He knows that Dean is going into hemorrhagic shock, and he lets out a small distraught cry, trying again to push healing grace into the wound and repair the damage, for it to once again fail.

Two years. Cas had been locked away from Dean for two years, and the pain from that separation had nearly crippled him, especially when he knew that Dean was on Earth living a life with no memory of him. Nothing could compare to the pain that Cas feels now, though, kneeling at Dean’s side and watching him bleed out, unable to help him in any way.

Useless.

Cas sucks in a sharp inhale, his chest shaking with the task of calming his own quickly spiraling emotions.

He should have never come back.

He should have stayed in Heaven, where he belongs.

He should have accepted Hannah’s offer to rule at his side and maybe then he could have convinced him that they could save Heaven without the Winchesters.
Hell, at this point Castiel wouldn’t have cared if Heaven burned, as long as Dean was safe!

Because of him he had yet again put Dean’s life in danger. Because of him Dean was dying now, fading right before his eyes with a small sliver of grace inside of his body all but quivering as it tries to keep Dean alive as long as possible, but that too will fail in just a few short minutes. And then he will be gone.

When Cas had first fed Dean most of his own grace all those years ago just before the final battle with Amara, he had done it as a sort of fail-safe to ensure Dean’s survival. And it had worked.

After time the grace should have ran its course and left Dean’s body. When Castiel first laid eyes on Dean Winchester again and discovered that a small bit of his grace had not only remained within Dean, but fused with his soul, he’d been so shocked that he’d almost forgotten he was purposefully staying invisible to his eyes. Nothing could have prepared him for the feeling of the grace within Dean reaching out towards Castiel’s own, though. In fact, he’d been so shocked that he’d accidentally caused the lights to flicker in the kitchen of El Diablo where Dean had been nursing a beer alone, and after a beat the hunter had pulled out the salt, narrowed gaze searching the air around. Cas had flew out after that, worried that he would cause even more of a disturbance.

He hadn’t been able to get the sight of his own grace curled so beautifully with Dean’s soul out of his mind for hours; had remembered the way the pale white blue so easily blended with the shining gold of Dean’s soul, as if it belonged there. And the most amazing thing about it all was that at this point, it wasn’t really even Castiel’s grace anymore. It had merged so fully with Dean’s own soul that it was his.

It was beautiful.

And soon it too will be gone.

Cas rakes his eyes over Dean, licking dry lips and moving one of the hands covering Dean’s wound upwards over his ribs until his palm rested in the center of Dean’s chest. The movement leaves a thick, bloodied stain, but he tries not to look at that, instead allowing his eyes to look beyond skin and bone and down to the soul beneath.

Just one more time… he just has to take in the sight of it one more time before… before…A sound bubbles up from his throat, broken and raw, and it terrifies Cas almost as much as the thought of Dean’s death does. He feels vulnerable, breakable. Human. He’s always felt human beside Dean.
Warmth begins to stir under his hand, the grace within Dean surging and reaching out to make contact with Cas, and Cas gently let’s his own rush out in a wave. The moment the two make contact Cas’ breath leaves his lungs in a sharp exhale, because it’s perfect.

He can still feel traces of himself within the grace, of course, but there’s so much more there now, and for a moment Cas is taken back to that time he first touched Deans soul in Hell. No. Even that pales in comparison to the feeling rushing over him now. Back then, while Dean’s soul had been fierce and vividly bright despite Hell’s taint, it had also been defiant and unruly, every bit Dean Winchester. Now, though?

If Cas hadn’t been kneeling already he would have fallen to his knees. The grace infused soul pullsat Cas’ own hungrily, as if an animal starved. It surges and wraps itself so fully around Cas that it feels almost like a smothering embrace. It’s not violent, or threatening, but more so desperate, and Castiel finds himself pouring more into the bond, feeling a certain type of blissed out high from the contact.

Suddenly Dean makes a sound on the couch, a deep, throaty moan of pain and Cas jerks his eyes open. He felt embarrassed somehow, like being caught doing something he shouldn’t, but then he notices with surprise that a bit of color has returned to Dean’s face, and that his breathing’s evened out.

And then it hits him.

Some part of him knows that it’s a bad idea, after all if his grace had already made a home of itself within Dean’s body it was likely that more would do the same. He knows now that the grace had changed Dean in some ways; had seen it back in Hell when Dean had located Rowena’s body. Yet, despite all the risk factors, Cas can’t let Dean die.

But he has to be careful.

Giving Dean more of his grace means that Cas himself will temporarily be lacking in it, and if any of the other angels put two and two together, he’s sure that he’ll face all the wrath of Heaven.

Using his senses he searches the bunker for Sam, finding him unsurprisingly in the dungeon, most likely still trying to make a deal with Crowley. Now that Cas knows he can save Dean, he feels his stomach sour at the thought, and realizes he has to hurry so Sam doesn’t do anything reckless; that Dean will later blame on him.
Expelling grace is a tricky thing. In a human vessel, an angel’s grace generates its power within certain points of the body; the neck, chest, and lower abdominal region. Cas isn’t quite sure why, but most angel’s assume it has something to do with a human’s chi points and that the three are the most compatible with angelic grace. Last time he’d shared grace with Dean, he had done it the easiest way he knew how, and while he can admit that he maybe had taken full advantage at that time, it feel’s wrong to do the same now with Dean unconscious.

He searches his mind for another way, but they all would take time that he doesn’t have.

When it comes down to it, it’s either this, or let Dean die.

He doesn’t hesitate, and covers Dean’s mouth with his own.

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Dean doesn’t react, not like the first time Cas had done this – but that’s to be expected, so Cas reaches up and gently tugs down on Dean’s chin with his thumb until his lips softly part. Despite the gravity of the situation Cas feels an inane urge to linger, to once again familiarize himself with the sensation of having his lips pressed against Dean’s. He pushes the urge aside and gathers his grace together, feels it build with intensity and push towards the surface. He reins it in just enough to control its projection and then it’s at the back of his throat, a hot, swirling entity bursting to be set free.

Cas releases it. Light pours through the seams between their lips and just under the skin. He clenches his hand against the side of the couch, his body all but vibrating. Something flits across the darkness of his eyelids; the memory of the first time he had done this with Dean, how Dean’s body had jerked with surprise, how his hands had slammed against Castiel’s chest as if to push him away. Cas had held on long and tight, not allowing Dean the chance to break away, and when it had finally been too much for Dean, he had slumped against Cas with a whimper.

It hadn’t been a true kiss, more so just a hard press of lips, but despite that when Cas had finally pulled away Dean had blinked up at him with slightly unfocused eyes, and Cas had seen clear longing in their depths.
Dean had passed out soon afterwards and Cas had dragged him to his bed in the bunker, exhausted from being nearly depleted, and left. The next time he saw Dean was during their final battle with Amara.

Cas will never forget the look of betrayal on his face.

Cas doesn’t have to forcefully hold Dean now, though, and once again he can’t help thinking that his actions, as required as they are, are somehow wrong.

He’s begun to slump, quickly feeling the effects of his depleted grace, and he tries to not hinder Dean’s wound by falling on it. He’s aware of a small, continuous tremble that’s started just under Dean’s skin, and he can feel the grace already within Dean pulsating and merging with the new, Dean’s soul a golden beacon of light that Cas can all but feel heating his own skin.

Cas doesn’t stop until he’s afraid that he won’t even be able to fly away afterwards. He slumps backwards with a groan, somehow catching his fall with his palms against the floor before his back can hit. The room spins a moment, and he closes his eyes against a disconcerting wave of queasiness. He gives himself only a few seconds to rest before crawling back towards the couch, using his hands to feel the way when his vision still isn’t quite back to normal. He clutches onto Dean’s pants leg, the rough material somehow stabilizing him like a life line as he’s finally able to open his eyes without feeling the urge to throw up.

His eyes rake over Dean, letting out a shaky sigh of relief when he sees that color has begun to return to his face and he doesn’t appear to be sweating anymore. Even his brows, which had begun to pinch tight in pain, are relaxed. Cas swallows and looks down at the wound.

The skin is unblemished. Perfect.

He hangs his head and closes his eyes and just allows himself to actually breathe with the knowledge that Dean is alright; that he’s alive.

He wants to linger. To rake his gaze over every inch of Dean’s skin and touch the path his eyes make, but he knows that he cannot.

He had never had that luxury before and he doesn’t now. It’s a knowledge that sobers him to the point of pain, and Cas draws stiffly to his feet before reaching down and placing a hand on Dean’s
He takes him to his own bed, even goes so far as to tuck him in, and then just stands there and
watches Dean breath a moment before flying back to where Rowena is laying on the floor.

She’s breathing shallowly, bone white, and Cas realizes with shock that she’s almost dead. He’s all
but drained, but still finds enough grace to fix the worst of her injuries. It’s not enough, though, and
she remains unconscious, but at least now her body will be able to naturally heal itself in time.

He goes to the dungeon, next, and Sam visibly jumps as he appears, his eyes going wide as he no
doubt searches his mind for some kind of excuse for being there in the first place. Behind him
Crowley narrows his eyes and looks at Cas with unnerving intensity, and Cas has this horrified
feeling that Crowley knows what he’s done.

“Your brother is okay. I was able to heal him.”

Sam blinks dumbly a moment before Cas’ words must reach, and then he’s rushing over and
gripping his arm tight. “He’s fine? He’s alright? He’s not… he’s…”

“Dean is fine, Sam.” He softens his gaze and lays a hand on Sam’s shoulder, just like Sam had done
to him in Hell. “He’s sleeping in his bed. I imagine he’ll need to rest, but he will be okay.”

Sam’s jaw trembles and he quickly tries to hide the movement by scrubbing a hand over his mouth.
“I don’t… I mean I thought…” He pauses, closing his eyes and taking a deep breath. When he looks
at Cas again the gratitude in his gaze is evident. “Thank you.”

Cas nods and glances back at Crowley, whose still listening intently. He clears his throat and turns to
Sam. “May I speak with you? Outside?”

Sam frowns a moment before understanding, and then he’s rushing from the room, closing the doors
behind Castiel and heading to the hallway. “Is everything okay?”

“I used most of my grace to heal you and Dean, but I was able to take care of the most serious of
Rowena’s injuries. She’s still unconscious, and I imagine she will be for a few days most likely, but
she will survive.”
Sam scrubs a hand over his face, heaving a heavy sigh. “Thank God. I had no idea what to tell Crowley. And we kind of need her, anyway. I’m sure she knows more about Jesse.”

Cas nods in agreement.

Sam looks up at him and seems to notice just how tired and wore out Cas feels. He huffs out a sharp breath and pulls Cas forward in a tight hug. They stand there a few seconds, Cas with his arms hanging awkwardly at his sides, before Sam laughs softly into his hair. “Uh, this is the part where you hug back, buddy.”

“Oh. Yes.” Cas lifts his hands and pats Sam a few times on the back, and Sam laughs harder at that, finally pulling away and shaking his head.

“You know, as much of a jackass as Dean can be, I kind of secretly thought you guys were douches, too. Glad you all aren’t.”

Cas’ lips twist in a smile that feels forced and lacking in honestly. He hopes that Sam can’t see it. “I appreciate the sentiment.” He shuffles awkwardly on his feet. “I hope you don’t mind, but I’ve used quite a bit of my grace tonight. I must go and rest.”

“Of course, man. Just… feel free to fly back in whenever, alright?”

And then Sam’s twisting away and rushing down the hallway, no doubt unable to hold off checking on Dean any longer.

Cas stands alone a few minutes before flying away.
Dean slowly opens his eyes. The room is dark, with only a faint pale glow cast over his shoulder and onto the wall that he’s facing, and for a moment he just lays there, blinking bleary eyes. His body feels heavy with sleep but with something else too, something warm. And full? For a moment he thinks about closing his eyes again and just basking in the sensation, because god knows it’s not like this – whatever this is, happens that often.

The moment he shuts his eyes, though, Purgatory comes rushing back, and Dean jerks up with a sharp gasp, tossing the covers off of him and looking down at his stomach. His jacket has been stripped off but he’s still in his black tee, and his hands shake when he sees how it’s ripped and covered with dried blood in the front. Swallowing hard Dean takes hold of the edge of the material and pulls it up. He blinks. His lips slowly turn down at the corners and his brow furrows. There’s no wound. At all.

No bandages. No stitches. Nothing.

Dean looks up with wide eyes, feeling like he’s fallen into an episode of the Twilight Zone. His room is empty, but there’s a chair parked right at the edge of his bed, like someone’s been sitting in it during the night. He moves from the bed and head’s out of the room, glancing up and down the hallway before following the familiar path to Sam’s room. His door is wide open, and Dean pauses just in the opening, finding Sam asleep on his bed.

He’s still got all his clothes on, and isn’t even under the covers. His legs are hanging over the edge of the bed, and he’s lying on his side up against the pillows as if he’d sat on the edge of the bed at some point and then fallen asleep, slumping sideways.

After a few beats he moves away from the doorway and head’s to the showers. He’s hyper aware of the fact that his shirt is covered in blood, and he wants it off. Strangely enough his body feels clean, despite hours of trekking through Purgatory and Hell, but his mind is still covered in the filth of the locations and he just wants to close his eyes, hang his head, and feel hot water slapping at his skin.

When he reaches the showers he begins to strip with shaking hands. He’s got his boots on still and he tries to kick them off, and lets out a frustrated cry when they don’t budge. He bends to jerk the ties open, all but throwing them as soon as they are free of his feet. With a bit of fumbling his pants and briefs are off and then he’s padding forward on bare feet to one of the showers.

He turns on the hot water and nothing else. The spray runs shockingly cold for a brief moment and Dean inhales sharply, but then it’s like molten lava rushing over his skin and the sting is exactly what
he wants. He clenches his teeth against the pain and lays his palms flat against the tile, hanging his head so the water flows over his shoulders and back. At some point a broken sob spills past his lips, and his hands curl into fists against the wall, his shoulders beginning to shake.

Benny.

Benny was dead.

Dean forces his eyes to stay open, because he knows the moment they close all he’ll see is the memory of Benny’s throat being ripped out, so deep that Dean remembers seeing the bone of his spine standing out so starkly white against the deep red.

The sight of Benny’s face just before he fell lifelessly to the ground plays behind his vision none-the-less, though, and Dean’s shoulders begin to shake as he remembers seeing something flicker in Benny’s eyes, some thought coming to life even while on the verge of death, and Dean tries to rip the image from his mind because he *knows* what he had seen in Benny’s eyes. He *knows* and the knowledge is too painful to relive. But Dean’s own mind has never been anything but traitorous, and before he can stop himself his eyelids fall and he sees it so perfectly there in the darkness.

*Reassurance.* Even at the end, all Benny had cared about was trying to convey to Dean that everything was alright, that his *death* was somehow *okay*. *That it didn’t matter.*

With a hoarse cry Dean pulls back a fist only to punch it hard against the tile. The brief surge of pain is rewarding but last’s only faintly, so he does it again, and again, and again; until his knuckles burn and the tiles are smeared with blood. And then he lays his forehead against the wet coolness and tries to hold himself together, when everything feels like it’s falling apart.

Getting dressed is like putting on armor. A well-worn, soft cotton tee somehow holds in the self-worthlessness. Dean still feel’s raw, though, so layering a jacket over it hides his insecurity. Pulling on his briefs and jeans is a safety that he needs and as he’s buckling his belt he feels he can actually breathe again. Sitting on the edge of his bed he moves to his socks and then laces up his boots, more cover to hide the weakness of his own skin. He runs a bandaged hand though his hair and thinks about doing something with the messy appearance, but he’s feeling like today’s going to be one of those days where he needs to tug and pull at the locks to make himself feel sane, and the last thing he wants is hands sticky with gel.
He checks on Sam again, but finds him still asleep. A part of him is glad. He doesn’t want his brother to see how raw he is right now, emotions swirling just under the surface.

So he does the only thing he knows will make him feel some sense of normalcy.

The Men of Letters had some damn good taste in alcohol, he’d give them that. Each drag spills a pleasant burn down his throat and Dean can’t get enough. He’s drowned four fingers of bourbon at least before deciding to slow it down a bit, because as much as he needs the buzz the last thing he wants is for Sam to see him a complete wreck.

The silence begins to get to him. He can’t stop thinking about things, going over everything that had happened in his head and he’s so frustrated and angry that he starts digging through the books and notes in the archive room, needing to preoccupy himself so he doesn’t break something.

Even that only further irritates him, though, because he can’t find anything on Cambion’s that he doesn’t already know and according to his reading material it was impossible for a demon to enter Heaven; something about their souls being too tainted by Hell.

Dean’s close to just tossing the damn book against the wall when he hears his name being called. Looking up he sees Sam standing in the archway of the room, looking like hell with bloodshot eyes and hair a mess. But he’s alive. He’s okay.

Before he knows it Dean’s standing and then they’re meeting in the middle. Sam looks shell shocked, his movements slow, hesitant almost, and Dean reaches out first. Soon enough he feels Sam’s heavy arms around his back though, and he closes his eyes with a sigh and holds on tight.

They were both alright, somehow.

“I thought you were – I was so sure that…” Sam draws off, swallowing hard as his eyes roam over Dean, lingering on his stomach. “I must have fallen asleep when I went to grab a blanket from my
room. Dean, are you okay? I mean how do you feel?” He glances down at Dean’s bandaged hand and there’s a question there, but he doesn’t ask it. No doubt he already has an idea and doesn’t want to set a repeat of how the wound occurred in the first place.

Dean crosses his arms over his chest anyways, hiding it from view. “Honestly? I don’t know how the hell I’m even alive. What happened?”

Sam bobs his head, letting out a shaky breath and rubbing his hand over his face. “Uh, yeah. It was Cas, he healed you. He healed both of us, actually.”

Dean let’s that settle for a moment, his lips drawing to a thin line. “And Jesse?”

Sam’s expression falls slightly, contrite, and he shakes his head.

Dean nods and turns away from his brother so he won’t see the flash of bitter emotion crossing his features. He hangs his head and closes his eyes a moment, trying to draw some sense of composure.

“Dean… there’s more.”

He arches his brow and turns to Sam.

“Cas brought Rowena back, too. He healed her as much as he could, but according to him whatever they did to her was pretty deep. She’s still unconscious, but from what I understand she’ll wake up eventually. I kind of put her in one of the empty rooms.” Sam holds up his hands as an incredulous look comes over Dean. “I warded it! Don’t worry. She’s not going anywhere, and she’s pretty much chained to the bed, so she won’t be a problem. I just - - I didn’t want to bring her down to Crowley immediately, you know? Not with the condition she’s in.”

Dean sighs. “Yeah, alright. That’s probably for the best.” The last thing they want is to loose what little sway they may have over Crowley. The demon isn’t going anywhere, anyways. He can wait until Rowena wakes up.

They stand in silence, and Dean knows that Sam’s going over everything that’s happened and he hopes that his brother won’t mention Benny. Not yet.
“It’s all a bit surreal.” At Dean’s frown, Sam shrugs his shoulders, his eyes drifting sideways. “All I can remember is Jesse being this kid, this confused, innocent kid. I just…” He draws off with a sigh, shaking his head. “I guess I just don’t understand how he’s….”

“The freaking Anti-Christ?” Dean drawls out with a bitter smile. They’d stumbled across the word before; during the first time they had met Jesse. After they had figured out what he was they’d found some all but obscure text that linked the apparent Anti-Christ to a Cambion. It had seemed so bizarre and strange, thinking of some kid as something so evil. It was true that Jesse had been the cause of the death’s that were taking place in town, but none were intentional. It had been an accident, a tragic one, but an accident nevertheless. They had never intended to kill Jesse. Hell, to be honest they had no idea what to do with him. They’d planned on taking him back to Bobby’s and hoping the old geezer would be able to come up with something.

Jesse had gotten one over them though by just vanishing out of thin air; literally.

Sam is right. It is surreal. A part of Dean can’t seem to comprehend how Jesse could have turned into the monster that he is. A part of him is having a hard time believe it even could be the same person.

“This is on us.” The words leave his mouth in a quiet whisper, and Sam jerks his gaze up with wide eyes. Dean draws in a deep breath, swallowing thickly. “If we would have… none of this would have happened if we had just done our damn job.” He’s bitter, and he knows it. But he’s so damn furious with himself.

“Dean, we couldn’t have known that he would - -“

“Yeah, but there was always the possibility.” Dean bites out before Sam can finish, and then laughs sharply, shaking his head. “No. You know what? We should have known, dammit! Nine times out of ten these freaks go bad! The only reason we didn’t stop this when we had a chance was because we were weak!”

“He was just a kid, Dean!”

“A KID WHO’S THE FREAKING ANTI-CHRIST, NOW!” Dean shouts, only just resisting the urge to slam his already damaged fist into a wall again.

Sam’s body is tense and his stance even more so, as if he’s readying himself for a blow. Dean supposes that’s what it’s come to with them, now. He jerks his eyes away from his brother, twisting
around to pace a moment, holding a shaking hand against his mouth because he feels like if his lips open again everything he’s *truly* feeling will just bubble out uncontrollably. Realization must dawn at Sam, because when Dean looks at him again his face has shifted from closed off and frustrated to something sympathetic and concerned. But Dean can’t handle that – not right now, not when he’s so sure he’ll finally unravel under the stress of everything.

“Dean… I know that…” Sam draws off with a sigh, struggling to begin again. “I mean, Benny was - -“

Whatever he’s about to say is interrupted by the soft flutter of wings. Dean looks up and Cas is standing there, a few feet away from the both of them. Blue eyes lock on his before reluctantly pulling away to roll over Sam, and then they are jerking back to Dean once more, seemingly taking in every inch of his body.

“Hey, Cas.” Sam’s voice sounds relieved, as if he had been even more reluctant to talk about Benny than Dean had been. He turns fully to face the angel. “How are you? Have you found out anything?”

Castiel seems to be lost in taking in Dean, narrowed eyes searching his form with almost methodical intensity. Stranger still Dean is watching him just as closely, though with a sort of aloof mistrust.

“Cas?”

Cas finally turns away from Dean, looking at Sam with wide eyes a moment like he’s confused. Sam’s question apparently resonates eventually though because he clears his throat and bobs his head. “I’ve spoken with the others. It would seem a Cambion being behind everything dawns a certain light to the situation. Honestly speaking no one truly understands what one is fully capable of. Some lore names them as being all powerful, which does not bode well for us I’m afraid.”

Sam sighs, running a hand over his face. “So what does that mean? What are we supposed to do?”

“All of Heaven is searching for any writings on Cambion’s that we may have missed, and we’ve begun to capture demons in the hopes of finding out more, but I’m hoping that Rowena will be able to give us the information we need. She wouldn’t happen to be awake would she?”

Sam’s shoulders slump and he shakes his head. “No. Not yet.”
Cas nods, already turning to head out of the room. “I expected as much, but I’ll take a look at her again. Perhaps I’ll be able to awaken her.”

“Wait.”

Dean’s voice draws the attention of both Sam and Cas, and they turn simultaneously.

Dean swallows, the ball of his adam’s apple bobbing with the motion. “Back there, in Purgatory, he knew who you were.” A sort of utter stillness comes over Cas, and it’s like he’s not even breathing. Hell, maybe he isn’t. Maybe angels didn’t even have to breathe. Sam’s turns to Cas as well with a deep frown, as though he’s only now remembering. “Jesse.” Dean elaborates, taking a step towards the angel. “He called you by name.”

Cas’ mouth opens, his eyes growing wider, but no words come out.

“Dean’s right.” Sam tilts head tilted questionably. “Cas... do you know Jesse?”

The angel looks every bit the deer caught in the headlights. It’s an expression Dean hadn’t expected to see, and the harsh demand in his voice marks his anger as he takes another step forward. “You better start talking.”

Sam’s gaze jerks to Dean, because he knows that tone. He clears his throat a bit awkwardly, shuffling his feet until he’s standing a little more to his left, which just so happens to be directly in the path to Cas. “Come on, Dean. I’m sure he can explain.”

“Oh, he’s going to explain.” Dean growls. “Ain’t that right, Angel?”

Cas flinches at the word and how Dean all but spits it out; like it’s something disgusting, like he’s something disgusting. “Yes.” He admits, his gaze never leaving Deans. “I know him. Years ago, when he was still a child, our paths crossed. Once I discovered what he was I had planned to smite him, but...” His eyes shift for a beat before returning to Dean. “Someone convinced me otherwise.”

Dean huffs out a dark laugh. “Hear that, Sammy? Guess we weren’t the only ones with performance issues.” He turns a narrowed gaze to Cas again. “What about that other thing he said? What he called you.”
This time Cas’ eyes lower sheepishly. “I’m not sure I understand.”

Sam looks from Cas to Dean and back again with a frown. “I don’t think I’m following.”

Dean’s gaze flicks briefly to Sam before returning to Cas. “Yeah, that’s because you were passed out by that time. You see Jesse called Cas here an *archangel*.”

Sam’s face scrunches into a frown before his eyes slowly widened and his jaw drops. He swings around to Cas. “Dude! Are you… Cas are you an Archangel?!”

Cas shoulders slumped in a sigh and he bristles as if irritated. “It makes no difference.”

Sam gawks. “Of course it makes a difference! This is… I mean the freaking Bible talks about you guys like you’re… *Jesus, this is insane!* Is that why you went with us? I mean I remember you saying that the angel’s that Hannah’s sent to scout Hell have either never come back or came back crazy. Were they just not strong enough?”

If anything Cas seems even more put out by this and shakes his head quickly, still not making eye contact with the either of them. “While it’s true that I may be a bit stronger than other angels, before now we’ve never really had any problems with missions involving Hell. Granted, there weren’t that many, but the casualty rate was always very low, aside from times of major war, of course. All this is happening now because of Jesse. When I found out from Crowley that a Cambion may be the new King of Hell I knew I couldn’t let the two of you go alone, regardless. It appears I was right in my worry. I imagine if I hadn’t pulled you out of Purgatory when I did the both of you would not have returned.”

Sam let’s that stew a bit in his head, while behind him Dean’s face is slowly drawing tight in confusion.

“Wait a minute. You said *Crowley* told you a Cambion was the new King of Hell? When the hell did you talk to Crowley?” In his life Dean had screwed himself over more times than he can count. Hell, he’s somehow became a professional at it, and when it happens so often you kind of got a knack for recognizing when someone else makes the same realization. When someone realizes they’ve *fucked up*. Dean see’s that same look in Cas as plain as day.

Cas had talked to Crowley behind their backs. Cas had *known* about Jesse, or at the least had an
idea, and he hadn’t told them a damn thing. Because of Cas they’d almost gotten killed. Because of Cas keeping things from them, Benny had… Dean’s surging forward before Sam can stop him. He sees the moment when Cas realizes what’s about to happen and it pisses him the hell off when the angel doesn’t even try to defend himself.

Dean’s slams his fist into Cas’ face with a growl of fury. It hurts – like a son of a bitch, and Dean knows that it probably shouldn’t hurt that bad and figures it’s got something to do with Cas being an angel, but that doesn’t stop him. He lands another blow and another, going after Cas as the angel stumbles backwards.

Sam finally gets a grip on him and drags Dean back, shouting out his name.

“BENNY’S DEAD BECAUSE OF YOU, YOU PIECE OF SHIT!”

Cas is slouched over slightly, staring down at his fingertips which are stained in blood from tentatively touching the wounds on his face. He’s got this kind of shocked expression, like he can’t believe what just happened, but when he looks up at Dean the look falls instantly from his face and shifts to something softer; something remorseful and guilty.

Dean can’t stand the sight of it. “Get the fuck out of here!” He hisses, not even trying to pull out of Sam’s arms anymore. He doesn’t let himself acknowledge the fact that he’d most likely be on his knees otherwise.

“Cas I think you’d better go.” Sam says, and even his voice is clipped, his expression guarded.

Cas seems to deflate from it, and he gives a slow nod. “If you wish.” His hands fall at his side as he draws straight, and his eyes slowly shift back to Dean, as if he can’t help himself. He meet’s the hatred in Dean’s glare a moment before his eyes lower. “I’m sorry, Dean.”

And then he’s gone.

It’s so fucking typical and Dean hates it. In a way it’s all he’s got, though, and that’s so damn
pathetic as well. Still, if he had stayed in the bunker one more second he knows he would have started lashing out at Sam, and things are already so fucking thin between them, like a fine sheet of ice barely able to hold the weight of the two of them together again.

Sam doesn’t try to stop him as he leaves, though, and Dean’s not sure if that’s a good thing or not.

Despite everything he’s not just on a mission to get wasted and forget everything that’s happened within the past twenty-four hours. Hell, if anything he needs to keep himself busy with something so he doesn’t lose his damn mind. He climbs out of the Impala with quick, determined steps.

It’s Friday, so the bar is a bit more crowded than it was the day before. He pauses at the entrance and takes his time to survey his surroundings. There’s nothing that looks out of the ordinary, but he’s been a Hunter long enough to know not to take that for granted. He pushes his way carefully through the throng of people, mostly plaid wearing, middle aged locals who are singing way too loud to whatever country song is blaring through the speakers.

He’s surprised when he see’s Josette fussing and fuming behind the bar, her hands on her shapely hips as she berates some old drunk guy grinning at her from his stool. She glances up as he approaches, though, and then her eyes shoot wide and a smile slaps on her face.

“Well either I’m going blind or some fool I haven’t seen in years just walked his scrawny ass back into my bar.”

Dean can’t help but grin, shaking his head as he takes a seat at one of the stools. “Well good thing you aren’t going blind, then.”

Josette laughs, the lines at her eyes crinkling deeply. She rolls her eyes and thumps Dean on the forehead. “Where the hell have you been the past few years, boy?!?”

Dean cringes and rubs at his skull with a sour expression. “Away from your abuse, obviously.”

Josette snorts and takes a beer from a fridge under the bar, popping the top and sliding it into his open hands. “Now you and I both know I’m gonna need more than that. You just up and vanished, kid! I thought something had happened to you.”

Dean’s expression softens and he reaches forward to pat the back of Josette’s hand resting on the bar
top. “Nah, nothing like that. I just needed a change of scenery.”

She tucks a stray brown curl behind her ear with a playful grin. “What, Lebanon don’t have enough of that for you?”

It’s Dean’s turn to snort this time as he tips his beer back and takes a deep swallow. He hadn’t planned on drinking tonight, but what harm is one beer going to do him? “What about you? I heard you got yourself a new grandbaby.”

Dean watches as Josette’s face all but lights up. She digs in the back pocket of her jeans to pull out a cell phone, and a moment later sits it down on the bar in front of him. On the screen is a picture of a small baby, only a few months old, with a head full of red curls. Dean grins. “Cute. Boy or girl?”

“A handsome little man. Annie named him Liam.” Josette winks at him, her grin turning a bit devious. “I tried to get her to go with Malaki, but for some reason she wasn’t too keen on the idea of naming her son after some red headed boy living in a hillbilly town and running around in corn fields.”

Dean has to make an effort to not spit his beer out as he laughs. They drift into a comfortable silence as Josette works on people’s orders before returning to perch against the bar across from him, a crooked grin on her face.

Dean shakes his head, unable to stop from smiling. He’d missed this. He and Sam had first met Josette shortly after moving into the bunker. They’d been checking out the town and had walked into the old bar for a cold beer. Josette had been working with her daughter that night, and as Dean and Sam drank their beers they’d both been a little heavy of heart as they watched the way the two bickered back and forth amongst one another because it had reminded them both so much of Ellen and Jo.

While Josette shared many qualities that the two remembered Ellen for, Annie was quiet and shy, unlike Jo, but every bit as likeable. After that they’d started to come to the bar more often.

“I bet you’re glad.” Josette says, drawing Dean out of his thoughts. “Annie’s done found herself a man and had a kid. Guess this mean’s I don’t get to try and put you two together anymore.”

Dean chuckles and taps his finger against the glass of his beer. “Guess I just don’t know a good thing when I see it.”
“Well about damn time you realized that you sorry son of a bitch.”

Dean wags his brows at her, leaning back slightly on the stool to look through the heavy crowd of locals. His eyes scan for a familiar short man with dark hair. “Annie working tonight? I’d like to say hi.”

Josette shakes her head. “She’s staying in with the baby tonight. My no good son’s around here somewhere, though. Most likely slacking out back nursing a cigarette.”

Dean had only met Josette’s son a few times, and from what he understood he only worked at the bar when Josette really needed him. Dean remembers the kid being a bit of a stoner, half of the time looking like he had no idea what was going on. “What about Chip?”

Josette tilts her head slightly with a frown. “Who?”

“Chip. Your new bartender. Short guy. Likes to read books.” As he’s talking Josette’s face has grown more and more confused, and that bad feeling at the back of Dean’s spine is slowly tingling its way up his skin again. “I met him last night. He was manning the bar, said you’d just hired him.”

“Honey, the only people I let work in my bar are family. You sure you’re not talking about Greg? He’s my brother’s boy, just started a few weeks ago. He’s short with dark hair?” At Dean’s puzzled expression Josette holds up a hand and grabs her phone again, fiddling with it a moment before showing him a photo of the man that Dean had met yesterday.

“Yeah! That’s him.” He shakes his head. “He said his name was Chip, though. That you’d just hired him. Hell he said he wasn’t even from around here, that he came to town for family or something like that.”

Josette slides her phone back in her back pocket with a frown, eying Dean like he was going out of his mind. “Well his name definitely isn’t Chip, and he’s lived in Lebanon his whole life. He got fired from the packing plant about a month ago so I told him I’d let him take a few shifts here at the bar since Annie’s got her hands full with the baby.” She gets another beer from the fridge and sits it in front of Dean. “Maybe he was just pulling your chain? He can be a bit of a smart ass at times.”

Dean drags the beer over to him with a deep frown. The way he saw it, either Josette’s nephew was possessed, or just a straight up asshole. Either one still pissed him off. “And he lives in Lawrence?”
“Hell, he still lives with my damn brother. I’m telling you there’s something wrong with a twenty-nine year old man who lives at home still.” Josette rolls her eyes. “Even if he does stay in the barn.”

“Barn?”

“Yeah. My brother, Frank turned the old barn out back into a guest house few years back for when family visits. Lotta good it done him, Greg moved right on in the moment the plumbing was working.”

“Hmm.” Dean gives a stiff grin, his hand tightening around his beer bottle. “Family. What are you gonna do, right?”

Josette snorts and taps her own beer bottle against his at that.

Dean makes small talk and finishes his beer, slapping his hand on the table a few times and promising to bring Sam with him next time.

When he’s behind the wheel of the Impala again he pulls out his cellphone and finding out where Josette’s brother lives is as simple as putting in his name and the city and state he lives in.

It’s so close that Dean doesn’t even need his GPS.

He thumbs the cool leather of the steering wheel a moment, staring out the window silently. Once upon a time he’d have called Sam, let him know that they had a potential case, but he remembers when he’d expressed his suspicion of Chip (or Greg, whatever his name was) the other day at the bunker and how Cas had tried to assure them that his suspicions were wrong.

Sam had taken Cas’ words in stride, not even questioning them.

Chances are this case leads to nothing more than a demon possession or salt and burn. It wasn’t like Dean needed Sam, exactly. But as he sits there surrounded by the calm familiarity of Baby, he can’t help but remember his earlier years with Sam passed out in the passenger seat, the way Dean would purposefully hit every pot hole just so Sam’s thick noggin would slap against the glass of the window, Sam jerking awake and cursing Dean for all he was worth.
He remembers pulling into grungy motel’s, the two of them dragging their tired asses to their room and flopping down on beds that are almost as uncomfortable for sleeping in as Baby’s seat.

Even after they had moved into the bunker they’d always fallen into a familiar routine when they’d stumbled across a case, with Dean frying them both a burger. Fuel to keep his brainiac brother running because God knows Dean didn’t have the patience to sit for hours at a time thumbing through books.

The decision is made before he even knows it, and he finds himself staring down at his phone, scrolling through his contacts and lifting the phone to his ear.

Sam picks up on the third ring, his voice strained and lit with mild worry.

Dean grins, laying his arm along the open window of his car. “So guess what I just found out?”

Sam’s quiet for a beat, no doubt confused. “Uh… what did you find out?”

“Turns out Chips name isn’t Chip. It’s Greg.” He snorts, glancing out the window as some drunken guy stumbles out of the bar towards his pickup. “Not that that’s any better, really. Anyways, I told you I was right.” Because yeah, it feels good to be right.

Dean hears what sounds like the shuffling of paper faintly in the background on the line, and he knows that Sam’s sitting in the archive room at that familiar table again. Just like old times. “Dude, you realize I have no idea what you’re talking about, right? And don’t you think you should be here? We’ve kind of got a lot going on right now, you know?”

Dean’s lip twitches, threatening to turn to a full scowl, and he scratches at his cheek and stretches his lips open to try and chase the sensation away. “Yeah, I get that, okay? But we got a case, Sammy. I was right about something being up with that bartender.”

“Wait… are you serious?”

It isn’t actually a question, what with the dubious sarcasm thickly laid on, and Dean bristles in annoyance. “This is serious, alright Sam? I talked with Josette tonight and - -"
“Josette? You saw Josette?”

Dean smiles softly, glancing up towards the bar. “Yeah, man. She’s doing good. Annie had a baby so she’s got her hands full lately.”

Sam gives a soft, happy laugh. “Wow. That’s… that’s amazing. Was Annie there?”

“Nah. Josette said she’s not taking as many shifts lately, with the baby and all.” The call drift’s into silence, and Dean has a feeling that he knows what Sam’s thinking because the same things running through his mind. It’s always strange, seeing people they know or used to know living their lives and growing in ways that they will never be able to. No matter how hard Dean tries to deny it, he always feels some sadness when it happens, as well as some other emotion that he keeps buried so far down that it almost rarely surfaces. Something that he knows is dangerously close to longing. “She said to bring you around next time.” Dean says softly.

“Yes. Yeah, that would be cool.” Sam clears his throat after a moment, the sound of a chair scraping the floor as its scooted backwards. “So about this supposed case?”

Dean clears his throat as well, straightening a bit in his seat. “Alright so get this. The guy that I met, turns out he’s Josette’s nephew. And I get there’s nothing weird about that, but then Josette starts telling me about this guy and nothing she’s saying is lining up with what he told me. And I’m not just talking about little things, man. I mean, the guy I met and the guy Josette told me about are two different people altogether.”

“So what are you thinking? Possession?”

“All I know is after pulling that little Jedi mind trip something’s going on there, and we need to figure out what.”

Sam sighs, quiet a moment, and Dean taps his foot against the floorboard, trying not to think about how much he wants Sam to say yes. How much he needs him to. His entire body is all but twitching by the time Sam finally clears his throat.

“Yeah, alright. When are you wanting to check it out?”
Dean grins and does a little fist bump in the air. “No time like the present, right?”

Sam snorts. “Dean, its ten P.M.”

Dean scowls up at the dark sky, hating how much sense Sam makes. “Fine. First thing in the morning then. Agreed?”

“Sure thing. Now get your ass back. If I’m going to be up all night trying to find out how a Cambion can break into Hell I’m going to need some burgers or something.”

It’s idiotic, how wide his grin becomes. “On my way.” He goes to hang up, but hears Sam softly clear his throat and pulls the phone back to his ear with a frown. “Got something else to say, Sammy?”

Sam’s quiet a moment before speaking. “Look man, about Cas …”

Dean’s hand squeezes so hard on the phone that he hears a crack! before forcing his grip to loosen. “What about him?” He growls out defensively.

“I just don’t want you to…” Sam’s voice fades with a sigh. “Never mind. Just… I’ll be here when you get back, okay?”

Dean swallows hard, staring down at his hand in his lap. “I’ll be there in a few.” He ends the call immediately, tossing the phone over to the passenger seat.

He puts the key in the ignition and starts Baby up, his hand curling around the steering wheel as the radio fills the silence. He cranks up the volume.

It doesn’t quite drown out his thoughts as he had hoped, though.
Chapter End Notes

This chapter ended up being very very long, so I decided to split it up into two parts. It's like...25k words in all haha Kind of an important part.

BTW, the next part of the chapter has some nice smut :P so there's that to look forward to haha Thanks for reading!!
Dean’s maybe not even a mile away from the bunker when he’s hit with a wave of searing pain. It’s so instant and unexpected that he serves on the road, his mouth open and his hands clenched tight on the steering wheel. He wants to screw his eyes shut but knows how unwise that would be, and luckily the road’s all but deserted so he doesn’t have traffic to worry about at least.

The pain is sharp and everywhere, making every muscle in his body clench and spasm. A scream is lodged at the back of his throat, and his body is so tense that his arm doesn’t want to move to put the Impala in park, and for a moment he just sits there, crouched over the steering wheel with watering eyes, trying to remember how to breathe.

And then it’s over.

He slumps against the wheel with a cry, taking a minute to let his body calm down enough so that his muscles loosen up, and then he’s shoving the gear stick in park and bolting from the car. He stumbles out with wide eyes, hands going over his chest and then lower to his stomach until he’s practically patting down his entire body like he’s expecting to find open wounds.

*What the fuck was that?!*

He’s shaking, drenched in sweat and his heart’s beating so hard in his chest that it hurts. The late November air feels almost too cold against his heated skin, as biting as ice, and Dean struggles with the idea of getting back into the Impala or staying outside. For some reason the thought of being confined in Baby’s space makes him strangely anxious, almost as if he’d be trapped, and he’s never felt like that before and it terrifies him.

He pulls his jacket closer against his body and slouches against the side of the car instead, his forehead resting against the cool steel as he drags in long, shaky breaths.

He goes over what had happened, what he had felt, and tries to figure out possible explanations. The possibility of a heart attack makes his pulse stutter a few beats but at the same time he wouldn’t be too surprised. With his stress level it was bound to happen at one point or another. It wasn’t like he and Sam lived the easiest of lives. Hell, something like this had most likely been building since he was a kid, waiting for the right trigger.
Even though it makes sense, there’s something about it that doesn’t quite feel right. Besides, your entire body wasn’t supposed to hurt when you had a heart attack, was it? It was just your chest and an arm or something. Right?

The only other theory he can come up with is a serious panic attack. But he’s had those before and they had felt nothing like this. Even now Dean can feel an intense tingle under his skin, like every inch of his body had fallen asleep. It makes his limbs heavy and uncomfortable, and the pins and needle sensation is even in his face. Even in his damn head. It’s jarring and Dean has to control his breathing to stop himself from going into a panic.

He stands there for a full twenty minutes before deciding to get back in the Impala, and even then the sensation hasn’t completely gone, just faded to a more bearable tingle.

He practices a few minutes with breathing deeply and then starts the engine. He grabs the gear shaft on the steering column and just holds onto it a moment, eyes darting back and forth warily as if waiting to see if the surge of pain will return. When it doesn’t he licks dry lips and puts the car in gear, and then pulls back onto the road.

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Sam’s still researching when he comes in. He takes one look at Dean and starts bombarding him with questions. Dean brushes him off as quickly as he can, muttering something about ‘bad choices’ and ‘tequila’, and then head’s to the kitchen to cook up a few burgers for them.

By the time he’s got them on a plate and heading back to Sam he’s all but exhausted. He falls into a chair across from his brother and watches with heavy lidded eyes as Sam practically inhales his burger while Dean nibbles on his own.

“Dude, you look like shit.” Sam voices finally, wide eyes conveying worry.

Dean gives up on his burger and scrubs a hand over his face with a weary sigh. “What about you? Find anything useful?”
Sam watches him a few seconds, like he wants to say something, but in the end looks down at the thick, old book before with a shrug. “Not really. I mean what little I can find on Cambion’s is pretty much the same lore that we stumbled on all those years ago when we first met Jesse. I mean I found a bit more but it’s mostly just mythology. Like, for instance, did you know that Merlin was supposed to have been a Cambion?”

Dean blinks. “Merlin?”

“Yeah, you know, as if King Arthur and all that.”

He’s just too tired for this bullshit. Dean groans, laying his forehead on the table. “I’m having a little trouble finding out how some kids bedtime story is supposed to help us, Sam.”

“Uh, yeah it’s not, exactly. And actually King Arthur and His Knights of the Round Table has a very wide age audience, Dean. It’s a pretty good book.” When Dean doesn’t say anything on that, Sam shuffles in his seat and clears his throat. “But yeah it’s pretty much useless.”

“So we’ve pretty much got squat.” He sighs again, slumping against the back of his chair.

“Yeah, man. I got nothing.”

They sit in silence a few minutes, the gravity of the situation heavy between them. Dean tries to put together all they do know about Cambion’s. So far they’ve discovered that they are the offspring of a human and demon, that they are able to warp reality to their own will, they’ve got superhuman strength, and oh yeah, they’re all but invincible. He groans, tipping his head back against the chair. How the hell were they supposed to beat this guy?

“I’ll keep researching, but I think our best bet is Rowena right now.”

“You checked on her lately?”

Sam shuts the book and pushes it aside, reaching to grab another. “Yeah, she still hasn’t woken up.”

The sound of fingers drumming against wood makes Dean crack an eye open and he glances over to
find watching him warily. “What?”

“I think we need to call Cas.”

Dean’s glare is instant. “Are you serious?”

“Look, I know that what he did was wrong, but at the end of the day we kind of need him. What if he’s the only one that can wake up Rowena?”

“He was talking to Crowley.” Dean points out angrily. “Crowley!”

“He was trying to get answers from him, Dean. It's not like he was going behind our back and plotting with the former King of Hell.”

“Then why the hell didn’t he say anything, huh? Why didn’t he tell us about Jesse? We went in there blind, Sammy! We could have been better prepared! We could have — “ Saved Benny. Dean doesn’t say it, but he doesn’t really have to.

Sam’s expression softens slightly, and Dean cringes, turning away from the look.

“Your right, he should have told us. But Dean, even if he had would it have really changed anything? I mean did we ever stand a chance against Jesse? Cas saved us. He got us out and healed us. Dean when he pulled us out you were…” Sam pauses, sucking in a deep inhale. “Dean you were dying.”

Dean scoff’s instantly. He wants to deny it, to laugh it off and call Sam an idiot, but the anxious flutter of his heart and the twist in his belly says otherwise. He had been at the end of his rope there, and as much as he can’t stand the idea, he knows that if not for Cas he’d be gone. Despite that, he still can’t help but feel anger by what Cas had done. Worse still is the shocking fact that he’s come to realize that as mad as he is at Cas by Benny’s death, he’s even more furious that Cas had lied to him. That he’d betrayed him.

It strikes a nerve that Dean doesn’t fully understand, and which he doesn’t let himself dwell on.
“I still can’t just let it go.” He mutters, staring at the table.

Sam sighs in front of him. “I get it, alright? It’s just… look, man. You don’t know what he was like before.”

“What do you mean?”

Sam shrugs. “I don’t know, he’s just different somehow. When I met him it was like he was this stiff, silent, inhuman thing. He wasn’t rude, exactly, but it was almost as if he went out of his way to not talk to me more than he had to.” Sam frowns, his eyes shifting sideways as he no doubt goes through his memories. “It was almost like he wasn’t allowing himself to. Which I know makes no sense, but… I don’t know…” He shrugs, drawing off and finally looking up at Dean again. “And then when you got back he started acting different.”

Dean grumbles under his breath and bristles on the chair, not liking how much of an awkward turn this conversation has taken.

“I’m serious. I mean, he interacts way more with you than he ever has with me.” Sam leans back in the chair, his eyes going wide. “Dude, he gave you his blade; his magical angel blade, his only one.”

“He said he could get more, so shut up.” Dean snaps.

“I know, but still.” Sam’s eyes go mischievous, a small grin spreading on his face. “I think he likes you more. I’m kind of jealous, honestly.” Dean sputters at that a few moments much to Sam’s delight. “And I think you like him, too. I know you, Dean. I know how you act when you’re around people you actually consider friends.”

“I don’t even know the guy.” Dean protests, his face pinching. “And in case you’ve forgotten, he’s not even human.”

“Yeah, cause an angel is such a terrible person to have as a friend.” Sam remarks dryly.

Dean turns in his chair with a sigh, crossing his arms over his chest. “Whatever, man. Regardless, he lied to us, and I don’t forgive and forget that easily.”
“Well, maybe he’ll make it up to you somehow.” Sam returns his attention to the books laid out in front of him with a sigh. “Anyways, I’m going to research a little more. You heading to bed?”

Dean snorts. “Well I sure as hell ain’t gonna stay up reading that shit till dawn.” The chair squeaks as he pushes away from the table, and then he’s standing. He pauses before heading to his room, though, looking down at Sam whose already nose deep in pages. “Don’t stay up too late, alright? Try to get some sleep.”

Sam nods, not even looking up as he scans the pages. “Yeah, alright. Night.”

Dean grunts out a reply and then head’s to his room. He pauses by the spare where Rowena is to take a look inside. She’s still on the bed, the covers practically up to her neck. Her face is pale, but she looks a hell of a lot better than she did before, at least. Sighing, Dean heads to his own door.

He strips to his tee and boxers, and crawls in under the covers, curling an arm under the cool pillow. He’s exhausted, his body at this point pretty much useless, but despite that when he closes his eyes sleep does not instantly take hold of him. Instead he finds himself going over everything that Sam had said.

It was true. When he’d first met Cas he had instantly disliked him, so sure that he’d be just as much of a douche as Balthazar was, but after spending time with the angel Dean had found his perception changing. True, he still found Cas annoying, after all the guy had a very bad conception of personal space and an obvious staring problem, but all of that aside Dean didn’t really mind having him around.

A slight grin catches his lips as he remembers teasing the angel, the way Cas’ face scrunches slightly in irritation.

Dean has a feeling that the guy normally works hard at keeping control, and that only makes him want to antagonize him even more.

He’s still mad at him for lying, and he’s somehow holding back a meltdown over Benny’s death that he knows will come sooner or later, but he has a feeling his anger won’t last very long.

Rolling over Dean draws in on himself, all but crowding the edge of the bed. As his thoughts eventually still and he drifts into the beginning stages of sleep, he has this weird urge to glance over
his shoulder into the shadows behind him.

He manages to roll to his back and tilt his head slightly sideways before he drifts into darkness.

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His skin is on fire.

Dean groans and shifts on the bed, sweat beading his brow and sliding into his hair. He clenches his hands into tight fists as another wave hits him, this time lingering in its wake and leaving his skin tingling, fine hairs standing at attention. His heart flutters anxiously in his chest and the need to move has his legs shifting and tangling against the sheets. He draws a knee up and curves his other leg wide, his toes curling as every nerve ending in his body comes to life.

His shirt feels heavy, too heavy, and it sticks to his skin. Dean wants to peel it off but his arms feel like lead, and he’s just able to rest the flat of his palm against the exposed skin of his lower belly, where his shirt has ridden up.

He moans again as another wave of heat hits, this time seeming to pulse strongly in the hollow of his throat, directly in his chest, and low in his belly. He arches his back at the latter as it sends a new sort of sensation sparking in his body, and his hand helplessly trails lower on his stomach until his fingers are breaching the top of his briefs. He stops just as they land on his public hair, using his other hand to clench into the pillow under his head.

He tries to push past the fuzzy daze of his mind, realizing faintly that something isn’t right, but when another pulse of hotness slams into him his mouth parts on a sharp gasp and his hips lift into the air.

He has no idea what’s happening. He’s never experienced anything like this before, and he can’t quite form a coherent thought to try and understand. All he can do is feel.

Everything is raw, so raw it’s almost painful, but he wants… he needs…
Dean let’s out a hoarse cry into the darkness, finally closing his palm around his aching cock and it’s almost too much but god it’s not enough either and he just needs more! He doesn’t stoke himself, not yet, just squeezes around the base and even that is enough to make him cry out again, a thick pearl of precum sliding down from the head of his cock and landing wetly against his fingers. He rolls his hips and grinds against the air, digging his fingers so tight into the pillow that he’s surprised it doesn’t rip.

He spread’s his legs wider and gives his first pump, almost blacking out from the shock of the sensation which makes him pull his hand away with a whimper. He needs something but his touch is so intense that it’s bordering on pain. The sharp pins and needles sensation is back and Dean can’t stop twisting on the bed, the covers pulling down to tangle fully around one of his legs.

His clothes are driving him insane. His shirt feels harsh against the skin of his chest, and oh my god he can’t even think straight with how rough his briefs feel. Sucking in a sharp breath he fumbles to push them down, cringing as they slide over the sensitive skin of his balls. Once the unpleasant cloth settles high on his thighs he draws his hand away and pushes his shirt up. It’s heavy with sweat and sticks to his skin, and he moans as it brushes over his hard nipples, causing a new wave of tingling warmth to rush over his body.

For a moment he just lays there, sighing as the cool air kisses his heated skin and soothes a bit of the irritation. The relief last’s only an instant and then he’s twitching uncontrollably again, biting down hard on his bottom lip and silently begging for something, anything to cool the burn of his body.

Something swells in his chest, a feeling that Dean is at last familiar with; even if it still is confusing, and as it spreads and reaches he whimpers weakly, his back arching off of the bed again and his cock straining thick and painful between his legs. He tries to spread them more, but the briefs hinder the movement, and Dean can’t find it in him to pull them the rest of the way off, skin prickling just at the thought of the material dragging so roughly.

He ruts against the air helplessly, too out of it to hear his own mind begging for release, a jumbled mix of ‘please’ and ‘I need’.
Once upon a time Castiel had considered Heaven home. After pulling Dean from Hell he had desperately longed to return every time he had been ordered to Earth. It was natural.

When he had begun to understand the appeal of ‘free will’, his need to return to Heaven had still been there, only also driven with the urge to share his discovery with his brothers and sisters. To tell them that it was okay to break free from their stoic bonds and allow themselves to form opinions and thoughts of their own.

When Cas had fallen, the knowledge had cut deep. The Apocalypse was right around the corner, and Lucifer walked amongst them again, and Castiel had been so incredibly defeated with the knowledge that his Father had no interest in saving an earth that Cas had a new found appreciate of. Returning to Heaven was not only foolish but dangerous, what with Raphael and Michael running things and furious with his rebellion. Still, Cas had ached to return, even if only to experience something yet again familiar when he felt like his world was unraveling.

Making a deal with Crowley, opening Purgatory and consuming the souls there had made him powerful. Invincible. He was made anew, and he was God. His return to Heaven meant the start of a new order - a better order. He was revered and feared by Heaven and Earth alike, and Heavenly judgment was cast on any who stood in his way. He was… unhinged; made mad with power. His tyranny had stretched far and wide, and by the time he finally understood his mistake it was too late.

After that, it was shame that kept him from Heaven.

His time in Purgatory was penance for his sins, and if Castiel had it his way he would have remained there far longer. It was by Namoi’s hands that he was made free, though, and after he discovered her malicious role in Heaven he finally understood that what he had once called home had been nothing but an illusion.

He was lost yet again.

Being an angel on Earth is hard, almost as hard as being a human on Earth. Having ‘angel radio’ blaring in his ears at times coupled with the loud prayers from the people of earth is jarring. For some reason it’s always been harder tuning it all out when he isn’t in Heaven, almost as if the signal is weaker there, or at the very least more easily managed. Even in Heaven, though, Dean’s prayers have always been the loudest of them all, rather they are deliberate or unintentional.

Some part of Castiel must know the difference, though. Some code in his programing that helps him
differentiate between the two, because as he hears Dean’s prayers he recognizes obvious yearning, but Cas doesn’t feel the overwhelming need to rush to him. Not to say that he doesn’t feel a need to answer Dean’s prayers, because he always has and most likely always will, but as he stands in Heaven’s Library, ancient tome in hand, he can’t help but go over their last parting.

Castiel hasn’t seen Dean so furious in a long time, and the knowledge that he had caused the emotion to arise again sits ill on his stomach. After healing Dean he’d flown away to some hidden part of the world that not even his own brethren knew about. It was a cave deep in the Carpathian Mountains that he had first discovered centuries ago, drawn to the beautiful ice caverns and the mineral in the rocks that made them glow. Over the years he’d slowly begun to procure items to decorate a part of the cave he often dwelled in, and he had been lying on a thick bed of animal pelts even though he knew that his grace would be more easily replenished if he were to return to Heaven.

He’d slept for the first time in years, and instead of darkness he’d been met with fervent dreams of Dean. The hunter had been burning bright, light pouring out of his body much like Castiel’s own grace when used. He’d awoken shaken and confused, and had returned to Heaven soon after to find out what Hannah had learned of Jesse, which hadn’t been much, and which had lead him to his own research now.

The Library is a vast expanse said to have no real end, and surprisingly enough not many angels frequent it, other than those who are tasked with guarding its safekeeping and ancient tomes. They, at least, are many, and constantly walk the floors, sharp eyes scanning over every inch seeking out anything threatening. They’d paused and looked upon Castiel as he had entered, and it was unnerving, having so many sets of eyes directly on him before concluding that he meant the sanctuary no harm.

Dean’s prayers even now whispering at his grace cause a certain sense of paranoia which makes him glance up from the yellowed pages of the book, his eyes scanning the Guards around. He knows his reaction is foolish, that it only further made known just how humanly his emotions have become, but he can’t help it. Angels did have the ability to hear prayers, but if the prayers were directed towards a specific angel more often than not they were projected to that angel alone.

Dean’s prayers have taken on a stronger sense of longing, and it’s causing heat to creep up into his neck and he can’t help but wonder what exactly it is that Dean is praying for. It’s impossible to resist the call, but Cas decides that he’ll go to Dean under the guise of invisibility first, mostly because Dean appears to be praying unconsciously.

A few feet away from him an angel pauses, his head tilting slightly and his eyes narrowed. Castiel vaguely recognizes him as Pravuil, the Keeper of the Library. He doesn’t know much about Pravuil, but he does know that he is quite old, and has guarded the Library since almost the beginning of time. Castiel has a feeling that if anyone in the Library will be able to catch glimpses of Dean’s prayers it will be him. As if on cue piercing golden eyes turn to him and Castiel hastily looks away,
hoping that his face is as blank and free of expression as he’s attempting. He hastily shuts the tome and slides it back into its place on the shelf, and then with a soft flutter of wings he leaves the Library and flies to Dean.

He appears in Dean’s bedroom. A pained moan at his back has him swinging around, expecting to find Dean fighting for his life even with the fleeting question of how a demon could have gotten past the wards of the bunker. The sight of Dean writhing on his bed, completely naked with a fine sheen of sweat covering his body makes Cas suck in a breath so sharply that he almost chokes on it. His eyes quickly scan over Dean, watching as his naked body ruts against the air, cock straining and ruddy. Common morals make him jerk around with his face towards the wall, eyes wide and unblinking.

It takes a moment for him to remember how to fly again and just as he’s about to it suddenly strikes him that Dean had been praying to him. No matter that it wasn’t deliberate, he had still called to Castiel; he had wanted him. The knowledge sends something hot and heavy rushing straight through Castiel’s chest and deep in his belly, and he has to hold onto every since of self-control he has to not turn around when he hears Dean let out a deep, guttural moan again; a moan that sends another flash of heat straight downwards.

This isn’t the first time that Dean has prayed to him under similar circumstances, but it’s the first time that Castiel has flown to him. Castiel knows that the incoherent cries of a man in the throes of passion are not something to be taken to heart, and the fact that Dean’s prayers had not been sent intentionally only further make Cas realize that even if Dean harbor’s any longing towards him, it’s the kind that he would never readily acknowledge.

At some point Castiel had grown to accept that he would never be anything more than a fleeting thought at the back of Dean’s mind, and that usually gave him the motivation to resist the pull, but after being separated for two years Cas finds it harder to resist his own blatant need.

As Cas breathes out a deep exhale and turns slightly back towards where Dean lays on the bed, he becomes aware for the first time of a certain electric current in the air. It tingles softly along his skin and he doesn’t know how he’s missed it before, with it lacing the air so heavily. Dean groans again behind him, and for the first time Cas hears pain within sound. Any hesitation quickly leaves him as he swiftly turns.

Many years ago, Cas had repaired Dean’s entire body, had put him back together with great care. Castiel had gazed upon his naked form and at the time hadn’t fully been able to appreciate the beauty there. But he does now. Dean has always been a bit broader, his shoulders wide and strongly defined. Dean’s shirt is tangled high on his chest, just under his chin, and Cas watches in fascination as the strong muscles of his chest clenching in a way that makes his heart pound. He’s covered in sweat, and the darkly inked tattoo on his chest draws Castiel’s eyes. Naturally, his gaze drifts slightly lower and Cas’ breath catches in his throat when he see’ show hard Dean’s nipples are. They are a
dark, dusty red, and Cas is shocked by how strongly he wishes he could drag his teeth against each nub, feel their texture under his tongue.

When he had raised Dean from perdition his body had been slightly different, more sleek and coiled; younger. Now, though... Cas’ eyes drift lower and catch on Dean’s quivering belly. He’s grown softer there, over the years, and there’s a plush layer of fatty tissue that Castiel does not find unappealing. The striking contrast from hardness to softness is something he’s deeply drawn to and wants to fully explore. Dean’s stomach clenches as his hips rise from the bed, his cock straining tall and thick. Even from the distance Cas can see the gleam of precum that covers the head, and his eyes trace a line that leaks down to vanish in neatly trimmed pubic hair.

Dean’s testicles are drawn tight and high, and they appear just as painfully strained as Dean’s cock.

An agonized moan bubbles from Dean’s throat, his arms clenching in the sheet under him, corded muscles in his arms bunching. For everything happening, Dean’s eyes are shut, and he looks in a daze, as if he’s still half asleep.

The electricity in the room seems to be charged directly around him, and Cas can feel the pulse of it tickle against his skin. He feel’s something else as well, a familiar swell of energy that he’s sensed various times from Dean, and one that Castiel is all too familiar with.

Grace.

Something strikes him, a thought so horrific that his breath catches in his throat. It’s almost impossible to close his eyes from the temptation laid out before him, but he does, for only a moment, and when they open again his gaze is white with grace.

Castiel sees it.

Grace surges through Dean’s body, pulsing most vibrant at the chakra points of his neck, chest, and groin. It rages within Dean, threatening to consume.

Dean is burning up from the inside.

Cas panics, all previous arousal quickly leaving him at the thought of Dean suffering. Rushing forward he lays a hand on Dean’s shoulder, and jerks back almost instantly when Dean all but
screams, flailing on the bed as if in pain.

It’s too much. Dean’s burning too bright and Castiel is horrified, because the time’s he’s seen grace react in such a way ends with a vessel combusting from the inside out.

Dean needs to find a way to either calm the surge, or release it altogether, or else…

Not allowing himself to think of what could happen, Cas climbs to the edge of the bed, careful not to touch Dean’s body. Initially, it was his grace, and some of it still is; especially after healing Dean. If he could somehow extract a bit, maybe it would save him.

But there were so many factors involved. For one, Cas didn’t dare take too much, after all if not for Cas’ grace than Dean would have died after being stabbed. Even more alarming is the fact that the way that Castiel would have to extract the grace is dangerous and painful.

Very painful.

He would have to reach into Dean’s body and try to grasp onto the energy, hoping against all odds that it recognizes and accepts Castiel once again.

Castiel swallows hard and rolls up the sleeve of his trench, his heart pounding erratically in his breast. On the bed Dean flails and cries out, his body bowed in what looks like a painful and near unnatural position. The thought that he will hurt Dean further makes him want to sob, and Cas curses everything and everyone in that moment. When would Dean be free from his chaotic fate? When would he no longer hurt?

“I’m so sorry.”

The first touch has Dean screaming with such intensity that Castiel immediately places a barrier around the room, fearful that Sam will come running in. Dean’s body jerks and he tries to pull away, but Cas holds him forcefully down as his fingertips push past skin and muscle, further still past bone and towards the core of Dean. Dean’s screams crash against Cas like a physical force, and he grits his teeth to force himself forward. He’ll hate himself after this even more. He’ll never be able to look at Dean again without seeing his face now, wretched and twisted in pain; tear’s pouring from clenched eyes and down into his hair.
He can’t.

Extracting his hand as swiftly and safely as possible, Castiel slides down from the edge of the bed with a sob until his knee’s hit the floor and his forehead rests against the bed. He can’t do it. He loves Dean too much to hurt him in such a way. He’d never forgive himself.

Dean’s quiet above him but for soft, panted groans. Cas can still feel the grace pulsing so strongly from his body, untamed and surging, and it reminds him of younger angels who have yet to gain control.

What few humans know is that angels are not created with the knowledge of how to control their own grace, and as they grew older, and the grace grows stronger, if without proper guidance their grace can shift to something wild and forceful, sometimes seeming to have a mind of its own.

Castiel has seen an angel lose control of their grace only a handful of times, and if left unhinged the ending is always chaotic; often times causing what human’s assume is natural disasters.

But if caught soon enough there is a way to temper the chaos.

Castiel stills, his eyes narrowing deeply in thought. Only a few seconds pass before he’s rising again. He stands over the bed, staring down at Dean, at the beautiful, terrible anarchy of him. Leaning forward he lays a hand on Dean’s forehead. Dean hisses and tries to pull away, but Cas does not let him. “Dean.” He draws out deeply, allowing himself to be seen and hoping the commanding tone in his voice will be enough to pull Dean from his haze. Sure enough, Dean’s eyes begin to flutter after a few seconds, and then his cloudy green gaze is looking up at him. Cas cringes at the pain in their depths.

“Cas…” Dean’s voice is wrecked, stretched thin and hoarse from screaming.

Cas lowers himself more, until he’s leaning just over Dean, their faces mere inches apart. “Dean, I know you are in pain, but I need you to concentrate and hear what I’m saying.”

A low whine claws free from deep within Dean’s throat, and his hips arch off of the bed again as confusion fills his gaze. Cas hates seeing him like this. Hates that Dean has no idea what is
happening to his own body and hates that it’s happening because of him. “What’s…happening…” Dean rasps, his lips twisting as another surge of pain shoots through him.

“In short the grace inside of you is too much for your body to handle. Your body’s trying to accommodate and relieve the tension in the only way it’s able, but you’re only human, and it’s not able to properly calm the surge.”

Dean grunts and twists sideways as no doubt another wave hits him. His eyes remain tightly closed until it passes and then he slumps against the mattress with a pant, sweat pouring from his brow.

Cas licks suddenly dry lips, his stomach in knots. “I can help you. I’ll admit that I’ve never done this before, but I’ve seen it done and know the gist of it. It will be… intense. I’ve only ever seen it done in an angel’s true form, so I can’t imagine how different it will be within a vessel, but I can’t do it unless you give me permission.”

Dean shakes his head, and Castiel thinks he’s refusing, but then he realizes that Dean’s not exactly telling him no but rather thrashing his head back and forth, his jaw clenched tight and the veins of his neck thickly tense. Has he even heard anything Castiel’s said? How deeply in delirium is he? The thing is Cas needs Dean’s consent on this. What he’s about to do is a very invasive and intimate thing, and he can’t do it unless Dean agrees in some way or another.

Growling in both desperation and fear, Cas grabs Dean by his face and forces his head to him. Dean cringes and jerks open wide eyes, staring up at Cas.

“Dean, tell me I can do this! Tell me I can help you!”

For a second clarity seems to return to Dean’s gaze. His eyes dart over Cas’ face, and his hand reaches up to grab onto the sleeve of his trench. “Cas… please…”

It’s all the permission he needs.

Cas slaps a hand over Dean’s eyes and his grace surges outwards from his body. He hears Dean suck in a strangled gasp below him but ignores it, instead focusing on the part of himself that is pure energy and light. His human eyes are closed, but he sees with his angelic sight, and is somehow still caught off guard when Dean’s grace barrel’s into him like a brick wall.
Its power is willful and unrelenting, almost savage in intensity, and so different from what Castiel had felt in the crypt that he is left stupefied, his own grace quelled almost instantly. The only plausible explanation Cas can perceive is that Dean’s own emotions are somehow molding the grace within him; that in Dean’s fury towards Cas, and his emotional state over Benny’s death, he’s created a living storm within himself, and one that his body cannot readily contain.

For a moment Castiel’s shock weakens his intentions, and Dean’s grace quickly tries to assert dominance, all but swallowing Castiel’s own. Some part of Castiel wants nothing more than to give in. To lay flat on his back, show his belly, and let Dean surround him, because the sensation of Dean’s grace moving forcefully against his is something so intimate that he could weep. He can’t, of course, but if the situation were anything else he’d eagerly allow Dean to bend him into full submission.

The air snaps with electricity as Cas’ grace surges in a single burst, filling the room with blinding light. He isn’t sure if the sight of pure grace would still burn out Dean’s eyes, but he’s not ready to risk it, so keeps his palm held tight against Dean’s face. Under him Dean’s mouth falls open in a sharp gasp, and his arms begin to move frantically, his hands seeking purchase in the material of Cas’ trench. He’s pushing, fighting Cas’ hold, and his grace does the same, burning brighter still in a last attempt to remain in control.

Chaos fills the room. Items on a shelf over them fly off and slam against the far wall, the sound of rustling papers fill Cas’ ears as they swirl around his head, trapped in a sudden rush of wind spiraling through the room. Though Cas had placed a barrier around the room he can feel it already beginning to break, cracks forming in its walls. If he doesn’t stop Dean soon, it will fall altogether, and Cas is scared for what that may mean for Sam and the rest of the bunker.

He has a frightening thought; that he should just give in and let everything erupt in a single, magnificent burst of pure energy. He wonders what it would feel like, if he’ll ever again feel something like this raw onslaught of pleasure/pain… he wonders if the two of them would burst apart at the seams, all evidence that Cas had even existed nothing more than a black scorch mark on the wall. And Dean? Perhaps he would be nothing more than floating dust particles, flickering in the broken rays of light that filled the bunker.

As cryptic as the thought is, it has no real substance.

Even if the closeness that he and Dean had shared is now gone, Cas would still do anything to ensure Dean’s safety. In a way, it is all he has left.

Grabbing onto one of Dean’s wrists Cas forcefully pulls it away and presses it into the mattress. His
knees hit the bed, and in the next instant he’s straddling Dean.

The noise that comes from Dean’s mouth is somehow both a moan of pleasure, and a cry of pain. He’s docile for only a second before bucking up against Cas, but the movement is nothing more than an attempt to push Cas off of him. He snarls and bares his teeth, while his grace once again simmers in similar rage, striking against Castiel’s own like blows from a fist.

Cas doesn’t even flinch.

Holy light surrounds his body, his human form appearing as nothing more than a dark blur within the white. The light molds and grows, and in an instant six large wings snap into creation, made of nothing but pure angelic energy. Dean’s grace buckles sharp, and Cas can feel another surge – more powerful than any other, begin to crash from Dean. It will be the final wave, if released.

Castiel moves quickly.

Hoping that even in his delusional state Dean has the sense to keep his eyes shut; Cas jerks him up by the shoulders and shoves him against his chest. His wings shudder briefly as unrestrained energy focuses within them, and then they’re curling around Dean’s body and enfolding them both, creating a barrier against the outside world. He grips the back of Dean’s head and presses it against his neck; just in case.

The room explodes in light.

There’s a loud roar in Castiel’s ears. His skin prickles like a thousand needles are pressing into him. It’s been so long since he’s wielded the full extent of his grace, and now that he is an Archangel everything feels magnified tenfold.

Dean’s shockingly rigid against him, back bowed at an angle that looks near painful. Cas can feel the hot exhilaration of Dean’s breath against his neck, and through the rush of sound filing his ears, he recognizes Dean’s familiar deep bellow. Dean’s grip on him is firm, one of his hands curled around the bone of Cas’ shoulder, while the other tangle’s in the trench at Cas’ back.

As he curls his arm tighter around Dean’s waist, Cas wishes he could do this another way, one that is not so overwhelming to Dean. This is his last resort, though, and he won’t risk Dean’s life worried about frivolous pleasantries. His grace swells and pushes, countervailing Dean’s. Dean’s grace tries to resist, but Cas is an eon’s old being. Dean never stood a chance.
Cas knows the moment that Dean finally yields, can feel it in the way Dean’s grip on him wavers, and how his grace shrinks into submission, retracing it’s path back into Dean’s body, the pulsing surge of it weakening as it does so. Cas follows it’s retreat, a final push to make sure that it’s fully quieted.

Dean’s shaking against him, his cries now cut to short, sporadic pants against his neck as his body tries to come down from its over stimulated state. Cas carefully begins to draw his grace back into his body, his wings uncurling and his own breathing quick and uneven. Dean’s arms suddenly go slack and fall to his sides and his head rest’s more heavily against Cas’ shoulder. He whimpers once, a soft, almost nonexistent sound, before slumping heavily against Cas.

A part of Cas envies this. He’s anxious, now, heart hammering heavily in his chest and nerves flitting just under his skin. With a shaky grip he carefully lowers Dean down to the mattress, and has to grit his teeth and purposefully not look downwards to where Dean’s seed covers his belly. Cas had felt as Dean’s cock had twitched in release tight against his hip, and the knowledge that some no doubt now covers his trench is torture; a shove in the face of what Cas can never have.

When all the light has receded back into his vessel, Cas untangles himself from Dean, unable to look at his sleeping face. He stumbles from the bed. He can’t stop shaking. He feels raw and overwhelmed, distressed in ways he had never imagined. His body is on fire, heat pooling heavily between his legs. His cock aches, and he can’t help but be disgusted with his own lack of self-control. He has no idea how much of this Dean will remember when he wakes – if he remembers anything, and Cas is horrified of what the repercussions of what he had done will be.

Dean will never forgive him…

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Dean’s woken in the morning with a pillow to the face. He flails and jerks up, hands fighting against the air while Sam backs away with a snort. He’s dressed, and his hair’s still damp from a shower. He’s even got his damn shoes on.
“What the hell, Sammy?!” Dean yelps angrily with a voice rough with sleep.

“I thought we were checking out that case today.” Sam snarks, a little grin on his lips.

Dean rolls his eyes and scrubs a hand over his face. “Yeah, but I never said at the asscrack of dawn!”

“Dude, it’s almost ten-thirty.”

Dean blinks dumbly a moment before fumbling for his phone on his bedside table. As he does the sheet slides a little further down his body and Sam lets out a squawk, twisting around with a curse. Dean looks down and realizes, with horror, that his junk is on full display, his briefs having somehow managed to slide their way down his thighs. He hurriedly tugs them back up, bewildered when he notices that his shirt is all but jacked up as well. He tugs that down and then clears his throat, embarrassed. “Uh, I’m decent.”

Sam hesitates before looking over his shoulder. His brow is arched and though he still looks pretty much disgusted there’s also this smug little glint in his eyes. “Must have been long night, huh?”

Dean doesn’t bother looking at him, just flips him a birdie and blinks blurry eyes down at his phone, realizing with surprise that it is indeed ten-thirty. Weird. His internal alarm clock usually has him up by eight at the latest. He must have been more tired than he had thought.

Out of nowhere a pillow hits him in the head again with so much force that Dean goes flying back against the bed with a squawk.

“Grab a shower, dude. I’ll meet you at the door.”

He’s jerking the pillow off of his head and aiming to retaliate, but Sam’s already darting out of the door and the pillow hits the wall with a dissatisfying thunk! Dean glares a moment before untangling his legs from the sheets and standing up. As he stretches he’s aware of an uncomfortable dry tightness across his stomach and chest, and his face burns hot because he recognizes that sensation. He pulls up his shirt and sure enough, yup, that’s dry semen.

Hastily dropping his shirt he makes his way to the bathroom, trying to remember what wet dream he
had obviously had last night. It’s all kind of high schooler-ish, and he’s just really hoping that Sam hadn’t noticed because the last thing his brother needs is more leverage over him.

As he strips he tries very carefully to not look at the large mirrors over the sinks, something about seeing himself completely debauched sits wrong when he doesn’t even remember how he had gotten that way in the first place. He can vaguely remember waking up during the middle of the night feeling hot, and maybe kicking the sheets around, and as he turns on the shower and steps under the spray he tries to see the memory more clearly, but it’s like there’s a heavy fog in his brain and he can’t see past it.

Sighing he scrubs at his stomach with his hand, washing away the evidence

Josette’s brother owns a large cattle ranch on the outskirts of town, and the smell of manure wafts so strongly through the vents of the Impala that Dean gag’s when he gets his first whiff. Sam shifts a bit more subtly beside him, clearing his throat and lifting a hand to press against his nose, and Dean’s just glad as hell that it’s late November, because he honestly doesn’t think he’d be able to deal with the smell of steaming cow shit in the hot dregges of summer.

They follow a dirt road past wide pastures until they approach a massive old looking farm house, and two dogs that had been sleeping on the ground jump to their feet and start barking immediately, their fur on edge and their tails all but slashing against the air. Dean kills the engine but makes no move to get out, glaring through the windshield at the beasts. “Freaking hate dogs, man.” He mutters unhappily.

Sam makes an unhelpful grunt at his side and shrugs. “Maybe they’re all bark, you know?” And then he’s opening the door without a moment’s hesitation, like he’s not the least bit terrified that some mutt is going to snap it’s jaws over his dangly bits.
Dean hisses at him but Sam’s already shutting the door and walking around the Impala slowly, his hands held out. His mouth’s moving and Dean knows that he’s cooing at the dogs like a damn idiot, and he’s so incredibly close to grabbing at his gun holstered to his leg in case one of the dumb animals makes a run at him, but all they do is stand there and keep barking.

The front door of the house opens a few feet away and a small, round woman with graying hair steps out, a deep scowl on her face as she yells at the animals. They continue to bark at Sam a moment and the woman rushes down from the porch, slapping a dishcloth at the air around them until both dogs drop their tails between their legs and go running off around the side of the house.

Dean makes sure they stay gone before heaving a heavy sigh and finally opening his door. He climbs out and watches as the woman eyes Sam and him with a face scrunched in annoyance.

“Hi, Ma’am,” Sam’s already flashing a fake badge, and Dean shuts the door to stand beside his brother and do the same. “My name is Daniel Griggs, and this is Steven Crawford, we’re from the Kansas Wildlife Federation and we were wondering if we could have a moment of your time.”

It’d taken them a while to come up with a cover story, and its one that Dean’s still not too sure of mainly because he knows squat about what the damn KWF even is, but he’s trusting Sam to know what he’s doing and not make them sound like a bunch of dumbasses.

The woman squints at them, her already beady eyes narrowing even more. “The what, now?”

Dean resist’s the urge to throw an ‘I told you so’ look at his brother and clears his throat, walking forwards. “The Kansas Wildlife Federation, Ma’am. There have been some occurrences in the area with livestock being mutilated.”

This seems to get the woman’s attention, and she lifts a small, thick hand over her chest. “Mutilated? Like that Satanic stuff?”

Dean draws back in slight surprise, blinking at the unexpected question. “Uh, not exactly; just some black bear attacks, Ma’am.”

The woman arches a brow and looks at him like he’s an idiot, and Dean pretty much feels that way. “There are no black bears in Kansas.”
Dean practices looking like a fish before Sam thankfully swoops in, stepping beside Dean with a tight smile.

“You’re right, there aren’t. We’re thinking the bear must have migrated down from Nebraska. It’s attacked livestock and a few dogs. Actually, we’re pretty sure it’s rabid, which is why we’ve been called in to take care of the matter.”

*Can bears even get rabies?* Hell, Dean doesn’t even know, but he doesn’t want to stand there looking stupid either so he just nods his head gravely, trying to convey as much seriousness in his expression as he can. Apparently it works because the woman’s eyes go from annoyed skepticism to trepidation, and she glances over at the thin expanse of tree’s past her farm, her eyes darting back and forth like she’s trying to find the make believe bear there in the shadows.

“Frank’s gone off to the feed store in town, but I suppose me and you could have a talk.”

Dean resist’s the urge to sigh, while Sam nods his head vigorously. “Of course! Would it be alright if the two of us talked while my partner takes a look around the farm to check for tracks?” Sam cast’s a pointed but subtle look Dean’s way, and Dean smacks his lips and bobs his head, trying for his most charming grin.

Frank’s wife is clearly a bit weary of the thought of a stranger wondering around her property, but eventually she nods and motions for Sam to follow her back towards the screen door. “Just watch out for the dogs. They don’t like strangers.”

Sam throws a small, amused grin over his shoulder as he follows her into the house, and Dean scowls deeply at him before the door slaps shut, bouncing a few times before it quiets. He heaves a deep sigh and leans sideways a bit to try and get a peek around the house, but there are no dogs in sight and he figures if they were really going to knaw his legs off they would have attacked by now. At least he hopes. Forcing himself to man up he head’s around the side of the house, and if he goes a little slower than normal, well no one’s around to see it.

He immediately spots a few sheds at the back of the property and two larger barns. One’s obviously been remodeled and has freshly painted red walls and neat, clean wood. The other’s a bit bigger and has obvious signs of wear, with the wood slightly faded. The door’s pushed wide open and Dean can just make out stalls in the dim light.

Josette had said that her brother had turned the old barn into a small house for their son, so Dean’s
pretty sure the newer, updated building is the one he’s looking for. He walks across the soft grass towards the wide dirt path, and barking starts up almost instantly. Swinging around he sees the two mutts standing on a small porch and raising hell. They’re not actually making a move to come after him, though, and Dean takes that as a good sign.

“Yeah, all bark and no bite.” He mutters under his breath, and then because no one is looking and he can get away with it he flips them the birdie with a smug grin. Sure that he’s not going to be mauled to death he turns away from them and head’s towards the newer model barn, kicking up dirt as he goes.

The smell of manure is strong in the air and Dean crinkles his nose in distaste, thinking that he’ll be glad when they get to the bottom of this and are able to head back to the bunker. He self-consciously pats the pocket of his pants, feeling his small flask of holy water and the lone iron nail that he had grabbed that morning. He’s pretty sure he can just sneak some of the holy water into a drink when the guys not looking, but figuring out how to test the iron is something that’s a bit more tricky, and Dean’s hoping that the opportunity will eventually present itself as he goes along.

The large wooden door of the barn has been replaced with glass double doors lined in heavy white, and Dean tries to peer through the glass but there’s some kind of privacy shutter on the other side and he can’t see much of anything through the narrow slits. Clearing his throat he raps his knuckles against the glass a few times.

The right door swings open almost instantly, and Dean finds himself looking down at a frustrated man with severe bedhead. They just stand there a moment, staring at one another, and when the silence becomes awkward Dean clears his throat.

“Who are you?” Chip or Greg or whoever draws out in a voice heavy with sleep.

He plasters on a grin and holds out his hand. “Morning, my name is Steven Caldwell. My partner and I are here on behalf of the Kansas Wildlife Federation. Looks like a bear’s made its way down from Nebraska and is making a mess out of livestock; we’re just going around and letting everyone know and asking a few questions as well. Is it alright if I come in?”

The guy scowls down at Dean’s hand before huffing and rolling his eyes. He twist’s around and stumbles none too gracefully back into the barn, and Dean blinks a moment before heading in after him. This is already off to a bad start. Not only is the guy apparently a rude little shit, but he doesn’t seem like he’s going to be too corporative. Not to mention he hasn’t said anything about meeting Dean at the bar.
“Bear, huh?” The guy sighs as he moves through the open floor layout of the barn towards a small kitchen area. Dean takes in the place briefly, noticing a slightly ratty looking couch in front of a large plasma screen TV on the wall, a bed and some dressers tucked into a far corner, and what he guesses is a closed room that had been built onto the barn, most likely a bathroom and shower. All in all the get up isn’t really that bad.

“Uh, yeah. Black bear. It’s been doing some real damage.” He watches as Chip/Greg pulls down a mug from some shelving on the wall and fills it up with coffee. He stands with his back to Dean as he takes a sip, and Dean watches as his shoulders slump in a deep sigh at the first taste. When he’s done he turns and takes a seat at a small circular table. Dean waits to be offered a seat but when it never comes he locks his jaw and pulls out a chair anyways. Jeez, could the guy be any more of a douche?

“So why you talking to me?” Chip/Greg mumbles into his mug before taking a sip. “I’m sure Frank would have more information for you than I do.”

“My partners talking to your mother, and from what I understand your father is out at the moment, though, and we really need to talk with everyone on the premises. You know, protocol.” His grin is sharp and annoyed, he knows, but he can’t really help it. The guy is so completely different from who he had talked to that night in the bar that the change is practically giving him jetlag, and Dean has no idea if who he’s talking to right now is the real Greg, or some poor fool being possessed. He figures there’s no better time to find out, though. “Hey, would you mind if I had a cup as well?” He nods pointedly at the coffee in his hands. “It’s been a long morning.”

Chip/Greg cuts his eyes up at him and gives a look like he’s bothered by the very idea before dragging himself out of his chair and moving to take down another mug from the shelf. Dean hurriedly pulls out the flask of holy water and pours some into his coffee, returning it to his pocket just in time as his host turns and sets a mug down in front of him.

“Hope you like it black.”

He gives a tight smile to say thanks and carefully sips the steaming coffee, glancing up briefly over the rim of the mug as Chip/Greg takes another sip of his own.

Nothing happens. Damn. Looks like he was dealing with a witch after all. Now how the hell was he supposed to work the nail in?

“So whose farm has gotten hit?”
Dean’s frozen a moment, his mind slightly muddled from trying to figure out a way to iron the guy. When the words meaning finally resonate in his mind another surge of ‘oh, shit’ rushes through him. “Uh, some neighbors a little further south were hit, a lot of their sheep and some hogs were killed. There were some tracks leading up this way so we figured we’d check out the area to see if anyone else has had a run-in as well as give some heads up.”

Chip/Greg stares up at him, and Dean can practically see the thoughts forming in his mind. “Hm. All of the farmers around here are kind of a tight knit community, you know? It’s strange that I haven’t heard anything.”

Dean’s already reaching for the knife strapped to his belt, his shoulders tense and body alert. Chip/Greg surprises him, though, when he slouches back in the chair with a deep sigh and scrubs a hand over his face. Fully expecting an attack, Dean just freezes, unsure what the sudden shift in the man’s behavior could mean.

“Then again, strange is a word I’m pretty familiar with lately.” Chip/Greg mutters softly before looking back up at Dean with weary eyes. He clears his throat and shifts uncomfortably after a moment. “Well, thanks for the warning, I guess. We’ll keep a look out.”

He’s clearly being dismissed, but there’s something familiar in Chip/Greg’s expression that keeps Dean in his chair. He’s seen that look before, various times, on the faces of people who have stumbled across something they can’t quite explain. It’s the look of someone whose experienced the supernatural and has no idea what to do. For the first time Dean begins to question if this is something else entirely. He leans forward in his seat a little, laying an elbow on the table and clearing his throat. Chip/Greg arches a brow and studies him with a confused expression. Dean has to tread carefully. People aren’t always open with talking about this.

“You know, I’ve seen a lot on this job; me and my partner both. I’m talking about stuff that I’ve never seen before, you know? Stuff that most people wouldn’t even believe if I told them.” Chip/Greg’s face slowly begins to drain of color as he listens, and his hands all but clench around his coffee cup. “We run into that sometimes, not a lot, but it happens. Sometimes we’ll go out on a job that turns out being more than we’d expected.”

Chip/Greg nervously licks his lips. “Uh… more than you’d expect in what way?”

“Strange ways.”
Chip/Greg swallows, his eyes shifting away. “And is this one of those cases?”

Dean shrugs. “Maybe, maybe not; it all depends.”

“On what?”

“On how much information we get.” His eyes scan Chip/Greg, noticing now that he doesn’t just look tired, but *exhausted*. Like there’s something more than a sucky night’s sleep weighing on his conscious. Oh, yeah. Something was up. “There anything you wanna tell me?”

Chip/Greg’s eyes linger on him a moment before he turns his head to stare at the wood of the wall. He licks his lips a few times, chewing on the bottom as if he’s contemplating actually talking. Whatever’s knocking around in his head seems too much a burden to bear alone, though, because after a moment he opens his mouth and everything comes spilling out at a nervous, jittered pace. “I thought I had gone crazy when it first started. Hell, sometimes I still do.” He lets out a quick chuckle, his chin quivering slightly when he cuts off the slightly mad sound. “I thought about checking myself into the hospital, you know? I mean, I imagine they would have taken me in an instant; after all how many people can say they got some angel talking to them in their head, huh?” He lifts a shaking hand to cover his face, his throat bobbing as he swallows hard.

Dean straightens in his chair immediately. “Angel? Are you saying you were seeing some angel?”

Chip/Greg shakes his head, hand still covering his eyes. “No. I didn’t see anything. I *heard* him. In my head.”

Dean falls into stunned silence. A part of him would like to believe that Chip/Greg really is off his rockers, but the whole thing is too much of a coincidence. So an angel was behind this, then? A surge of something hot and angry flashes over Dean, and he wants to look up to the sky and curse every single one of the feathered dick bags. Why the hell are angels messing with people’s heads?

“You think I’m crazy, don’t you?” Chip/Greg asks with wide, pleading eyes.

Dean looks at him a beat before shaking his head. “No. I believe you.”

Chip/Greg all but deflates, falling down into his chair with a deep sigh, and as douchey as the guy had been, Dean can’t help but feel a bit bad for him.
“So what is it that this angel wanted?”

“Oh yeah, you’ll love this part. He said he needed my body.”

Dean stutters. “I’m sorry?”

“He asked if he could use my body; that there was something on Earth he needed to do.”

Call him crazy, but that sounds a hell of a lot like possession. It doesn’t make sense. Angels don’t possess people, right? Is it a demon after all? Chip/Greg’s clearly not possessed, or at least not anymore. Call him a skeptic, but Dean’s never heard of a demon taking a joy ride in a body and then just vaping out.

“You said he asked for your permission to possess you?” Demon’s don’t ask for permission. They just take.

“Yeah. The crazy thing is I said yes.” At Dean’s look Chip/Greg quickly tries to come to his defense, shaking his head as he hurriedly speaks. “I can’t explain it, man. It was just – I don’t know why, but I trusted him. Instantly. Hell, I was eager to help him out. The guy seemed kind of frantic.” He draws off, tilting his head slightly and frowning. “Actually, he was pretty weird for an angel.”

“Weird how?”

“Well, for starters he didn’t talk like an angel. Or at least what I’d expect an angel to sound like. He was kind of weird… quirky, maybe? And I’ve totally never heard of an angel with a name like – well, he said to call him Dr. Sexy.”

Dean fingers tips pause during mid drum, hovering just over the table. His brows shoot up and he can feel a faint blush climb his neck. “Uh… Dr. Sexy? As in Dr. Sexy M.D.?” Chip/Greg arches a brow and shakes his head, clearly not understanding. Dean clears his throat and waves him off with a nervous laugh. “Nevermind. Okay, so let me get this straight. Dr. Sexy the angel wanted to borrow your body to… to do what exactly?”

“That’s the thing, I’m not sure. I mean I remember being possessed. I remember feeling this – this
insane surge of something and then,” Chip/Greg shrugs. “It’s just nothing. It’s like I fell asleep. I woke up this morning with time missing and know that something must have happened, I just don’t remember what.”

Great. So they got squat on why angels are going around possessing people. The fact that angels are even a thing is still something that Dean hasn’t fully gotten used to. He’s not sure what the hell to think about this. Every Hunter instinct he’s got has him going into fight mode. The tried and true ‘kill first, ask questions later’ way of life that he and Sam have followed so far.

It’s only that one word that has him pausing. Angel. It’s so damn stupid and Dean’s not even sure why it means anything, but it does. Dean’s not religious; at all. Hell, if he’s being honest he’d say he has a grudge against everything holy; especially the big G. Too much shit has happened in his life and it’s always been more than clear that if there is a God, he doesn’t give a damn about the little man.

So why is he sitting here searching for some explanation that doesn’t end with him shanking an angel.

Or one angel, in particular, because it’s not like he gives a shit about the others.

The realization that he actually does give a shit about Cas hits him none too gently, and Dean bristles visibly, fidgeting in his seat and returning his attention to Chip/Greg, although at this point he might as well just say Greg. If Chip had ever existed, it had been when Greg was being possessed.

“So what do you think? I mean, am I going to be alright? Have you ever heard of anything like this?”

Dean forces a stiff, close lipped smile and slaps the table, perhaps a little too hard because Greg jumps. “Good news! You’re going to be fine.” He stands, tucking the chair back under the small table. “Believe me, angel possessions are at the very bottom of the list when it comes to threats of this particular nature. In fact, some would say you are blessed!” He laughs a little too hard at the failed attempt at humor, clearing his throat when Greg only frowns deeply at him. It’s clear by the guy’s distraught expression that he’s still worried about everything that’s happened, but the thing is Dean really has no idea what to tell him, or even where to start. It’s not like he knows squat about angels.

But he’s starting to realize that he really should.
Knowing what a half-assed job he’s done, Dean shuffles awkwardly to the door, giving a few weak words of assurance to Greg, who’s watching him with an almost pleading expression as he tries to run away. His hand’s closing over the door knob when Greg stops him, a sudden ‘wait!’ erupting from his lips. Dean licks dry lips and turns to face him.

Greg is scowling down at the table, his brows drawn tightly together. “Most of it was a haze, like I was sleep walking, almost. But I do remember one thing.”

At his pause Dean quirk’s a questioning brow.

“The angel, he kept saying a name, or at least I think it’s a name. I remembered because it was familiar, not in a way that I know, but just because of the name in general. Winchester.” Greg looks up at him, blinking. “You know, like the gun?”

For a few beats Dean can’t speak; his thoughts too chaotic to put words together. He hadn’t really considered that this could have anything to do with Sam and him, but now it’s blatantly obvious, and he realizes more than ever that he’s got some damn answers to get from some angels.

---------------------------------------------

“Wait, an angel possessed someone?” Sam’s skepticism is thickly laced as he stares at Dean from the passenger seat of the Impala.

Dean’s nods, glaring out at the road ahead. “Did you know about this? That they jack people’s bodies just like demons?”

“What? I – no!”

Sam’s got such a scandalized expression that Dean can’t help but believe him. He nods, licking his lips and tightening his fist around the steering wheel. “So they were hiding their dirty little secret.” He laughs bitterly. “Of course they were; they knew we wouldn’t help them otherwise.”
The Impala’s quiet a moment, and Dean knows that Sam is realizing what this means and how they’re going to have to take care of it. In Dean’s book, this makes them the same as demons, and he kills demons. Every damn chance he gets.

The thought of shanking the sassy British angel is almost satisfying, and Dean’s completely indifferent towards doing so to Hannah, but for some reason when he realizes what he’ll have to do to Cas, something turns sour in his belly and his palms begin to sweat on the wheel.

It’s confusing, his reaction. It’s not like he knows Cas exactly, because in truth he knows absolutely nothing about the guy aside from the fact that he’s an angel. An angel with a scowl that could rival that stupidly famous Grumpy Cat, who walks around like he’s on the set of some damn Bond movie, and has the most vividly clear blue eyes Dean has ever seen.

So what if he had saved Dean’s life more than once.

So what if he had looked *wrecked* back in Purgatory when Dean had been dying. Like Dean’s death would end his entire world.

So what…

“You said that Greg gave the angel permission to possess him.”

Sam’s words rip Dean from his thoughts. He blinks rapidly, trying to clear his head. “Yeah, so?”

The younger Winchester shuffles in his seat, clearly nervous with how his next words will land. “So – so maybe that makes them different? From demons, I mean.”

Dean turns a shocked face from the road to look at Sam, completely unbelieving of what he’s hearing.

Sam shrugs, his brows drawn high. “I’m not saying its okay, but they clearly aren’t going around possessing people against their will, either.”
“You can’t be serious.”

“All I’m saying is maybe we should talk to them before we make any assumptions.”

“Assumptions? Sam, angels are possessing people. That’s a damn fact!”

“People who have given permission to be possessed!” Sam reiterates quickly, his eyes sharp on Dean like he’s willing him to understand something that Dean’s just not grasping.

Dean has a hard time keeping his eyes on the road; his head continuously jerking back to stare at his brother in disbelief. Sam’s expression never changes, something so justifiable in his eyes that Dean honestly questions if this is real, if he’s not in some wacked out dream. “You honestly think that makes this okay? Holy shit, man, do you even get that – Sam, I talked to this asshole angel. I saw him parading around in someone else’s skin. There’s no telling what he did while possessing this poor joker. How the hell could that be morally right?”

Sam throws his hands up and huffs, universal language for ‘I’ve got no idea, but I’m sticking with it’. “I just don’t think you’re in any condition to be passing out any final verdicts. The only way we’re going to get to the bottom of this is by talking to one of the angels.” He shrugs. “Like Cas.”

What the fuck?

The Impala swerves suddenly, Dean spinning the wheel and hitting the brakes until he’s skidding to a stop on the side of the road, dust rising up to form a brown fog around them. Sam’s hands shoot out to brace himself against the dash and his door, wide eyes on Dean, who cuts off the car and swings around with a glare.

“What the hell does that mean?”

Sam stutters. “What?”

“The part about me not being in ‘any condition’.” Dean mocks with a sneer.

Sam’s mouth snaps shut and he slumps slightly with a weary sigh. “You know what I mean.”
“Actually, I don’t. That’s why I’m asking.”

“Dean, I know you. I know you’re not alright.”

Dean lets out a sharp burst of air through his nose and rolls his eyes, jerking his gaze away from Sam.

“I know.” This time Sam turns in his seat, narrowed eyes locked on Dean. “What happened to your hand, Dean?”

Dean grits his teeth even as he unconsciously pulls his arm tighter against his body to hide his still bandaged hand.

At his silence Sam snorts, shaking his head and turning away. “Yeah, that’s what I thought.”

“You don’t know what the hell you’re talking about.” Dean bites out harshly.

“Bullshit. You think you’re so good at hiding your real feelings, but you’re not. You never have been.” Sam sighs, and when he speaks again his voice has gone softer. “I know you’re upset about Benny. I get that, okay? But Dean I’ve seen what happens when you let your emotions drive you. I don’t think you’re thinking clearly right now. I think you blame Cas for Benny’s death and you’re so quick to jump on this whole ‘angels being bad’ thing because you feel like it will bring you some kind of justice.”

He wants to deny it. He wants to glare and keep arguing until his damn teeth hurt, but deep down he knows Sam’s right.

Goddamn, why is he always right?

Sudden emotion washes over him, cold and daunting, and Dean flings himself from the Impala before Sam can see him break down. His lips purse tight and his hands clench at his side as his boots hit against the dirt, his legs carrying him a few steps away. He’s always hated how damn hard it is to hold back his own emotions, how weak it makes him feel sometimes.
He hears the passenger door of the Impala open and turns his body more away so Sam won’t see his struggle.

“Dean, you’ve got to talk to me, man.”

Dean sucks in a sharp breath and scrubs a hand over his mouth, hating how his chin trembles against his palm.

“I mean is it only Benny? Because you’ve been off since the very beginning.”

A sudden, hysterical laugh bubbles up from his throat and slips out past his lips.

If you only knew.

He looks back at Sam, taking in his brother’s gentle but eager expression, his stance relaxed and leaning over the top of the Impala. He turns back to stare at the ground and then closes his eyes.

“You know,” He clears his throat, his voice gone deep with emotion. “I didn’t want to come back.”

Sam’s quiet a moment, before Dean hears him reply, his voice soft. “I know.”

Dean sniffs hard and nods his head. “I just… I got so tired of it, you know? After…” Dammit he was sick and tired and having a hard time saying her name. Gritting his teeth he makes himself bare on. “After Amara.” Jesus Christ, why did it still feel like a blade to his gut?

“Well… we didn’t exactly part on the best terms.” Sam mutters, staring down at the Impala’s shinning black metal.

Dean chuckles darkly, staring forlornly down at his own feet. “Yeah.” He looks up at Sam, and their eyes meet and stay a long moment, so much still unspoken between them. So much tension that he’s not entirely sure will ever fully fade, and he hates Amara even more for doing this to them, for driving a wedge between the two of them… for allowing Dean to. He sighs, his shoulders slumping.
“That’s not why I didn’t want to come back, though. Not fully, at least.”

Sam frowns and shakes his head.

“It’s just so damn stupid, thinking that I could ever be anything other than this, that I could ever have anything. After everything that had happened, I just… I guess I just remembered what it was like to actually want something.” He cringes, his nails digging into his palms. “I know that none of it was real, that she was nothing more than some perverse addiction that I couldn’t shake. She had her claws in me, Sammy.” He whispers harshly. “She knew the control she had over me and she played on that.”

His head jerks up to Sam, his eyes narrowed harshly. “And I hated it. Every goddamn minute of it, I hated it.” And he had. As unhinged as he had felt while in Amara’s presence, as strong as her sway over him had been, there had always been an undercurrent of disgust and anger. But at the same time, the want that he had experienced, as nonconsensual as it had been, had made him remember what it felt like to yearn for something more.

“I know you did, Dean.” Sam acknowledges softly before he pushes away from the Impala. He runs his hands through his hair with a sigh. “But I get it. You finally got what you wanted, and I took that away from you.”

Dean doesn’t allow Sam enough time to wallow in self-deprecation. “You’re wrong.” He stands there in the dirt, looking incredibly forlorn and feeling so freaking lost. “Nothing changed. I sure as hell tried to fool myself, though. God did I try. But at the end of the day, I was still miserable.” He looks up at Sam, making sure their eyes are locked before he goes on. “This is all I am, Sam. It’s all I’ll ever be. There’s no happily ever after’s for us. Never was. It’s time I accept that.”

The sound of cars passing fills the silence that follows, blurring in and out of intensity.

Chapter End Notes

SIIIIIGH. I don't know how I feel about this chapter, honestly. What do you guys think??????

Also, next chapter will have more Crowley and... ROWENA!!! Yay. Love me some Rowena :)
Rowena’s still unconscious when they get back to the bunker. It’s not like Dean had expected anything else, but the sight of her lying so still and quiet manages to make his mood even darker. Since they’ve known the witch she’d done nothing but make their lives a living Hell. Still, the memory of how beaten and bruised she had been when they had found her is fresh and while Cas had healed all visible wounds, there’s still something about her that seems so fragile and unlike the venomous snake that he knows her to be. It’s unnerving.

“Dean, we need to call him.”

Dean drags his palm over his mouth and glances over at Sam. He knows it’s true. They’ve got squat on Jesse and need answers as to what’s going on with the Angels. “Alright. Get it over with then.”

Sam eyes him warily. “You’re not going to do anything stupid, are you?”

Dean glares at him, not bothering to justify that with an answer.

“So… are you going to do it, or should I?”

He snorts, the sound loud and obnoxious. Dean does not pray. Sam seems to realize the stupidity of his own question because clears his throat and tilts his head a back. His eyes shut and his face scrunches in concentration, and Dean watches with an arched brow, torn somewhere between amusement and irritation. It’s just… weird. He doesn’t think he’ll ever get used to it.

A few moments of silence go by, and Dean’s getting impatient enough that he starts to shuffle his feet with a sigh.

Sam frowns and opens his eyes, looking around. “Hmm… it usually doesn’t take this long.”

“This is dumb.”
Sam gives him an annoyed younger brother look that says ‘You’re dumb’ before gesturing his way. “Why don’t you try, then?”

“Huh?” Again. *Huh?*

Sam sasses, crossing his arms over his chest and looking at him with an arched brow. They stare at each other a moment before Dean turns away with a sneer. “Oh, you have got to be kidding.”

“What, are you scared?”

The squawk that leaves his mouth is something that he’s not proud of. “Scared? You’ve got to be joking.”

“Fine. Do it, then.”

Sam’s fallen into his annoyingly familiar ‘I’m more stubborn than you’ mode, and Dean knows for a fact that it’s frustratingly true. “Wow. How old are you again?” Sam just raises his brows, waiting. Dean purses his lips and turns his back to him. He stares down at his boots. *Not gonna happen.* The thought of actually praying is something so distasteful that it rest’s sour on his tongue.

He chances a glance over his shoulder at Sam again. “What makes you think that it’ll work with me?”

“What’s the worst that can happen?” Sam says with an exasperated sigh.

Dean glares at him and turns away again, looking upwards. He blinks dumbly up at the ceiling. “Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray to... Castiel to get his feathery ass down here.” Cause yeah, if he’s going to do this he’s going to do it his way.

Sam snorts behind him. “You’re an idiot.”

“Stay positive.” Dean shoots him a cheeky grin.
“Oh, I am positive.” Sam mutters.

Dean glowers at him before looking around the empty room. He huffs in frustration and shuts his eyes again. “Come on, Cas! Don’t be a dick. We got ourselves a… a situation down here.” He cracks one eye open, looking around. “Do you copy?”

Nothing.

Sam stares dryly at him. “Dude, of course he’s not going to show up when you’re –“

Dean stops listening half way, his eyes widening as he looks over Sam’s shoulder.

Sam pauses mid-sentence, his mouth shutting slowly and a dry look of irritation coming over his face. “He’s right behind me, isn’t he?”

Dean doesn’t bother answering, just clenches his hands at his side and narrows his eyes at the angel.

Cas’ eyes dart up to him before quickly looking away, turning instead to Sam, whose turned to look at him. “Hello.”

“Uh, hey, man.” Sam gives a sheepish grin. “Sorry about that. Dean’s under the impression that he’s funny.”

Cas stands as stoic as ever. “I’ve heard worse. I assume you called me for a reason?”

Dean jerks, breaking from the still that had come over him. He clears his throat and crosses his arms over his chest. “Yeah, two, actually.”

“You want me to try and wake Rowena again.” He’s already walking to her bedside.

“Yeah,” Sam moves to stand by him, looking down at the witch. “We haven’t been able to find anything useful on Jesse. She’s pretty much the only lead we’ve got.”
“I wasn’t able to fully heal her because I had used most of my grace healing the two of you, but maybe if I try now it will work.”

Dean twitches at the mention of Cas healing him, and he’s reminded yet again that if not for Cas he’d be dead. It’s a stifling thing, to owe your life to someone. Some part of him can’t help but feel like he’s indebted to Cas now, and that hits him in all the wrong ways. He doesn’t like owing people. It’s why he and Sam more often than not handle cases own their own. It’s not like Dean has anything against helping a fellow hunter, he’s just lost so many people in his life that at some point he started to hate the idea of being responsible for someone.

“Before you go getting all glow-y,” Dean draws out, and he’s not sure why but the fact that Cas isn’t looking at him as he speaks makes him all kinds of irritated. “We got some questions for you.”

The angels lips tip downwards. “Questions?”

“Uh, yeah.” Sam pulls away from the bed, glancing up at Dean as he passes. “Maybe we should do this somewhere else?”

Dean shrugs and motions for Sam and Cas to head out, watching with narrowed eyes as Cas all but makes a wide birth around him, hurrying out of the door after his moose of a brother. Just what the hell is going on with him? Or maybe the angel knows what this is about, already. Now that he’s thinking about it, there’s no telling how long he’s been watching them. The thought puts Dean on edge, and he can’t help but pat the knife at his belt as he follows the two down the corridor towards the Map Room. He knows for a fact that it won’t hurt Cas, but having it resting there still makes him feel somewhat better, as irrational as that is.

Once in the room Sam motions for Cas to take a seat and plops down in one himself. Dean watches as the angel frowns down at the chair before carefully lowering himself to it awkwardly. Under different circumstances Dean would have found the sight amusing. He moves to stand at the head of the table near Sam and Cas’ eyes dart up at him before quickly looking away, and Dean’s had about enough of whatever the hells crawled up the angel’s ass.

“So, were you ever going to tell us about hitching a ride in some poor sucker’s body, or is that something you were just planning on keeping to yourself?”

Cas looks genuinely confused a moment, his face scrunched into tight lines.
“We know, Cas; about angels possessing people.” Sam offers.

At that Cas draws a little straighter, his gaze flitting back and forth between them. “You’ve met another angel?”

“Yeah, apparently mister Chatty at the bar the other night was some poor schmuck being possessed,” Dean quips snidely. “Me and Sam talked to the guy, and looks like the angel’s flown the coop, but that leaves us with a whole lot of questions; first one being why the hell you didn’t say anything.”

Cas doesn’t answer right away, staring down at the table with a look of extreme puzzlement. Sam calls his name and the angel looks up again, blinking owlishly before speaking in a monotone murmur. “I didn’t think that it mattered.”

“Didn’t think – “ Dean huffs, scrubbing a hand over his face in frustration. “How the hell could you think it didn’t matter? You guys are possessing people, Cas! You know who we are, you know what we do! We’ve ganked monsters for far less!”

“I am not a monster. I am an angel of the Lord.”

Cas finally looks fully at him, and Dean’s caught off guard by the clear challenge in his blue eyes. He locks his jaw and smashes his lips into a thin line, angry that Cas has the ability to unnerve him.

“It’s true that we require vessel’s while on Earth, but we do not possess anyone against their will.” Castiel sigh is one of pure frustration, and when he speaks again his voice is tired and a bit clipped, as if he’s repeating something he’s already said countless times before. “This vessel,” He pats his chest. “He asked for this, Dean. He was a very devout man. He prayed for it.”

“He prayed to be possessed?” Dean snorts, unable to believe anyone could ask for such a thing.

“Yes. He was very eager to help in any way he could against the coming Apocalypse. He considered it a great honor, actually.”

“And what about his family, huh? Did they consider it a great honor?”
For once Cas has the decency to look sheepish. He opens and closes his mouth a few times before sort of deflating in the chair, staring at the large map through the glass of the table. “His wife has passed, and his daughter… his daughter now lives happily with a very good woman who considers the girl as her own.”

Dean doesn’t say anything for a moment, the atmosphere in the room having clearly turned a shade gloomier. Sam coughs under his breath and shifts in his chair. Dean’s eyes remain on the angel. A subtle sadness is painted plainly on his features, and it’s totally unexpected.

Dean’s unsettled by the entire situation; mostly the fact that the person sitting just in front of him is what--some bright light filling up a meat suit? He knows nothing about angel physiology; hell he can’t even begin to comprehend, and there’s just something that feels so incredibly…wrong. He can’t decide if he wants to stare at Cas (or his vessel), or pointedly look away.

He’s mad. He’s confused. Everything about Cas isn’t real; from the five o’clock shadow covering a sharp jaw, to the pink, plush lips that stand out so blatantly against the faint dusting of hair.

The moment Dean had laid eyes on Cas, something in his mind had sparked to life. He hadn’t known what it meant at the time but looking at Cas now - at his straight nose and deep set eyes, Dean has the strangest feeling that he’s seen that face before. It horrifically dawns on him that he may have met Cas’ vessel at one point or another before he had been possessed. Sure, the chances of that seem incredibly slim, but it’s not like crazier things don’t happen every day.

Cas’ suddenly turns and their eyes lock. Dean feels all the breath leave his lungs and for a split second something flashes over his vision and he’s no longer in the bunker but standing on a porch. He’s still looking down at Cas, but Cas is different somehow. He’s more cleanly polished, domesticated with his hair neatly combed and wearing some stupid blue pull over with a zipper front. He’s looking up at Dean like he’s the freaking puzzle that needs to be figured out, and for some reason that scares the hell out of him.

The vision jerks from him as quickly as it had come, and Dean’s overcome by the swift change again, blinking rapidly as his brain tries to reassert itself to his surroundings.

“Dean?”

Sam’s calling his name and Dean tries to focus on that as he turns his head, feeling like he’s going in slow motion. There’s a heavy, fuzzy sensation in his brain and he can feel the beginning of what’s
most likely going to be a massive migraine. “Huh?”

Sam frowns at him. “I asked what you thought of all this?”

He’s at a loss, practicing his best fish out of water look, and Sam must mistakes it for abnegation because he holds up a hand as if to cut Dean off before he can say anything; which he hadn’t been about to do anyways.

“Look, I know this goes against… everything, but right now, the way I see it, we don’t have any choice. We kind of need him.”

Dean licks his lips and glances down at Cas again. The angel’s still watching him, his eyes narrowed and Dean feels strangely naked under his gaze. “Well I guess it’s settled then.”

The room falls into silence, no one knowing quite what to do. Sam’s the one that finally breaks the tension, the scrape of his chair echoing loudly against the walls. “We should head back to Rowena.”

Cas stands immediately, and Dean takes a step back as he realizes that over the span of a few minutes he’s somehow drifted closer to the angel.

“I’m not sure if I’ll be able to wake her, but I will try.”

Sam gives Cas a thankful smile before glancing at Dean, and then they’re heading through the corridors. Dean can feel Cas’ eyes on the back of his head the entire way. It’s an almost physical weight that he’s slowly folding under. Just what the hell is it about Cas that makes him so unsettled? There’s something about the guy that affects him on a deep personal level and Dean can’t help but wonder if Sam feels similar. He glances up at his brother. Sam looks at the angel as if he’s the answer to all their problems, but Sam’s always been like that, looking for some kind of meaning in all their suffering.

He’s naïve, even now, and it only makes Dean realize that he’s got to look out for him. So until Cas can prove that he can really be trusted (which after this whole possession fiasco, most likely isn’t soon coming) Dean’s got to be the one with the level head.

“So, was it one of you guys?” Sam’s looking behind him and over Dean’s shoulder.
Dean follows his gaze and finds Cas frowning. “What?”

“That possessed the guy?” Sam explains. “I’m assuming it wasn’t you, so was it Hannah or Balthazar?”

“Oh.” Cas shakes his head. “No. At least I don’t believe so. To be honest this is the first I’ve heard of it. I’m not sure who it could have been, or even why.”

“Great.” Dean scoffs. “Aren’t you some kind of leader up there? Shouldn’t you know this?”

Cas shakes his head quickly. “Hannah and Seraphiel regulate the angels now. Balthazar and I are just… I suppose you could say Hannah thought our experience would be beneficial.”

Dean doesn’t say anything, although he wonders why he’s yet to see this Seraphiel guy. If he and Hannah have some sort of joint leadership wouldn’t it make more sense that when the angels had first appeared Hannah would have brought him instead of Balthazar? Hell, or Cas for that matter. Apparently his thoughts must show plainly on his face, because when Cas speaks again it’s on the exact subject.

“Not all angels are comfortable on earth. To some it can be very… disconcerting. Seraphiel choses to preside in Heaven while Hannah commands garrison’s here on earth. It’s a very able unit of command, I assure you.”

“Yeah, well, good for them.” Sarcasm has always been second nature to Dean, and he’s never missed an opportunity to wield it, but Cas has a way with unimpressed glares that makes him feel flustered and slightly foolish. He licks his lips nervously as he looks away, determinedly staring at the back of Sam’s head as they head back to Rowena’s room, all too aware of the sensation of Cas’ eyes boring into his skull. The guy seriously has a staring problem.

Not that Dean isn’t used to people staring at him.

He’s knows he’s attractive, and yeah, he may have a bit of a narcissistic streak in him. Luckily the years have been kind, and though he’ll be hitting the big Four-Oh in seven short months – because yeah, he’s counting, Dean considers himself one of those rare individuals that only get better with age. Like a fine wine - a fine wine with stiff knee’s and a back that can make his life a living hell if he sleeps on the wrong side of the bed.
Hey. You can’t be perfect, right?

They finally shuffle into the guest room housing Rowena, and Dean takes a sidestep so Cas can enter behind him. The angel moves to the bed, looking down at Rowena’s pale complexion. She’s always been on the fair side, but she looks downright ashen now, and Dean can’t help but wonder what kind of hell Jesse put her through. He tries not to feel too bad for her. It’s not like she’s completely undeserving of a little ass kicking, after all.

Still…

Looking at her is almost haunting.

Cas frowns sternly down at her, two fingers resting lightly on her forehead. He’s quiet a moment, his head cocked slightly and his body still. Dean has a bazaar thought that compare’s Cas to a stone angel in a graveyard, so hard and unmoving. The image upsets him for some reason, and he reminds himself that Cas isn’t like that, that’s he’s this living, breathing being whose eyes could never look so cold.

“I should be able to heal her.”

Deans takes a few steps closer, relief fueling giddiness in his steps. “Awesome.”

“Perhaps before I do so, you’d like to restrain her? For precautionary measures?”

Sam jolts as if he’s been forcefully pushed from a daze. “Yeah, actually that’d probably be a good idea. Uh, let me just… Hold on.” He throws Dean a glance that can’t be anything but warning, and then hurries from the room.

Dean rolls his eyes and holds back a sigh, irritated that Sam seems to think he can’t have a single conversation with Cas without it ending in blows. Not that he’s wrong, but he’d be damned if he strokes his little brother’s ego by admitting it out loud. Glancing around the room he spies an old wooden chair against an equally old dresser and pulls it forward a bit, swinging it around with a flick of his wrist and throwing a leg over the seat to straddle it. He rolls his shoulders and pops his neck a few times with a low groan, slumping a bit against the back of the chair. It’s weird. He remembers waking up once during the night because he’d been hot, but other than that he should have slept pretty well. Why the hell does he feel so drained?
“How are you, Dean?”

Dean jerks his gaze up, his eyes wide. For a moment he wonders if he’s been talking out loud. Cas glances over at him and his eyes travel over Dean before looking away again.

“The other day when we came back from Purgatory you were… not so well.”

*Oh.* Dean scratches the back of his neck and shrugs a shoulder. “So I’ve heard. I don’t know, man. I’m fine now. Thanks to you, I guess.” He manages to actually look up at that, holding Cas’ gaze. He figures he owes the angel a proper ‘thank you’ and hopes that Cas understands that this is his way of doing so.

Cas, as expected, does not shy away from him gaze, and for the life of him Dean can’t look away either, so they just stay like that, filling the room with heavy silence until Sam comes stumbling loudly in a moment later.

Sam’s got a pair of enchanted cuffs in his hands and he’s looking between them, his brows slowly climbing towards his hairline. Dean watches him with an annoyed scowl, trying his best to ignore the way his ears feel slightly heated.

“Well are you going to put them on her?”

Cas moves a few steps over to give Sam room, but otherwise stares attentively at a brick on the wall like it’s the most interesting thing in the entire world. The look on his face is so comical that Dean can’t help but think of a child that’s trying to feign innocence after being caught doing something they not supposed to.

Once Sam’s got Rowena shackled he steps away and moves to hover over Dean with a smirk.

Cas leans over the bed and lays his fingers on Rowena’s forehead, and after only a few seconds Rowena sucks in a sharp gasp of air, her eyes shooting wide. Dean’s up and out of his chair, moving with Sam to the foot of the bed while Cas draws back. Rowena blinks wide, slightly glazed
over eyes, and then with a sudden guttural cry leaps from the bed. She hits the wooden floor hard, landing on her side, and Dean rushes forward to help her up but a hard hand on his chest pulls him back. He looks up Cas, half annoyed and surprised that the angel would touch him so freely.

Cas is looking at Rowena as she struggles to her hands and knees, fumbling unsteadily with her hands cuffed. “Wait… she is not well. Keep your distance.”

Dean jerks his gaze to Sam, whose still inching towards her. He hisses out a warning and tsks when Sam holds a hand up and continues forward. The witch looks around the room with large, slightly unfocused eyes, and something about her seems wild, crazed even.

“Rowena?” Sam reaches out a tentative hand, palm up.

“I don’t think it’s wise to –“

Before Cas can even finish his sentence Rowena is on her feet and coming at Sam. Her lips are drawn back from her teeth and she’s screaming; wailing in rage. Sam yelps as she barrels into him, and even with her slight built she’s got enough momentum to send him skidding backwards a few feet. Dean pales when he watches her snap at Sam’s face like some kind of rabid dog. Sam’s holding her back, but just barely; and Rowena’s getting closer by the second.

There’s a sudden gust of wind against Dean’s side, and before he can even comprehend what’s happening Cas is behind Rowena, one arm around her small waist and the other covering her eyes. The moment he touches her she goes from crazy to full on insane, and her screams shift to something desperate and agonized. The sound shoots through Dean and claws at the walls buried deep within him; walls that keep memories of Hell and torture at bay. It’s so gut wrenching that he just wants to shut his eyes and press his palms against his ears, to block the sound out and pretend that he had never heard it.

“What’s wrong with her?!” Sam yells over the shrieks, his eyes wide and spooked.

Cas wrestles with Rowena in his arms before she suddenly goes limp.

The room goes quiet.

Cas carefully lift’s Rowena into his arms and carries her back to the bed. He lays her down gently
and after a beat reaches out to push a lock of dirty, tangled hair from her face. “I had wondered if something like this would happen.” He says softly. “I put her to sleep, but she won’t stay that way forever.”

“What the hell was that?!” Dean hisses, completely shaken.

Cas glances over at the both of them before sighing. “I’m afraid that this is something I am unable to fix. Whatever she went through while in Hell, whatever… torture, that she endured, I may be able to erase the physical evidence, but I cannot take away the mental. I’m sorry.”

Dean let’s that sink in, a loud, humorless laugh bubbling up from his throat. “So she’s nuts. Awesome.” He shakes his head and swings around, staring down at the floor with a locked jaw. What the hell were they supposed to do now? The one advantage they had against Jesse is off her freaking rockers.

“What about Crowley?” Sam asks softly, staring down at Rowena. “Maybe she’ll react differently if he’s there when she wakes again.”

“You really think that’s a good idea?” Not that Dean has a better one. “I mean last we were all in the same room together they weren’t exactly on ‘friendly terms’.”

Sam shrugs. “They’ve never been on friendly terms. It’s kind of their thing.”

“Who’s to say that Rowena even has any idea what’s actually going on? You saw her; she was completely out of it! For all we know she’s back in the Pitt fighting off God knows what.”

“So we restrain her. For real this time.”

Dean snorts. “Yeah, I’m sure that won’t remind her of Hell.”

Sam releases a huff of frustration and combs his fingers through his hair. “What other option do we have, Dean?”

None. He knows it as well as Sam. Truth is they’re pretty much screwed without Rowena.
“I’ll leave the two of you to think it over.” Cas says with a nod at Sam. “When you’ve come to your decision, call on me and I’ll help in whatever way I can.”

Sam gives a small, grateful smile. “Thanks, Cas.”

Cas nods faintly at him before his eyes shift to Dean.

Dean doesn’t quite meet his gaze; just licks his lips and nods silently. A moment later he hears Cas vanish in a flutter of wings.

“Dean, we need to do something.”

Dean huffs and scrubs a hand over his face. “I know, I just… dammit, I need a beer.” He pushes past Sam and out into the hallway, walking the corridors and heading towards the kitchen. Everything about this is completely screwed up, and he can’t get the image of Rowena howling in Cas’ arms out of his head. She had looked terrified. The whole scene’s left a sour taste at the back of his throat, and he just wants to chase it away.

“Dean.”

He ignores Sam’s persistent tone, walking into the kitchen and jerking opens the fridge. Pulling out a beer he doesn’t bothering looking for to a bottle opener and instead hooks the notched edge of the cap against the counter and pops it off with a swift blow against the glass with the heel of his fist. He’s drowning the cold, slightly bitter liquid in an instant.

“Dean.”

Jesus Christ, does he never give up? Tipping his head back Dean drowns half of the bottle in a long, continuous chug before lowering it to sit against the counter. He takes a moment to compose himself before wiping his mouth with the back of his hand and turning around. “So let’s hear it.”

Sam frowns. “What?”
“You’re grand plan!” He throws a hand up. “I assume you have one, because I sure as hell don’t.”

“Well…”

Of course. Dean shakes his head with a huff, all but collapsing down into one of the kitchen chairs. “Things just can’t ever be easy for us, can they? What the hell are we supposed to do with this, cause last time I checked their isn’t some spell to fix crazy.”

“Well, that’s the thing,” Sam pulls out a chair to sit and leans slightly over the table as he talks. “I don’t think she’s crazy, at least not really. I think she’s just… traumatized.”

“Traumatized?” Dean arches a brow.

“Jesse’s had her held prisoner for God knows how long. I mean, there’s no telling what he did to her.”

It would make sense if Rowena’s just temporarily clocked out; that she’s suffering from a severe bout of PTSD. “When she woke up it was like she didn’t even know where she was, or who we were.”

Something flashes over Sam’s eyes, a thought that makes them slightly darker, and his face more somber. “Dean, what if she really thinks she’s still in Hell?”

Shit. He gives a sympathetic cringe. There are so many levels of wrong with that. If it’s true, though, it only makes things even more complicated. “How are we supposed to snap her out of it?”

Sam’s silence is all the answer Dean needs. They’ve got nothing. Actually, they’ve got even less to go on than what they started out with. Typical. A sudden thought has a huff of laughter bubbling up from his throat, and Sam glances up at him with a frown. Dean shifts in his seat and shakes his head. “Nothing, it’s just… How the hell did the two of us survive this long?”

A small smile plays across Sam’s face. “It’s kind of surprising, isn’t it?”

Hell yeah it is. Despite that, though, Dean has the strangest feeling that while things have always been hard for them, they’ve never been this hard. It’s a confusing thought, and Dean has no idea
what to do with it. Ever since coming back to the bunker something’s have felt off. No, for months now, really, things have been off. He’s been off, and it’s frustrating because he doesn’t understand why. “You ever get the feeling that things used to be different before?”

Sam frowns. “In what way?”

The thing is Dean doesn’t really have an answer for that, because he doesn’t know himself. “Just feels like something’s changed…”

“A lot of things have changed.” Sam mutters, his gaze not really meeting Dean’s.

Dean’s eyes shift away as well, and he sighs. “Yeah. Yeah I guess you’re right.” And he’s really getting to old for this shit. He knows now that hunting is all he’ll ever be, but Dean can’t help but wonder how long before some shifter gets the jump on him. Hell, half of the time he can’t even stand up without his knees popping, and it’s a miracle that his back hasn’t given out on him during a hunt yet. The grim reality is that Dean isn’t just getting old, he is old.

He nurses the rest of his beer with a slightly more somber mood, the weight of everything resting heavily on his shoulders.

“You know, there may be a way to get through to Rowena.”

Sam’s got a look on his face that makes Dean instantly weary, and lets him know immediately that he’s probably not going to like whatever he’s got to say. “I’m listening.”

“Okay, so just hear me out…”
“This is a stupid plan.”

Sam throws an exasperated look over his shoulder at Dean as they near the door to the dungeon. “Yeah, you’ve already said that. Like ten times. It’s the only option we’ve got, Dean.”

“You know he’s not going to just roll over and start taking orders, right? He’s going to want something.”

“Alright, so what should we do then?”

Dean’s got nothing. He’s been racking his brain for the past hour, practically burning boot prints into the floors. As much as he hates Sam’s idea, it’s the only one they’ve got. So he pursues his lips and glares at his brother like he’s the bane of his entire existence. “Just so we’re clear, I don’t like this!”

“You’re not the only one.” Sam mutters as Dean pushes past him and shoulders open the door.

Crowley’s sitting prim and proper inside the dungeon; ankles crossed and folded hands resting in his lap. He’s got a big, shit eating grin on his face, and his head’s tilted just a bit, but as Dean looks a little closer he notices that there’s a certain flicker of unease in his eyes, and maybe his lips twist a bit too sharply at the sides.

“I’m assuming things went well, then?” His eyes flicker briefly behind the two of them before settling once more.

“Why do I get the feeling that you’re surprised to see us alive?” Dean hisses through his teeth.

“Maybe because I’m always a bit shocked that the two of you haven’t gotten yourself killed yet.” Crowley snarks back.

“You knew about Jesse. You sent us on a suicide mission!”

Crowley rolls his eyes. “I swear; it’s like the two of you forget that I’m a bloody demon!”
“That’s bullshit and you know it.” Sam’s steps forward until he’s just outside of the circle and glares down at Crowley. “You needed us to get Rowena, what use would we be to you dead?”

“You knew that if you told us, we wouldn’t have gone.” Dean cuts in angrily. “Not yet, at least. Not until we knew more about Jesse and had a way to kill him.”

“Congratulations, would you like the prize behind curtain number one or two?”

Dean ignores him, moving until the toes of his boots are just outside of the protective circle. “You sent us in there – empty handed, just to save Rowena. Why? And don’t give me any she’s my mother bullshit when we all know you could give a rat’s ass about her. Why do you want her so bad? What’s she got that you need?”

“You know, it’s occurred to me that during this lovely little chat, I’ve yet to see hide nor hair of the evil bitch.” Crowley hisses, leaning forward in his chair. “For all I know, she’s not even here.”

Dean and Sam share a look, taking a few steps away from Crowley and where he’s all but simmering in his chair. For what it’s worth, Dean’s still sure that this is a bad idea. The fact that he had agreed to it only proves how shit out of luck they really are. But, when times are tough…

“She’s here.”

Sam glances over at him as he speaks, his eyes waiting for silent agreement. Dean purses his lips unhappily and swings back around to Crowley, whose now eying them with a narrowed, curious gaze.

“We found her and brought her back, but… look; they did something to her, man. She’s not… something’s wrong.”

Silence fills the small room. Crowley’s features stay stiff and closed off, and if not for a slight tick of his jaw Dean would have thought Crowley as apathetic as he’s no doubt trying to pull off.

“Wrong?” His brow lifts just slightly.
“Maybe it would just be better if we showed him.” Sam mutters near his ear.

Dean bobs his head and clears his throat. “Uh… Cas, you got your ears on?” It’s almost laughable, how just hours before the idea of praying to the angel had been so distasteful. Now, though it feels so incredibly normal. “We’re ready, so bring her on down.” A few seconds pass in silence, and Dean rushes to say his next words to Crowley. “Just remember, we did what you asked. Anything else… well, that’s beyond us.”

Castiel appears with a faint flutter of wings and a soft breeze that brushes against Dean’s skin.

Dean had expected him to fly in carrying Rowena’s unconscious body, but the sight of her struggling fiercely in his arms, hands clawing at the skin of his face, makes something shift and swell furiously within him.

He knows that Rowena is completely out of it right now, but that doesn’t seem to stop him. He surges forward with a hiss of anger, grabbing at her arms, wrenching them away from Cas and behind her back. Rowena yowls and screams, bucking against them both like a wild animal, and Sam hurriedly pushes a chair over to them so Dean and Cas can both wrestle Rowena down and hold her still while Sam secures her ankles and wrist’s on the chairs arms and legs.

When she’s finally bound Dean draws away and looks at Cas, whose still standing close. Like a magnet Cas’ eyes immediately lift to meet his own, and Dean swallows. “You alright, man?” His eyes search Cas’ face, but there isn’t a single scratch marring the otherwise soft skin.

There’s just the faintest tilt of Cas’ lips, but the sight of it is enough to cause Dean’s heart to pound in his chest. “I’m fine, Dean. You’ll find I’m all but invulnerable to most human wounds, and I assure you I’m a quick healer.”

Dean nods a little dumbly but otherwise does nothing. He makes no move to take a step back, and neither does Cas; the two of them just standing there staring at one another. It’s actually a little ridiculous. Rowena’s tied to the chair just behind them and wailing like a banshee, and Dean knows that Sam is most likely watching the entire exchange with amusement, but for the life of him he just can’t pull his gaze away.

He’s bombarded yet again with the idea that he knows Cas; or knows his vessel, rather. There’s just something so familiar about his entire presence that draws Dean in.
“Uh, Dean?”

Sam’s voice brings him back to reality and with a flash of heat to his face Dean stumbles a few steps back and jerks his gaze away from the angel. He blinks sluggishly, as if he’s just waking from a deep sleep. “Huh?”

Sam rolls his eyes and then jerks his chin upwards. Dean turns around and realizes what’s going on.

It’s Crowley. He’s spooked. His wide eyes are locked on Rowena, and his jaw is slack, his mouth hanging open. His face is frozen with shock and all but drained of color, taking on a slightly gray pallid. Rowena’s screams kick up a few notches, and Crowley jerks hard in the chair, his lips twisting in a cringe. He doesn’t look away, though, and the horror on his face makes Dean feel almost bad for the demon.

“What…” Crawley’s mouth moves a few times, but nothing else comes out, and it’s clear that he’s so unnerved by what he’s seeing that he can’t even speak.

“We don’t know.” Sam moves towards the barrier again, finally succeeding in drawing Crowley’s wide eyes away from Rowena. “She was unconscious when we found her, locked in some kind of catacombs. When she woke up… well…”

Crowley drags his gaze to Rowena again. “Catacombs… I know the ones. The sarcophagi nullify magick. She would have been all but powerless.”

Well, that would explain it. Dean’s been wondering why Rowena would just allowed herself to be held prisoner when they all know she’s more than capable of escaping. But the loss of her power makes everything clear. “Sam seems to think she’s not all here in the head.” He realizes how that sounds and clears his throat. “As in she thinks she’s still in Hell.”

Crowley shoots a glare at Cas, whose been standing just behind Rowena, watching the entire exchange. “And what about special fingers over there?”

“I healed her the moment we returned.” If Crowley’s sarcastic tone bothers Cas, he doesn’t show it. “Her body healed, but I assume that whatever has been done to her mentally is something too strong for me to break.”
“Too strong for you to break.” Crowley repeats, his voice laced with skepticism. “*You’re a bloody Arch-angel!*”

“Yes. And Jesse is a Cambion.” Despite the obvious distaste that the two have for one another, when Cas regards Crowley again his eyes are soft and sympathetic. “I’m sorry, but I can’t break it.”

Crowley falls into silence, wide eyes turning back to Rowena.

Dean tries to imagine what it’s like, seeing her like that. It’s unnerving for him, sure, but there’s actual blood between the demon and witch, and while Crowley may pretend that he cares nothing for Rowena, why else would he be so adamant about them rescuing her?

“What are we supposed to do, then?”

Sam licks his lips, a nervous gesture that he’s never quite been able to toss. “We figured maybe you could do something.”

Crowley looks between all three of them, his face twisted with incredulity, and when he speaks his voice is high pitched and sharp. “Me?! What the bloody hell am I supposed to do with… with *that*?” He jerks his cuffed hands towards Rowena.

“You can possess her.” Dean’s tired of dancing around this. They need answers, and they need them now. “Get in her mind. Find out what’s going on and snap her the hell out of it.”

Crowley balks visibly, looking like he’s just taken a bite out of something sour. “You want me *inside* her?” Almost instantly he cringes, shutting his eyes and shaking his head. “Oh, God. I’ll never live that down, will I?”

“It’s the only option we’ve got.” Sam shrugs. “And considering you obviously need her for something, I figure you’ll do just about anything.”

Hook line and sinker. Dean knows when someone’s been got, and by the look on Crowley’s face, it’s obvious that he has. A part of him seriously wants to force answers out of Crowley, find out exactly what it is that he obviously wants from Rowena. He knows that the demon will never play by their rules, though, so he pushes his curiosity aside and hopes that what they’re doing isn’t going to bite them in their asses.
Crowley shifts around in his seat, muttering just under his breath. He holds up his cuffed hands again, looking between Dean and Sam pointedly. “I expect I’ll be rewarded for good behavior afterwards?”

Dean rolls his eyes and glances over at Sam.

Sam sighs. “Fine. We’ll take them off while you’re in Rowena.” He shrugs, looking over at Dean again. “He’s still trapped in the circle, anyways.”

“I’m not sure if that’s a good idea.” Cas is looking at Crowley, his brows drawn tightly together.

Dean frowns. “Dude, its fine. He can’t escape.” You’d think an angel would know a thing or two about demon traps.

Crowley flashes a sharp grin at Cas. “Yes, dude. I can’t escape. And can we please ex-nay on the ‘in Mother’ comments.” Crowley fakes a shiver.

Dean’s grin is just as biting. “Oh, I have a feeling they’ll come up every now and then. Alright, get on with it, then.”

Crowley glowers at Dean, his eyes narrowed to tiny pinpricks of pupil, and then suddenly his head snaps back and his mouth shoots wide. A thick, red, fog like substance flies out of his mouth and Dean stumbles backwards with a hiss when it nearly hits him in the face. He jerks his gaze to Rowena, and watches as her already open mouth stretches wider as the red fog enters her, her body shooting stiff and then still. For a moment nothing happens, and then it’s like all the bones leave her body and she slumps against the chair, her head bobbing and her chin lowering towards her chest.

Dean’s grown so used to her shrill screams that the absence of it is somewhat jarring, and there’s still a faint ringing in his ears that he’s sure isn’t quite natural. Hopefully no lasting damage’s been done.

Sam moves beside him, making his way into the circle. He digs into his pockets and pulls out the key to the handcuffs, unlocking them and letting Crowley’s arms slump down at his side. “You sure this is a good idea?” He asks, looking back up at Dean.
Dean shrugs. “Like you said, it’s not like he can go anywhere.” Still… “I guess we can double check the chalk line though. Make sure there’s no break.”

Sam nods and gets to work immediately.

Dean turns to Cas, finding him frowning sternly at Crowley’s slump form. It’s obvious that he’s not too happy with the very scarce freedom that the demon’s been given, but Dean can’t understand why. “Hey. It’s alright. He’s not going anywhere.” He has no idea why he feels the need to say the words, but they spill past his lips anyways. Heat rises faintly towards his ears, and he refuses to look down and show just how embarrassed he is by his own damn actions.

Cas’ eyes snap up to his and hold. For a long while the two of them stay that way, and then, unexpectedly, Cas looks down, blinking rapidly. “You’re right.”

Dean continues to stare at Cas, although it’s with tunnel vision. Faint, glowing light flickers to life, but Dean knows somehow that it’s not real, and he watches almost mesmerized as it dances across Cas’ face. He’s seen this before. He’s been here before; maybe not in this room, hell, maybe not even the bunker. But this - he knows it. He knows the look of resignation on the angel’s face, the unmistakable guilt and shame. And he has absolutely no idea how. He’s stunned, confused and something in his chest feels squeezed tight.
For the second time that day a low key pain flares to life in his head, and Dean cringes when it swiftly increases.

Something’s wrong. He knows that now, he just doesn’t know *what*.

Only that it has something to do with Cas.

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Over the years, as much as he’s tried to stay out of the affairs of the Winchesters – seeing as that usually meant frustration for him, the brothers always seem to drag him into their messes.

*This* mess, though? Well… this is something else entirely.

As the (former) King of Hell, he’s seen his fair share of weird and macabre. It kind of just goes with the job description. And while it’s true that Crowley finds a certain thrill in the darker things of life, *this* is an entirely differently level of weird that he doesn’t particularly want to touch.
His surroundings are faintly familiar, and Crowley turns on his feet, his neck craned back as he looks around the wide open area. There’s a certain… haze to the air, almost like a fine grain of sand that makes him aware that what he’s seeing isn’t real, but instead a figment of whatever obscure and hellish reality that Rowena’s gotten herself trapped in.

But that’s another thing. It’s not very hellish at all. In fact, Crowley has a pretty good idea just where he is.

Brick and concrete walls surround him, and reach far above his head to a curved ceiling where round dusty glass forms a sort of rustic skylight. The air smells dank and slightly of mold, a smell that while slightly annoying to his sensitive senses, is nowhere enough to make him sneer – which he does anyway, but Crowley’s been told a time or two that he’s got a serious case of ‘resting bitch face’.

He’s pretty sure he’s got Rowena to thank for that.

There are a few openings in the walls surrounding him, crude entranceways carved out of the brick leading into dimly lit tunnels.

Vague recollection has him taking the one closest to his left, and he’s only walked a few short paces before the narrow hall opens once again into another room, that though smaller than the first, is certainly far more interesting.

His lips pull down in a faint frown as he approaches a large marble statue in the center of the room. It’s once white clarity seems to have been warped with time, ugly gray patches stretching over the stone, and darker blemishes scattered like paint splatters over that still.

The statue is of a woman – a muse, he knows. Her arms are outstretched and reaching forward, the look on her face filed with a kind of peaceful serenity that Crowley remembers taking notice of the first time he had seen this place, which had actually been a few hundred years ago when he was still a young demon and eager to see as much of the world as possible.

“Bloody Hell. Seriously?” He stares upwards with a look of exasperation. When no reply comes from anywhere around him he shakes his head and takes the time to roll his eyes back in his head as far as they’ll go. “Of all the places… though I suppose this would be appropriate.”

He’s always held a sweet spot for the ‘Golden House’ of Rome. After all, what demon wouldn’t
want to walk the halls of the previous home of one of the most evil men to ever live? He’s confused as to why this place would be horrific for Rowena, though, and as he turns away from the statue of the Muse to scour more ground with is boot heels, he vaguely notices a flickering light reflecting off of a wall further ahead in the distance.

Narrowing his eyes Crowley moves away from the statue and heads through the room. “Mother…” It’s eerily silent, and his voice echoes against the stone walls, coming back to his ears and sounded slightly warped, somehow. Wrong. He ignores the slight prickling to the back of his neck. Crowley doesn’t do fear. He is fear.

As he walks another sound gradually reaches him, the soft crispness of strings being plucked unmistakable. The tune is for the most part pleasant, but against the eerie background and haze of the world around him, it shifts instead to something eerie and unpleasant. “Is that a lyre?” As chilling as the sound is, Crowley finds curiosity swallowing all other emotion, and his steps quicken until he’s approaching the flickering wall. He realizes that it’s not the wall itself that is generating the light, but rather that it’s coming from a doorway in the wall directly opposite. Turning his body he squints against the darkness outside, his eyes flitting left and right, before he stills and his gaze widens.

“That’s… unexpected.” To say the least.

Outside, against the black backdrop of night, is a garden. And inside of that garden, people sway and dance slowly to the ease of the lyre playing from, still, seemingly nowhere.

And they are burning.

Some are naked, but most are covered in rags. It’s a sort of morbid curiosity that has him stepping into the garden, his eyes drifting from one dancing body to the next. Everything about them seems at ease – their movements flowing and without pain. The only proof of their torture, Crowley notices, is in their faces, which are twisted in agony, mouths stretched wide and eyes pleading. They’re all watching him, and their gaze is strong enough to force a shudder down his back. Suddenly feeling like maybe this isn’t the best place to be at the moment; Crowley takes a step backwards, and only then notices the sensation of something sliding underneath his feet.

He looks down, a glimpse of gold flashing from the flames around him. Bending he picks up something round and smooth, and lifting it to his face notices that it’s a coin of some sorts, glimmering bright and gold against the shadows. Blinking, he turns his gaze from the thing and looks at his feet, noticing that the entire ground is covered with the things. “What the…”

Sudden movement at the edge of his vision grabs his attention, and Crowley jerks his gaze up to see
a dark shadow flit behind a large shrubbery. He closes his hand tightly around the coin, making a fist, and edges towards the bush. Whatever’s hiding there must hear his approach, because the bush shakes sharply and a shadowy form darts out and makes a run past him. Crowley catches a glimpse of long red hair and his hands snake out automatically, grabbing Rowena by her arm and pulling her back against him.

She hisses in his arms and tries to worm her way out of his grasp, and Crowley swears sharply and drags her behind the bush, not wanting to draw any more attention to them than need be. Rowena digs her teeth into his arm and Crowley yelps and twists her around with a snarl. “Snap out of it, you insane **twit**!” He shakes her hard, her small head bobbing back and forth on her shoulders, and when she stills again her head jerks up and wide eyes take him in.

Crowley cringes when he sees something dangerously close to tears water her eyes.

“Fergus? Son… is that really you?” Rowena’s hands slap against his face, dragging over his skin as if she’s trying to tug it off, like she expects he’s wearing a flesh mask.

Crowley curses and pushes her away, glaring at her and straightening his clothing. “Of course it’s me!”

Rowena eyes him from head to toe, a glimmer of hoping taking place of the suspicion in her eyes. She pounces on him, her small hands fisting in the material of his jacket and tugging. “You’ve come to save me, then? To take me from this place?” Before Crowley can form a coherent sentence she pulls away from him again with a gasp, coughing near the bush and peeking around it. “I’ve been trying to escape for days but she always finds me and sets that damned **beast** on me!” She twists around, crowding Crowley again, and even in the dim light the bruises and dried blood covering her stand out in stark contrast. “Did you stop her? You did, didn’t you! Always knew you were a good lad! I always knew you would come for me!”

Crowley’s at a loss of words. He’s nearly shocked still, having no idea how to deal with Rowena’s manic mind frame. Her left eyes blackened and bruised, nearly swollen shut, and one of her cheek bones looks puffy and discolored, as if it’s been broken. Her lips are cracked and the bottom is smeared with dried blood, and the dress that she’s wearing is ripped and barely more than rags. She’s a wretched sight overall, dirt and grime covering her from head to toe, and it’s so disconcerting to his eyes that he feels sick with something he doesn’t dare dwell on.

He grabs ahold of frail shoulders and shakes her hard, startling Rowena out of another crazed sort of vigilance, her eyes having been darting left and right around them. “Listen to me, dammit! This isn’t real! None of this is real, and you need to snap out of it, **now**!”
A tight frown catches her lips, and she shakes her head slowly. “What are you saying?”

“I’m saying,” Crowley bites out through clenched teeth. “That this place, whatever sideshow freak stop you’re trapped in, is inside of your bloody head! Don’t you get it?”

Rowena jerks back as if she’s been slapped. “You’ve lost your mind.”

“No, Mother, I’m afraid it’s the other way around.” He reaches out with a hiss and forcefully prods the side of Rowena’s matted hair, thumping against her skull. She flinches and jerks away with a feral like growl, glaring at him. “I’m inside of your head. We’re with the Winchesters at this very moment. They pulled you from Hell. Any of this ringing a bell?”

“I’m not sure if you’ve noticed, but we’re still in Hell!”

“This isn’t real.” He’s nearly mad with frustration, his words clipped and sharp. “So snap out of it!”

Rowena stumbles away from him, her face blanketed with a tight scowl. She finally pulls her gaze from him and her eyes dart around them, scanning their surroundings with a new sort of intensity, her spine stiff. She’s quiet a long moment, the jaunty cords of the lyre filling the silence. She moves closer towards the edge of the thick shrubbery they’re standing behind, peering over the dulled colored leaves at the spectacle still in the garden. The light of their flames flickers faintly over Rowena’s face.

“It feels real.” She muses softly, her voice almost inaudible.

“Yes, well, it’s not. So can we –“ The sound of screams suddenly rent the air, cutting Crowley off and making him jerk his gaze back towards the garden. “What the…”

The burning dancers have stopped their dancing. They now scream; their mouths stretched open almost horrifically wide. They’re moving frantically, some pulling at their hair, ripping away flaming chunks and dropping them at their feet, only to continue. Other’s claw at their very skin; nails grasping charred flesh and pulling with a sickening sound that Crowley can somehow hear over the playing of the lyre, which has sped up so fast that Crowley wouldn’t even call it music any more, as much as spastic cords plucked with frantic intensity.

Rowena’s suddenly stumbling into him. She keeps trying to back away, though, and Crowley hisses,
stumbling backwards and grabbing onto her shoulders to hold her still.

“We have to run!” She swings around and looks up at him with wide, frightened eyes.

Crowley’s seen Rowena scared before. After the mess that was the Darkness they’d both had their fair shares of close calls; but this is different. The look of sheer panic on her face makes his stomach clench in weary anticipation, and a surge of morbid curiosity has him looking up over Rowena’s head and back towards the garden.

The flimsy grey that covers their surroundings shifts, bleeding to a darker shadow that stains everything in sight. The color of the flames covering the screaming people intensifies, shining with almost painful clarity and Crowley squints against the glare. There’s movement from the darker shadows of the brick, and out of the same opening that had lead Crowley into the garden, something emerges.

The first thought that enters his mind is big. It’s humanoid in shape, but bulky and wide, and even from the distance Crowley imagines it’s at least seven feet tall, if not more. Its skin appears off somehow. Darker than soot but glowing red in some places, and Crowley’s vaguely reminded of smoldering embers. There’s not a stitch of clothing on it, but the fact that the things head is shaped like what can only be a bull’s skull is enough to keep his gaze from wandering lower.

“What the holy Hell…”

Something dark and antsy churns his belly, swelling quickly to his chest and making his lungs ache. A sense of hopelessness overcomes him, and Crowley stumbles backwards, dragging Rowena (whose all too willing) with him. He doesn’t realize he’s wrapped his arms around her until she’s fighting his grip, pushing against his chest while trying to run past him at the same time. Crowley jerks and releases her, briefly watching her dart past him and run towards a dirt pathway that winds around the bushes. He takes another step backwards, slowly looking up again and lets out a choked noise when he sees that the beast (because that’s what it is, really), has somehow covered almost all of the ground in just a few short seconds, and is practically on him.

This close, Crowley can make out more of the things features, and his blood runs cold.

It’s undoubtly a man, at least in form, with shoulders so wide that Crowley imagines they could wrap easily around his frame. He realizes with shock that the things skin isn’t just black, but charred, and that the red glow he had vaguely seen is in fact living fire breathing through cracks of burnt skin.
Crowley feels rooted to the spot, locked in some strange form of disbelief and horror, and he stares at the black holes of the skull on the beast’s shoulders, somehow unable to turn his eyes from the bleak nothing staring back at him.

The things close. So close that he can feel the heat from its singed body pressing against his clothing; and Crowley’s leg’s trembling before he’s collapsing downward, his knee’s hitting the earth jarringly hard. The pain seems to bring life to his limbs again, and Crowley drags in a sharp, painful gasp of air, not realizing until now that he’s not been breathing.

Suddenly something large and gray flies over his head, hitting the beast straight in its skull. Crowley vaguely notices that it’s a statue of some sort – a bust, and then Rowena’s dragging him upwards, screaming in his ear.

He’s jerked back to reality, and after casting one last glance to the beast – it’s recovered from Rowena’s attack, and drawing straight, it’s shoulders stiff and it’s neck taunt with fury, Crowley follows Rowena’s heed and runs.

The screams of the burning people are so loud that his ears feel like they’ll soon bleed, and the dirt path they run down is narrow and uneven, making him stumble and grasp at the air awkwardly.

Its legs… they’d been twisted… gnarled and covered in thick hair, leading down to large black hooves.

He can’t stop picturing it.

Rowena turns a corner and as Crowley cuts it she grabs him by the arm and swiftly jerks him sideways. He grunts and feels branches and brush slap at his face, but his body slides into a narrow opening hidden within, and then his face slams into cold stone and he can’t move anymore. Hissing, Crowley tries to turn his body in the tight space, realizing that Rowena’s lead them to what is most likely a hiding place of hers. It’s a narrow space that seems to be between the stone of the wall and the high shrubbery grown against it. He belatedly spits out a few small leaves only to have Rowena slap her palm against his mouth.

She crowds in close, standing on her tiptoes until her face is directly in front of him.

“Shut. Up.” The words are hissed and weighted, and her eyes dart away from Crowley and towards the wall of green. They stay a long moment, darting left and right. Her hand trembles on Crowley’s
face. She finally lifts her other hand and presses her finger to her lips.

Crowley wipes his mouth with the back of his sleeve and glares. It’s weak, though, and his eyes drift towards the bush soon after, his adams apple bobbing as he swallows. “What the bloody hell was that?!”

Rowena’s eyes dart briefly towards him before returning to their previous vigilance, and when she speaks her voice is hushed. “I don’t know.”

She doesn’t say anything more, and that bothers Crowley, drives him mad. “You don’t know?! How can you not know?!”

She finally turns to him with a sneer. “I haven’t exactly lingered to ask, Fergus!”

Crowley bares his teeth and lowers his head until his face is hovering just above hers. Rowena narrows her eyes and does not look away. “You need to get us out of here. Now. I’m not dying here!”

“You’re the one that just showed up! Why don’t you get us out!”

Something loud and jarring rents the air, and Crowley cringes with Rowena. The sound is garbled and deep, and terrifying enough to send a chill down Crowley’s back, and he feels weak with the realization that he can be scared like this.

“It’s coming.” Rowena says in a hushed voice, her eyes so wide that the whites practically glow in the darkness.

Crowley twists as much as he’s able in the narrow space and grabs ahold of Rowena’s thin shoulders, his grip biting. “Do you remember the catacomb chamber in Hell? The one with the sarcophagi?” Rowena sneers at him again, her eyes blazing; because of course she remembers. Crowley had threatened to lock her there more than once, after all. Another bone chilling growl sounds, this time closer than before. Crowley’s fingers stiffen, the knuckles bleeding white. “Jesse had you locked away there. I don’t know for how long, but we got you out. Dean and Sam got you out!”

Rowena’s glare slowly begins to fade, her brow furrowing in confusion and doubt. Crowley can
hear the sound of hooves slapping stone, a steady crescendo which fuels an anxious rush within him. Rowena’s gaze pulls away, turning towards the sound and he hisses, shaking her until her eyes are on him again.

“Do you want to be here?”

Rowena doesn’t seem to understand the question. She frowns, shaking her head slowly. “What?”

“You don’t have to be here! This isn’t real.”

Rowena’s lips twist downwards, and her eyes glisten. “But I’ve tried for so long. I’ve – there’s nothing else… nothing.”

“This isn’t Hell. You know Hell. You know it.” And it was true. Rowena knew the ins and outs of Hell almost as well as Crowley. She had lived there with him long enough, after all.

That finally seems to spark something, light flickering across Rowena’s eyes.

Crowley ignores the sounds of the beast drawing even closer, even though it’s like thunder in his ears. He lowers his head even closer to Rowena, until their noses are almost touching. “Do you want to be here?” He asks again.

At last, a faint, though familiar, flame colors Rowena’s gaze.

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“This is taking too long.”
Dean watches as Sam paces back and forth a few feet away from him. He’s been doing it for the past few minutes, and as annoying as Dean finds it he can’t help but agree. It’s been nearly thirty minutes since Crowley’s flown coop and set up residence in Rowena’s body, and it’s not like he’s got any idea how long this kind of thing takes, but he can’t help but feel like something isn’t right. “He can’t, uh, get stuck in there with her, right?”

Sam huffs out a breath and shrugs his shoulders, but doesn’t say anything.

Dean glances over at Cas. Since Crowley vacated his body in a burst of red smoke the angel’s stood directly outside of the circle, back straight and eyes locked on Rowena. He hasn’t looked away once. Dean can’t help but feel like the guy’s expecting some shit to go down and that makes him all kinds of anxious.

In fact, there are a lot of things making Dean anxious at the moment, and most of them seem to surround Cas.

In a moment of weakness he’d asked the angel if he had any memories from the life of the body he’d snatched. Apparently the question had been curious enough to draw Cas’ eyes away and for a moment Dean had been held prisoner under his gaze.

“Some.” He’d said; his voice flat in a way that had felt controlled to Dean. “We try not to look. Despite the circumstance, we understand the human need for privacy, Dean.”

Dean had bit his tongue at that, holding back the comment of Cas not understanding anything remotely human.

“Do you think we should do something?”

Sam’s words tug Dean back to the present, and he turns away from Cas to look at Rowena. She’s utterly still, her chin lowered down towards her chest. She hasn’t moved once since this has started, and Dean doesn’t know if that’s a bad thing or not. Not for the first time he wishes that there was a damn manual for these type of things. Hell, a manual for his life in general would be awesome. “Like what?”

“I don’t know. *Something.*” Sam finally stops pacing, moving to stand beside Cas. The angel glances briefly at him, barely moving his head so it’s more of a quick darting of his eyes, and then he’s focused on Rowena again.
Dean can’t help but stare at their backs; feeling bothered by how easily Sam stands so closely to Cas. How it’s seems so normal. Something itches under his skin, an irritation that feels disturbingly close to jealousy. Dean pushes it down, like every other emotion that’s ever made him uncomfortable.

“Can you tell anything?” Sam asks, glancing at Cas.

Cas’ eyes squint in concentration, his lips turned downwards. After a moment he sighs and shakes his head, shifting slightly on his feet. “No. But I believe you’re right. It shouldn’t be taking this long. Perhaps if I –“

Cas is moving forward when suddenly Rowena’s head jerks back, her neck stretched long and pale. Her mouth gapes open and Dean jerks to attention when red smoke bursts past her lips and shoots through the air to where Crowley’s body is. The smoke slams into Crowley, the demon’s body jerking and his mouth forced wide as the fog invades it, snaking down his throat until vanishing from sight.

Dean stands rigid along with Sam and Cas, his eyes on Crowley.

The demon gasps, his head bobbing up and his eyes wide.

Dean lets out a sigh of relief, scrubbing a hand over his face. “Jesus…”

Sam crowds the edge of the circle, all but pulsing. “Well? Did it work? What did you see?”

Crowley glowers up at him, drawing straight and flexing his freed wrists.

Cas lays a hand on his shoulder, and Sam turns to look down at him with a frown. Cas doesn’t say anything, just nods his head, his eyes focused on something beyond Sam.

Dean turns his head the same time Sam does, and his lips part in a soft exhale.

Rowena’s awake.
She’s still slumped in the chair, but as Dean watches she draws straighter. Her head’s tilted down, and he realizes that she’s looking at the binding holding her in place. She looks up then, and Dean almost closes his eyes and says a silent ‘thank you’, because her eyes are actually clear, and not glazed over like before. She sneers then, her lip twisting in distaste, and when she speaks she sounds just as haughty and condescending as she always has. “Well – is someone going to take these off?”

Dean can’t help but laugh.

Okay... so this chapter is VERY important. There are a lot of things here that are being hinted at, and which will come into play later. Be mindful of that XD
The 'Golden House' of Rome is a real place, btw. Here's one of the parts Crowley was in...

Chapter End Notes

I had SOOOO much trouble writing this chapter, all because I HAD to write from Crowley's POV at one point, and that terrified me haha He's such a complex character to me, and I was afraid I wouldn't be able to write him well enough. I've held this chapter off so long because I was afraid of how it would come out, and while I'm still not very satisfied with that part of it, I realized it's as good as I can get it lol

Sorry for the delay. I hope you guys like it.
Welcome To The Jungle

Chapter Summary

Rowena reveals a bit of information that could be the key they need to defeating Jesse. Dean & Cas head to an exotic location in search of answers, while Sam holds down the fort on his own.

Even after Sam releases Rowena she remains sitting in the chair for a brief, hushed moment. She takes in the room, her eyes eventually tracking over each one of them. Dean feels the weight of her eyes the moment they land on him, and he practically sags under the pressure. They’re gazes lock for what Dean knows must be only seconds, but it’s a second that feels suspended in time. When Rowena looks away, Dean can breathe again.

Her eyes had been void of light… bleak and lifeless. Dean never wants to see them again.

She stands and sways, and Crowley is suddenly beside her, an arm snaking around her waist and holding her steady. Rowena tilts her head slightly, but she doesn’t look up at him.

Dean has a feeling Crowley wouldn’t have wanted her to.

He knows that he should start grilling her with questions; it’s not like time’s something they’ve ever had on their sides. He doesn’t, though. A particular kind of hush has fallen over the room and he doesn’t want to break it. In a weird kind of way it feels almost sacred, reminding him of all the times he and Sam had just barely tiptoed past death, dragging beaten and bruised bodies back to whatever hotel room they’d come to call home. They’d cared for one another’s wounds in the silence of the night, ragged breathing and grinding teeth straining the hush.

He wonders if Rowena has someone to bandage her wounds. It’s not like Crowley does – even now he’s standing so stiff and strained, and while he’s got his arm around Rowena he’s not really supporting her… just holding her up.

Suddenly Rowena announces her need of a bathroom, and as Sam quickly jumps into motion and takes her from Crowley’s arms to lead her her out of the dungeon, Dean finds himself standing there with Cas beside him and a slightly bemused Crowley. They’re all looking at one another, and it’s not until Dean’s eyes meet Crowley’s again that he realizes their exact situation. Humility coped with a certain kind of self-dissatisfaction kicks into gear, and Dean grinds his jaw and twist’s around, Cas moving into step behind him.
Crowley makes a brisk, sharply irritated sound at his back, and Dean holds his hand up and shakes his head, not even looking back. He slams the door the moment Cas steps past the threshold, sparing a fleeting glance up at Crowley who’s standing with his hands raised and an indignant look on his face.

He and Cas just stand there a moment, their quiet somehow even more heavy than the previous.

Cas breaks the silence first, shifting just slightly on his feet. “Do you think, given the circumstances, we should let him out?”

Dean scowls, trying his hardest to make his face show nothing but forced vexation, when really he feels insecurely at odds with everything. “He’s a demon.” He doesn’t say anything else, he shouldn’t have to. The word is proof in itself. He sighs, running a hand over his face and glancing up at Cas.

The angels watching him, as Dean knew he would be. There’s a look on his face that for some reason makes something flutter to life at the back of Dean’s skull, a sort of fleeting tickle that after fading leaves behind a ghost like memory which lingers.

He’s overcome by how familiar it feels, how his body wants to dwell and hold the angel’s gaze like he’s never done anything but. That in itself is overwhelming, though, so Dean forces down a dry swallow and turns away, heading after Sam.

He finds his brother in the kitchen, and Dean lingers in the doorway, watching Sam. He’s standing in front of the coffeemaker with the pot in his hand. It’s filled with water, like Sam had been in the process of making a fresh brew. He’s got his head lowered and is staring down at the counter, and there’s a stiffness to his shoulders that Dean recognizes.

He clears his throat, announcing his presence, and Sam jolts into awareness, wide eyes shooting over his shoulder at Dean. There’s a bit of wildness in their depths; nowhere near as deep as Rowena’s had been, but just as fragile. Sam’s good at hiding it though. He throws on a shaky grin and relaxes his body, returning to his task of making the coffee.

“You okay?” Dean feels more than see’s Cas hang back, no doubt sensing that the atmosphere in the room’s changed.

“Yeah.” Sam nods, finishing filling the brewer with water and slipping the pot in its space. “It’s just
crazy, you know?”

Yeah, he does know. He still has the nightmares, and he imagines that Sam does as well. “Yeah, well… it is our lives.” Dean doesn’t call Sam out on his shit laugh, not when he can’t keep the tremble from his own grin. He instead takes a seat at the table, glancing back at Cas, who is leaning against the doorway, looking down at his crossed feet. Dean thinks the posture looks odd on the angel, but at the same time somehow more true. He doesn’t know what that means. “You think it’s okay to leave her alone?”

“I don’t think she’s a real threat right now. She can hardly even stand on her own.”

Dean supposes there’s sense enough in that. “Did she say anything?”

Sam shakes his head, turning to lean with his back against the counter. “Not really. Just asked for a clean towel and a change of clothes.” A more sincere smile catches his lips. “She wasn’t too happy about the clothes part. Said something about ‘borrowing the rags’.”

“Who doesn’t love flannel.” Dean quips. Sam laughs for real this time, a low chuckle that makes Dean’s grin stretch.

Silence falls over the three again, Sam lifting a hand to rub against his arm in what can only be a comforting gesture. “Do you think she has anything?”

“On Jesse?” Dean guesses, and Sam nods. He sighs, leaning back in his chair and shaking his head. “I sure as hell hope so.”

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Rowena spends a long time in the shower. So long that they begin to question if she’s slipped through their fingers again. They’re heading down the hallway to check when she rounds a corner. They all come close to colliding, and Dean has to come up short so he doesn’t ram into Sam. As it is, though, Cas is suddenly pressed up against his back with enough force that Dean stumbles with it,
which makes Cas’ arm wrap up around Dean’s chest to hold him steady.

The center of Cas is electric warm. His heat soaks into Dean and invades his skin, pressing down deep and surging through his blood. It’s like his body is suddenly charged, sparking to life and expanding. Dean sucks in a sharp gasp, his eyes fluttering towards the back of his skull at the intensity of it all. Cas exhales sharply and his hot breath rushes along the back of Dean’s neck, and Dean feels chills erupt over his skin at the first contact, little pin pricks of memory that tingle.

Unexpectedly Cas pushes him away, his hands gripping tight onto Dean’s forearms. Dean snaps out of his daze and ice invades from his head down to his does. His spine straightens and his jaw locks, his eyes darting in shameful disbelief. He harshly shrugs off Cas’ hands, refusing to look back at him.

In front of them Rowena’s got her arms crossed over her middle and she’s standing rigidly tense and suspicious, her eyes narrowed to slithers.

“Oh, we…” Sam struggles a moment, his mouth gaping open and shut dumbly. “We were just making sure you were alright.”

Rowena doesn’t buy it, of course. “I’m not putting them back on.”

Dean’s just as confused as Sam.

“Putting what back on?” Sam questions with a frown.

“The handcuffs.” Rowena hisses, edging a little closer and her shoulders rounding in what can only be a fight or flight giveaway.

“Oh!” Sam holds his hands up, taking a few steps backwards. “That’s not what we had planned. Right, Dean?”

Dean quickly shakes his head. “Oh, yeah, no! Not at all.”

Rowena sneers. “I’m to believe I’m free to go, then?”
Damn. She’s got them there and they all know it. Sam sighs, deflating a bit on himself, and suddenly Dean realizes just how tired he looks. How weary and stretched thin. “Look… we need information on Jesse that we know you have. We saved you… you owe us.”

Rowena’s lips turn down in disgust, and for a moment Dean thinks she’s not going to bend. He had expected nothing less, though, and gears up to make a move if she tries anything.

She surprises them all, though, when she instead curls in on herself a bit, her eyes almost instantly losing their edge and fogging over darkly. “Okay.”

They’re taken aback, Sam looking at Dean with raised brows. Dean clears his throat and stands a little taller, bobbing his head. “Yeah, well… alright then.” He tries to sound like he’s somehow won, but can’t quite bring himself to feel that way.

“You’ll take me to Fergus, first.”

Dean can’t find any reason to argue. Nodding again he motions for Sam to lead the way and then steps aside, waiting for Rowena to follow so he and Cas can take the rear. After only a moment’s hesitation Rowena moves, falling into step behind Sam.

It feels surreal, and Dean’s tense the entire time, expecting Rowena to turn on them at any moment. She never does, though; just follows soundlessly behind Sam. She’s wearing a shirt of Sam’s and an old pair of Dean’s drawstring sweats, and the clothes bag on her enormously. Dean thinks she looks so small and feeble in them, and it’s throwing him off, messing with his head and causing something old and instinctual to spark to life; some cave man instant that screams protect female, and he doesn’t know how he’s supposed to feel about it.

Crowley’s already on his feet when they open the dungeon door, and he swings around to them, his wide eyes automatically zoning in on Rowena. The shock is evident on his face. In that moment Dean sees more emotion cross the demon’s gaze than ever before. A soft kind of ripple comes over Crowley suddenly, a gradual easing of his body that Dean recognizes as a bone deep sigh.

Eventually his gaze lowers to take in Rowena’s clothes, and his brows lift significantly. “Can’t say I agree with the present fashion statement, but I suppose all in all you look… well.”

Dean looks down at Rowena, expecting her to priss and glare. When her lips twist and then break
into a weak, shaky smile they’re all thrown - Crowley especially. He takes a step back as if he’s been physically pushed, his brows rising even higher towards his hairline.

Dean watches with an anxious sort of curiosity as Rowena slowly moves forward. When she reaches Crowley they just stand there a moment, looking at one another. Then, as if they’re weighted down, Rowena’s right hand struggles upwards and even from where he’s standing Dean can see her chin tremble.

She cups Crowley’s cheek, her palm curling over it. Crowley jerks and twitches, making a move to step back, but then Rowena sniffs, and Crowley’s face bleeds of color.

“Fergus…” Her voice is thick, deeper than usual and hushed slightly. “Thank you.”

Crowley’s eyes grow to the size of saucers when Rowena wraps her arms around him.

It’s so shocking that Dean edges forward warily. It’s the most un-Rowena thing he’s ever saw the witch do, and his mind automatically goes on the defense.

After an awkwardly long time for them all, Rowena finally pulls away from Crowley; whose now got a stiffed jawed reaction on his face. His brows are tightly scrunched in uncertainty, and he throws a glance up at them with an expression that looks just shy of pleading.

Rowena turns to look at the three of them again. She lingers on Cas a moment, before turning away and moving to take a seat in the chair that she had just an hour ago been tied to. “I suppose you’ll be wanting to know what happened?”

When no one makes a move to say anything Dean hurriedly clears his throat. “Yeah…. Uh, that and whatever you’ve learned on Jesse. More importantly how to kill him.”

Rowena nods, folding her hands neatly in her lap and crossing one leg over the other. “Well, as you’ve guessed, when this mess all started it was within my best interest to… be on peaceful terms with the most powerful player on the board, if you will.”

Crowley bristles at this, like he wants to say something, but Sam shoots him a sharp glare and cuts him off before he can. The last thing they need is the son and mother bickering like usual.
“And Jesse was easily the most powerful player. He was omnipotent in his abilities. I’ve never seen anything like it before. Some even say he would have easily stood his own against Lucifer himself.”

Dean snorts, muttering under his breath. “’Cause that’s a fight we wanna see.”

Sam throws him a scolding glare before nodding at Rowena in a silent request for her to continue. Rowena ignores Dean’s comment altogether, barely even sparing him a glance. That at least Dean feels he’s familiar with.

“I pretended to be his comrade by day, and then by night I’d gather as much information on him as I could. There wasn’t a lot.” Rowena shrugs thin shoulders. “There’s so little written information on Cambions, and there was nothing on Jesse at all. I went months without finding anything, and then I stumbled across knowledge of the journal.

Cas frowns at that, shifting slightly from his spot near the wall. “The journal?”

Rowena nods. “Apparently a Buddhist monk living in the sixteenth century had contact with another Cambion.”

A shift comes over the room, everyone drawing straight, their attention gathered.

“Who?” Cas muses loudly.

Rowena actually cuts a weak, but very dry glare his way. “How the bloody hell would I know who? The point is that was another Cambion, and we have written details on him. I don’t know about you, but that seems like it would come in handy.”

“Do you have the book?” Sam cuts in urgently.

Rowena swallows and looks down at her hands in her lap. “I was planning to scry the location that night, but Jesse had already begun to take notice of me, and before I could he… “ She stops, her face frozen.
That caveman like urge to move and stand near Rowena and clamp his hand heavily over her shoulder takes over, a sort of *me man, me keep safe* urge that he’s seriously hoping will stop soon. “So that’s it? Some *book*?” He can’t keep the skepticism from his voice.

“Do you think you’ll be able to find the location now?” Sam’s all but bristling with energy.

Despite the super lame outcome Dean can feel a similar reaction stirring deep in his belly as well; excitement over a lead in the case – one step closer to solving it. It’s a familiar and welcomed sensation, and he had almost forgotten how much he had once craved it.

“I’m weak.” Rowena admits, but when she looks up at them her eyes hold a glint of rekindled determination. “But I’ll do all I can to find out how to beat that sadistic bastard.”

That’s all the ammunition Dean needs.

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Dean refuses Sam at first, unwilling to split up when he knows that the bunkers wards most likely do nothing at keeping Jesse out. The fact that he hadn’t already showed up isn’t lost on Dean, and he’s just hoping that it’s because Jesse doesn’t see them as a threat. There’s still some secret voice practiced at self-loathing within his mind that whispers Jesse’s waiting for a moment to strike when they least expect it. He knows that Sam’s considered the idea as well, and it pisses him off that he’s still willing to go their separate ways.

It makes sense, though. He can definitely see the logic in one of them staying behind to watch over Rowena and Crowley, and to make sure that, despite her docile appearance, Rowena isn’t actually screwing them over. Like always.

He just doesn’t get why it has to be *Sam*.

Dean offers when Sam goes over the plan, the thought of being alone with Cas making something in his belly clench nervously. Sam shoots him down instantly though, staring at him pointedly in a way that Dean still doesn’t understand. In the end no amount of push and shove could make Sam change his mind, and honestly after a moment the look of forlorn disappointment that had come over Cas’
face had made Dean feel so damn guilty that he had caved.

He’s standing near the angel now, just moments away from being zapped out of the bunker and tossed about eight thousand miles away to some third world country that he’s only ever seen in gory war movies or bad quality B rated horrors.

“You’ll need to have this close.” Rowena hands them both a small spell bag made of cloth that she had put together.

They’d gone over the possibility of the book being warded by magic; after all something so important wouldn’t just be left unprotected.

Dean takes his and shoves it in his pocket, and beside him Cas does the same, sliding it into the pocket of his trench.

“Thank you.” Cas nods at them all, and then turns to look at Dean.

Dean swallows dryly, the blue of his gaze both hypnotizing and too intense. “Alright, let’s get this show on the road.” He hopes that his voice isn’t cracking, and when Cas nods and lifts a hand towards his temple, Dean shoots one last look at Sam before the world falls out from under their feet.

It’s jarring, and he feels like his stomach is dropping to his feet. Light flashes behind his eyes and he feels a sharp gush of wind against his body, and then the loud shift of large wings beating against air. Something slides across the planes of his back and hip, and he shivers involuntarily, the touch reaching bare skin even though he’s wearing two layers. The beginnings of something stir in his chest; the familiar surging of energy that slides and writhes when first sparked, still lazy from slumber.

And then everything ends so abruptly it’s like the worlds jerked out from under his feet again.

He sucks in a sharp gasp, blindly stumbling forward into Cas’ arms. He feels like he’s going to hurl, and he closes his eyes to hold the urge at bay, trying to still his body when it feels like he’s still moving.

“What…” He finally pushes at Cas, tsing when the angel barely budges and just stares down at him with confusion, his arms reluctantly releasing Dean. “What the hell was that?!”
Cas clears his throat, his arms falling back to his sides awkwardly. “I’m sorry. That can be a bit… jarring, at first.”

“Jarring?” Dean laughs bitterly, resting his hands on his knees and lowering his head because if he doesn’t he’s going to lose his lunch. “Believe me. It’s more than jarring.”

Cas nods apologetically. “Yes, well... if you like I could always just heal you.”

He’s already lifting his hand again when Dean jerks away, warding him off. “Hey! No, no I’m good. I’ll just deal with it.”

Cas freezes, looking like he isn’t quite sure what move to make next. He eventually pulls away, though, clearing his throat and nodding. “Of course.”

Dean eyes him a moment, strangely feeling like he’s just kicked a puppy. Frustrated with his apparent weakness of the look, Dean instead survey’s their surroundings. His eyes widen when he notices the vast array of tree’s. They’re a deeply rich green, most of their trunks covered by softly sparse moss, and varying from slender widths that Dean can wrap both his hands around, and massive giants that seem to reach the very sky. The foliage looks exotic, like something middle aged women buy and stick in their living rooms, telling everyone how real and lifelike it looks, and Dean’s overcome with the urge to reach out and rub a leaf between his fingertips, just to test and make sure it’s actually real.

“So this is really it, huh?” He turns in a full circle, looking all around. “We’re actually here.” Cas gives a soft hum of acknowledgement. When he’s done taking in everything, he turns to Cas with a sigh. “So which way are we going?”

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It’s miserable in the jungle, even in November. Dean’s grown somewhat used to the bleak cold of Seattle, and although Kansas often has a few unexpectedly warm winter days, he’s not prepared for the groggy warmth of the Philippians on a November day. He figures it’s at least in the mid-eighties, and the entire jungle is so wet his boots are already covered in mud. Cas says that it’s the end of Typhoon season (Dean had been overjoyed about that), and that rain can still be expected for so early
on. Dean makes a point to glare at him every time his boot’s stick and he has to forcefully jerk free.

Even though the rainfall is light, they’ve been trekking through the jungle long enough that Dean’s clothing is pretty much soaked through, and he’s just so uncomfortable that he forgets he’s not supposed to be suspicious of Cas, thinking that the angel could have definitely come on this mission alone and just brought them the book afterwards. Cas, whose walking a few steps ahead of him and leading the way, continuously looks behind him to make sure Dean’s still following, and there’s a bit of an amused smirk on his lips with each glance.

Dean hates it, but he can’t help but feel a little fascinated at the same time.

“Why the hell couldn’t you just zap us directly to the church?”

Cas slows down slightly, until Dean’s pretty much falling into step with him. “I thought it best to appear some ways off. If anyone else knows of the books location then it will be guarded.”

Yeah. It makes sense. Still… Dean wants to bitch and moan and cross his arms over his chest like a spoiled brat. “Who’s to say it’s even here anymore. Someone could have already gotten it.”

“I guess we’ll just have to hope that they haven’t got wind of its location, then.”

Hope. That words so laughable to Dean. Every time he’d found himself hoping in his life, he’s had to pay the price. No. Hope is something he doesn’t have the luxury of being optimistic about. “I just hope that Jesse doesn’t make his move while we’re separated.” *Since he’s already on the subject…*

“I know you want to get back to Sam, Dean.”

Cas’ asserting voice pulls Dean eyes up, and he finds Cas watching him with a soft, reassuring gaze. He can’t look away.

“I promise the moment we have the book, we’ll go back to him.” Cas turns away then, his gaze directed at something downwards. He’s quiet a beat, and Dean watches his chest rise and hold, like he’s gathering words in his throat and readying himself for saying them. “I know he means more to you than anything. I would never do anything to endanger the two of you.”
And Dean believes him. He doesn’t even know why, but he does. It’s his turn to stare at the ground now, something tight building in his chest. When he speaks his voice is gruff, fighting to hold back emotion. “He’s all I’ve got. I got to watch out for him, you know? I’ve got to protect him.” Cas looks over at him, and there’s something so broken in his gaze that Dean forgets how to breath for a moment.

“I understand.”

The words are spoken softly, but with such a heavy sense of understanding that Dean is suddenly stuck by the realization that there’s someone Cas protects, or at some point had protected. He wonders if it’s a brother as well, but there’s something that makes him want to think otherwise. Not a brother, but a friend - a best friend; someone important and *needed*.

Dean doesn’t like how the thought makes his chest ache, so he pushes it aside, treading mud as they make their way over the uneven ground.

He reaches up and rubs at his temple with a frown, annoyed that his headache has come back yet again and wondering why it’s been so persistent lately. Then again, with the amount of stress he’s under, it’s not that surprising.

There’s a soft rustle overhead, barely distinguishable with the sound of the jungle around them, but it’s enough to make Dean look up with a scowl. He finds some rat looking creature staring down at him from a branch. It’s a weird enough looking animal that he unconsciously stops, tilting his head to try and get a better look at the thing.

“It’s a Tarsier. They’re actually quite friendly.”

Cas appears suddenly at his side, and Dean jumps, caught off guard by the effect the angels deep voice has so close. He forgets the wide eyed creature, his eyes drifting over Cas and the way his hair is wetly slicked against his head in some places and sticking up messily in others. He’s got a droplet of water running down his cheek bone, and Dean’s eyes follow it’s trail helplessly, transfixed by how it clings so desperately to the angel’s chin before falling in a fast decent down his neck and into the collar of his trench.

Cas’ head turns and before Dean can think to look away he finds himself held prisoner by the blue of Cas’ eyes.

It’s the strangest thing – how normal this feels to Dean. How having Cas all up in his space with those unblinking eyes and his lowered brows seems almost like a memory. “Did I know you, Cas?”
The words come out unexpectedly, and Dean’s as surprised as Cas is. He blinks rapidly, licking his lips nervously and stuttering. “Not you. I mean the other one, before you… Dammit!” He huffs out in annoyance and scrubs a hand over his face. He can already feel how red his face is and he wishes he could take the words back. He’d honestly decided to never say anything on the subject, and he’s at a loss of where to go from here because he hasn’t had the time to actually practice saying this in his own damn head.

When he looks back up he’s surprised to find Cas a good six feet away. He’s staring at Dean with wide, terrified eyes, and it confuses Dean so much that for a moment his mind goes completely blank. “Cas?”

Cas jolts, his eyes growing even wider a second before narrowing, and suddenly he’s in Deans face again, this time all but crowding him, forcing Dean to take a step back. “Why do you call me that, Dean? Where did that name come from?”

Dean holds up his hands, wanting to grab a hold of Cas and stop his advance, but for some reason he’s afraid of touching the angel. He stumbles over a tree root and has to catch himself from falling backwards. “What? What name?”

“Cas. It had to have come from somewhere.”

“I don’t know! I just… it’s just easier…” Dean hisses, reaching up to touch his now pounding temples. “Look man, just forget it! I was wrong, okay?”

Cas’ brows furrow, his head tilting as he looks up at Dean. “You’re in pain.”

His hands already lifting and Dean makes an aborted sound of alarm and hops sideways to escape the touch. “Goddammit, Cas! I said no!”

“Why?”

“Because I don’t want you touching me, okay?!” The words fly out of Dean’s mouth with a sort of physical likeness, slamming into Cas and knocking him back a few steps. Dean feels like shit instantly.
Cas looks away, his eyes trained sideways and his head lowered, like he’s deeply ashamed.

This isn’t what Dean wants. Logically, he knows that there’s no reason for him not to trust Cas. He’d been pissed right after Benny’s death, but even now Dean understands Cas’ reasoning behind not telling them. He still hates that the angel hadn’t been truthful with them, but that doesn’t mean he had intentionally put their lives in danger; that he wanted them hurt. Now, more than ever, Dean understands that Cas honestly cares about his and Sam’s safety.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to… I won’t…” Cas mumbles weakly.

Dean doesn’t think he’s ever seen such a dejected expression in his entire life. He opens his mouth, struggling to find something to say that will fix this mess, but he just stutters stupidly and without a clue.

“Come on. We’re almost there.” Cas turns without another word and starts making his way through the jungle again.

Dean can do nothing but follow.

His stomach feels sour.

Cas comes to a halt, looking out from the edge of the jungle at the Guiob Church ruins that according to Rowena is supposed to house the journal. He feels Dean come to a stop beside him, and glances over indiscreetly. It’s obvious he’d made Dean uncomfortable earlier, and he feels like things are so incredibly fragile between them and the last thing he wants to do is push Dean away.

Logically he knows that he shouldn’t take Dean’s reaction to heart, but the look of utter disgust that had shown on his face feels like a knife that even now digs into Cas. He has a feeling he’ll feel the ghost of its sensation many days to come.
Cas had known that being around Dean again after so long would be hard – especially since Dean doesn’t even remember him. But it had never felt as painful as it does now. He had thought that some spark of memory had come back to Dean, and the excitement and desperation that had come over Cas had stripped him of any previous decision to remain aloof. But how honestly had he followed that rule he had given himself, really? Maybe in the beginning, but like always he’d found himself gravitating towards Dean without even realizing it. He’d begun to think that Dean was doing the same, and that they could one day have something similar to what they had in the past. After this, though?

Cas hasn’t realized how hopeful he’s been up until now, when he feels so incredibly dejected.

“So this is it, huh?” Dean drags his hand over his face, wiping the rain from his skin and squinting at the crumbling church a short distance away. “So what, we just walk on up?”

“Luckily this isn’t the tourist season.” Cas breaks away from the jungle cautiously, casting a glance in all directions. Dean does the same and begins to follow. “Since the church’s destruction in the late nineteenth century the locals have tried to preserve the area. There’s a small chapel at the center of the ruins and mass is often held there. I don’t believe we have anything to worry about, though - given the weather and time of day.”

Cas glances up at the now darkening sky before turning back to look at the area, his eyes scanning tall brick walls that look relatively new - Most likely built to keep the area more secure.

“What, you visit often or something?” Dean’s voice is thickly laced with sarcasm, but when he looks at Cas his crooked grin slowly falls and his brow arches highly. “Dude, do you visit?”

Cas ignores Dean’s stare, his watchful gaze on their surroundings as they make their way closer. He’s not sensed any demonic activity yet, but that doesn’t mean they won’t run into someone at some point. “Given the longevity of my kind, I’ve been prone to pass the time by traveling the earth.”

Dean falls into silence beside him, and when Cas finally glances over at him he’s got a tight contemplative look on his face. Cas can only imagine that he’s wondering just how long he’s actually existed. Cas wouldn’t mind answering, but in just a few moments they approach the fence and Dean’s yet to say anything. Cas lets it go. He remembers how daunting his very existence had been to Dean when he had first truly begun to acknowledge it.

“So how are we supposed to get over this?” Dean steps forward to lay his hand on the wall. It’s high, more than double the height of the hunter and covered thickly in places by vines and greenery.
“By my calculations we are on the west side of the ruins.” Cas takes a step back, his eyes darting left and right and his brows furrowed. “The chapel should be just over the wall. I’ll have to fly us over.”

Dean’s shoulders tense, and his hand drops from the stone, falling back at his side. He heaves a deep sigh before turning back to Cas. “We can’t just break into the place?”

“That would be vandalism.” Cas scowls. He’s not prone to the idea of desecrating the holy ground.

Dean rolls his eyes and mocks Cas under his breath. He stares at the ground a moment before shrugging. “Alright. Come on, then.”

Cas moves forward immediately, his palm curling around the bone of Dean’s shoulder. It only takes a second for them to appear on the other side.

Dean pulls away from him with a grunt, sucking in deep breaths through his nose and steadying himself. His eyes are closed and his body is still.

Cas doesn’t remember it taking so long for Dean to get used to this particular form of travel. It’s a little bewildering that it’s effecting him so differently now. He gives Dean a moment, taking in the familiar surroundings and wondering where it is that the journal could be hidden. He slides his hand in the pocket of his coat and feels for the charm bag, making sure that it’s still there. Rowena had said that it would help in finding the books location, and he’s counting on its witchery.

“We should check the chapel first.”

Dean turns to look at the small building constructed sometime after Mount Vulcan had erupted, destroying not only the church but the town of Cotta Bato (as it had been called in those days) as well.

“No one’s in there?”

“No one that I can sense.” Cas says, and watches as Dean turns from him to approach the building.
He tries the door handle, surprised that it opens. “No lock?”

Cas shrugs. “The locals consider the church sacred, and the chapel is simply made. There’s no reason for vandalism. Besides, there’s little need for locks.”

Dean frowns at him, confused. He pushes open the door and steps over the threshold, and Cas follows, watching as realization hits Dean’s face. “Dude… there’s no walls.”

Yes, and no. The chapel’s been built snug between two high walls. Because of that, the locals thought it unimportant to close in the chapel completely. Sure, there’s enough room for someone to pass between, but Cas understands the very human belief to have faith in the goodness of other people, and trust that they will do no harm.

“Jesus, this place is a dump.”

Dean’s not all wrong. The pews, as few as they are, are dilapidated and some almost rotted straight through, and the ceiling has various holes in it, the rain showering down adding to the rot. There’s a distinct smell of mold in the air, and it’s slightly hotter in the chapel. Despite that, though, there’s still a weathered sort of beauty to the place, and Cas finds himself mesmerized. He walks past Dean, up the narrow aisle in the middle and to the front of the chapel, where a small pulpit has been constructed. Behind it, built into the wall, are three arches, the middle larger than the others. There stands a cross in the tallest, and flowers perched behind foggy glass of the other two. Cas lifts his hand and runs his fingertips along the polished wood of the cross.

Despite his mixed feelings about God, there’s a part of him that can still appreciate such absolute devotion in others. And it’s clear to see the devotion within the church. It bleeds off of the very wood and wraps around his body like the caress from a friend forgotten.

Swallowing thickly he turns away from the display and searches for where the book could be hidden.

“So how are these things supposed to even work?” Dean’s got his charm bag in his hand, scowling down at it.

Cas reaches in his pocket and finds his own, taking it out and looking down at it. “I don’t know.” It’s something they should have asked Rowena about more, but Cas and the Winchesters both were so anxious to finally have answers that they hadn’t bothered to linger. Oh, well. He figures it will
make itself useful in one way or another.

“It’s not like there’s a lot of places this thing could be hiding.”

Cas tilts his head, staring down at the stone under his feet. “Look for any breaks in the stone. There’s a chance it could be hidden under our feet.”

Dean nods and begins his search immediately, bent low and squinting down at the floor. “Well, let’s just hope we find this thing before we lose our light.”

With the high walls on each side of them, they’d be searching in pitch dark.

Cas joins Dean in his search.

Dear reader, the following content is not included in the plain text representation.

Sam doesn’t trust Crowley. He especially doesn’t trust him with Rowena. Despite the witch’s current change of personality, Sam can’t help but worry that the moment he leaves them alone they’ll go back to their scheming ways. Crowley is the same as he’s ever been, though, and there’s only so much sass Sam can take before wanting to strangle the demon. So, before he can do something he’ll regret – or really enjoy, he leaves the two, chaining Crowley to the chair again temporarily and making sure to securely lock the dungeon door behind him.

He takes a lesson out of Dean’s book and grabs himself a beer, falling heavily into the kitchen chair and rubbing his temples with a sigh. He’s tired. Feels more worn down than he has in a long time. Despite how annoying his current situation, he can’t help but wonder how Dean is faring. He’d be an idiot not to notice how his brother and the angel clash. In a way it’s like seeing two positively charged ions forced to meet and Sam is helpless to do anything but watch.

He’s never seen his brother react so strongly to someone, and that’s saying a lot, considering how many times Sam has unfortunately witnessed Dean on the prowl for women. He has that same kind of steadfastly driven look in his eyes when around Cas, and Sam isn’t sure if Dean’s even aware of
it. Or if he is, that it’s something he’s willing to admit.

Dean has a habit of repressing his feelings, and it’s usually only with excessive hounding on Sam’s part that he’s able to get Dean to actually open up. It’s one of the many things that make the two of them so different.

Sam knows that he’s often driven by emotion. He considers it normal, though, and doesn’t understand the need to deny natural biology. Not to say that there hasn’t been times in the past that he wishes he could. There are quite a few significant points in his life that sharing Dean’s gift of repression would have helped. A lot.

But he and his brother are like night and day, and Sam’s long ago just accepted the fact that what one lacks, the other steadily makes up for; bringing them to what somewhat resembles a fully functioning human being.

Finishing his beer, Sam tosses the bottle to the recycle bin against the wall, sighing when the remaining dredges splash against the wallpaper and cling. He can’t find it within himself to stand and clean up the mess. The pitifulness of that is not lost to him, and he slumps down further in his chair, rapping his fingertips against the wood of the table.

He’s been thinking lately – a lot, and about everything, really. Thinking about this mess that they’re in again, thinking about how shaky the ground between him and Dean is, and even thinking of his childhood.

There’s something that’s been excessively coming to his thoughts though, one thing in particular that he’s only now beginning to find strange.

Only a month ago Hannah, Cas and Balthazar had come to him, requesting his help. The discovery of angels actually existing had been surprising… but not that surprising. It’s a little shocking how easily his mind had accepted the fact. No questions. Barely any doubt…

Something had just clicked inside his head and it’s almost as if ever since he’s been running on autopilot.

There’s also something so strangely familiar about the dynamic of Dean and Cas. Listening to the two of them bicker… watching how they seem to gravitate to one another when in the same room; Sam can’t help but feel a confusing sense of nostalgia.
He’s wondered if Dean feels the same, but doesn’t want to bring it up when he knows his brother is already so untrusting of people. If Dean starts thinking that the angels are hiding something from them Sam knows that everything will fall apart. Despite his own curiosity he’s not willing to risk the fate of the world in order to get answers.

Glancing at his watch Sam sighs at the time and scrubs a hand over his tired eyes. He’d like nothing more than to crawl in bed and escape the world for a solid eight hours. Unfortunately that’s just not an option – at least not until Dean comes back with the journal. If he’s even able to find it, that is. He half wants to call bullshit on Rowena, but they’ve got nothing else to go on and he’s so damn desperate for something that he’ll even cling to the most farfetched idea. He just can’t image what answers they’ll find in a journal. The fact that the things never been uncovered before only makes him more doubtful. Rowena had given them charms, yeah, but they were only charms. There’s only so much magick can do, even Rowena’s magick. If the journal’s warded somehow, and has yet to be found, Sam can’t help but feel that their chances are slim to none.

Everything just feels so overwhelming.

Standing, Sam heads out of the kitchen and back towards the dungeon. There’s a distinct chill to the air, and he rolls the sleeves of his flannel down his arms, covering hair standing on edge. He’ll have to turn the furnace on soon. Honestly he probably already should have, but being all alone in such a huge place he’d kind of found himself not caring so much about something like comfort. Besides, ever since Dean had left two years ago he’d spent so much time working cases that hotel rooms had become his home.

It had been like reliving the past, so much so that he’d often find himself booking a room with two queen beds before he’d even realized it. Every time he’d find himself lying awake at night, staring over at the empty bed. After long he’d just started sleeping in his car.

Rounding a corner Sam heads towards the room where the dungeon is, cracking his neck a few times to ease the kinks there. He has a feeling that pretty soon if he doesn’t lay down he’s going to fall down, and the last thing they need is Rowena roaming around the bunker unsupervised getting into God knows what. I’ll have to make a new pot of coffee, he thinks as he opens the door to enter the room that hides the dungeon within.

He’s half way across the floor when he feels it – a heavy, ominous presence pressing against his skin. His hand’s already reaching for the knife strapped to his belt as he turns, but a overpowering grip on his wrist snaps the bone easily. Sam cries out and the knife falls noisily to the floor. There’s a heavy and sudden pressure to his windpipe, and black seeps into his vision so quickly that he passes out almost instantly.
They give up after an hour. They’ve scoured every inch of chapel, Dean running his fingertips over every nook and cranny in the concrete floor – which are many, and have got squat to show for it.

“Perhaps it’s hidden somewhere else?” Cas moves to stand at the opening of the chapel and looks around with narrowed eyes. The rain has picked up, seemingly bringing with it a cold chill, and Dean shivers, pulling his jacket more closely towards his body as he stands behind Cas, perfectly happy with letting the angel get the brunt of the weather. It doesn’t even seem to affect him, after all.

Cas’ sighs and looks over his shoulder at Dean. “You’ve felt nothing from your charm?”

Dean shakes his head, tucking his chin down in the collar of his thin jacket. “Nah, man. I’m starting to think Rowena was just messing with us when she made them.” Cas doesn’t say anything, just watches him with that same narrowed gaze, and Dean twitches after a second. “What?” He bites out gruffly.

“You’re not properly dressed.” Cas’ gaze roams over him, like he’s only now noticing it. He turns fully to Dean, his face falling slightly. “I’m sorry, Dean. I wasn’t thinking.”

Dean rolls his eyes and is about to say something about not needing to be coddled when Cas starts to take off his trench coat. It’s so surprising that Dean just blinks stupidly a moment. It’s only when Cas has pulled it from his frame completely and is holding it out to Dean that he finds his voice again. “What the hell are you doing?”

Cas blinks. “You will be warmer with this. I don’t need it, its fine.” He pushes his hand closer to Dean, the trench dangling between them.

Dean looks from the trench to Cas, a kind of dubious expression on his face. Without the trench Cas is left in just a black suit jacket. It’s undone, and Dean notices for the first time how the equally dark button up under is soaked throat and sticking to Cas’ chest. Cas notices his staring and must mistake it for something else because the next second he’s moving to pull off his suit jacket.
“Would you like this, as well?”

Dean catches a brief glimpse of a nipple straining against dampness of Cas’ shirt and hurriedly jerks the trench coat from his hand. “No! Keep the damn jacket on, Cas.” He gripes, muttering under his breath before angrily putting the trench coat on. It’s a bit tight in the shoulders and short in the sleeves, and his wrist’s pop out annoyingly. Despite that, it is a bit warmer. “I look like a dumbass.”

The corners of Cas’ lips draw up slightly, a bit of a twinkle lighting his eyes. He doesn’t say anything, just turns and steps out of the chapel, heading east.

Dean glares up at the sky before trudging after. “Remind me to never come here again.” Because, yeah, he kind of hates it – hates how it can be hot one minute and freezing the next. Hates how the mud at his feet rushes up to cover his boots, coming dangerously close to his ankles.

“It’s much more aesthetically pleasing outside of typhoon season.”

Dean rolls his eyes, shoving his hands in the trench pockets. He feels ridiculous wearing it and can’t help but be reminded of some scene in a chick flick movie. The thought makes his ears burn and he pulls his shoulders up higher to try and hide it. “Who’s to say this things isn’t just buried somewhere in the ground? How the hell are we supposed to find that?”

“It’s logical for the journal to have been buried somewhere easily unearthed.” Cas halts, squinting through the rain. “Somewhere easily remembered…” Without another word he makes a sudden turn to the right and briskly walks away.

Dean glares at his retreating back before following. He’s about done with angels and their ‘half-speak’. He’d kill to have a conversation with the lot of them where they actually finish their sentences.

Playing follow the leader eventually brings them to what Dean thinks is perhaps the biggest tree he’s ever seen. Its truck is wide, easily large enough to fit at least seven people standing side by side, and he cranes his neck back to squint up – way up. He’s never been much of a tree hugging person, but there’s just something so old and characteristic about this one that he can’t help but drift towards it, standing close to Cas, their shoulders almost touching. He reaches out and brushes his fingertips across the bark, feeling the damp moss there. “Dude… how old is this thing?”
“Not very old, actually – just a century or so.”

_Not very old_. Dean huffs in soft laughter, shaking his head. But then again, that’s actually not that old, is it? He seems to recall reading somewhere that some of the California Redwoods are two thousand years old. He’d been just a kid at the time, but the idea of something existing for so long had amazed him, and he’d secretly wanted to walk among the giants ever since. There’s just something almost comforting about it – the knowledge that he’s so insignificant compared to something so old. Most people would find that daunting, but Dean doesn’t.

He sneaks a glance over at Cas, staring at the angels profile.

_He’s as old as time itself_. The thought comes out of nowhere, and even though Dean has no real way of knowing if it’s even true, he can’t seem to think otherwise. For the first time he really begins to contemplate the existence of the angel. Cas looks so incredibly human, and Dean’s beginning to think that because of that he hasn’t stopped to think of just how powerful Cas really is. He’s thinking about it now, though, and a fascinated kind of awe gradually fills his chest until it’s almost a physical ache that he wants to rub away.

“Hmm. It doesn’t seem to be here, either. I thought for sure…”

Dean notices for the first time that Cas has taken the charm out of his pocket and is staring down at it. He forces his attention back to the present and turns his gaze away, looking just past the tree to where the ruins of a building had once been, its stones withered and crumbling. “What about there?”

Cas glances up and tilts his head. “The convent? Yes, I suppose it could be.” He doesn’t make a move towards it, though, just stands staring with a sort of tensely brooding expression on his face.

Dean gives an inward sigh and folds in a bit on himself, shoving his hands back into the pockets of Cas’ trench and looking around him. He tries to imagine where he would hide something so important, and literally comes up with nothing. There’s an itching just under his skin, and he shifts anxiously on his feet. He’s tired of this. Tired of being here and tired of looking. He just wants to have the journal, and get back to the bunker so he can make sure that Sam is alright. Each minute that pasts is another minute that he leaves his brother alone with two potentially harmful people, and the possibility of Jesse breaking into the bunker makes him chew on the inside of his cheek.

If anything were to happen to Sam…
He can’t even think of that.

Tsking in annoyance Dean swings away from the tree and heads up the hill. Cas turns as he moves, his face drawing into a tighter frown.

“Dean?”

“I can’t just stand here, Cas.” He clenches his hands into tight fists, his nails digging into his palms.

Cas falls into step behind him, keeping a safe distance between them, as if he knows how tightly coiled Dean is and doesn’t want to be the one that tips him over the edge. “I know this is frustrating, but the journal is here somewhere. We’ll find it.”

“How do you know?” Dean grows, glaring over his shoulder at Cas as he quickens his steps. “All we have to go on is some witches words. A witch who has screwed us over time and time again. Who’s to say that she’s not lying, huh?” He makes a sharp turn to the left, following along a wall.

Cas shakes his head. “I suppose she could be, but I don’t believe she is.”

“You don’t know her, okay? This is kind of what she does. We should have never listened to her. For all we know she’s already done something to Sam and flown coop with freaking Crowely.” He stomps his way through a thin grove of trees, heading up another hill.

Cas’ narrowed gaze pulls away from Dean and searches his surroundings. He opens his mouth to say something but then stops, glancing down at his hand with a curious frown.

“We need to just get the hell back to the bunker. I knew we should have brought Sam with us.”

“Dean –“

“He’s got to be so damn hard headed, though. You’d think he’d have grown out of that in two years.”
“Dean.”

“What?!” Dean swings around, glaring at Cas impatiently.

Cas shifts awkwardly on his feet and clears his throat before holding his hand up. The charm is sitting there in his palm, and it’s glowing.

Dean blinks at it stupidly a moment before digging into his pocket to pull out his own. It’s in his jacket, though, and he curses under his breath when he remembers he’s wearing Cas’ trench still, and shoves it aside to get to his own. He feels the heat from the charm even before he sees its glow. He stares down at it a moment, his eyes wide in surprise. “Holy shit… it actually works.” He begins to hurriedly look around him, his eyes downcast towards the ground. Is it buried somewhere nearby?

Cas’ hand is on his shoulder suddenly, and Dean flinches when a sort of shocking sensation pulses through his layer of clothing and to the skin beneath. He doesn’t pull away from Cas, he doesn’t have to. Cas quickly takes a step back, wide eyes locked on Dean. They both stare at each other in silence a moment before the angel licks his lips. Dean tracks the movement.

“I believe I know where it is.”

Dean has trouble understanding his words a moment, can only watch as his mouth forms them. “What?”

Cas drags his gaze away and nods at something over Dean’s shoulder.

Dean follows Cas eyes and sees the ruins of something just a short distance away. It’s a square like structure, not all that large, maybe enough to fit a small group of people. There’s a large copse of brush surrounding it and vines climbing up the stone.

He moves, quickly making his way towards it.

“What was this place?”

“The bell tower.” Cas is beside him, his face just as anxious.
They reach the structure and Dean circles its wall until he finds an opening, entering immediately. There’s no roof, and the rain still pelts down on them. The earth under his feet is muddy and thick, and the stones give off a strong musk of age. He spins in a circle, staring down at the ground. “So what… we just dig? This thing isn’t very specific.” He glares at the charm in his hand, holding it left and right, trying to get a more detailed reading.

“There’s no roof, and the rain still pelts down on them. The earth under his feet is muddy and thick, and the stones give off a strong musk of age.”

“It’s faint, but Dean sees it. There’s a finely grated scrawling set in the stone, a sigil of some sort that he’s never seen before. He moves to kneel beside Cas, frowning at the thing. “What the hell is it?”

“It’s Enochian.”

“A noke what now?”


Dean draws back, surprised. “I thought you said the angels don’t know anything about this?”

Cas frowns sternly, shaking his head and looking back at the sigil. “We don’t. There’s no records on it at all, believe me, I’ve looked.”

“So then why the hell is it here?”

“You don’t have to be an angel to write a spell in Enochian. You just have to have knowledge of the language.”

“So it’s a spell?” Dean looks at the sigil. It’s a complicated looking thing, all unfamiliar lines and curves. “Well how do we break it?”
Cas stares at the markings a moment longer before lifting his hand and pressing his palm against the stone. “I think I may be able to…”

Dean feels a shift in the air immediately. It’s not subtle. It’s electric and heavy, and the hair on his arms instantly stands on edge. Cas goes stone still beside him, and Dean sucks in a soft inhale when he notices the faint glowing light beginning to radiate from him.

“Close your eyes.” Is the last thing Cas says before his eyes bleed white-ish blue and his hand does the same against the stone.

Dean wants to keep them open, feeling a surge of both stubbornness and awe, but he’s got a feeling that whatever that bright light is could maybe do damage. He closes his eyes and turns his head away.

There’s a charged sort of warmth bleeding into his body from the light, and Dean can’t help but think how peaceful it feels flowing through his own veins. A part of him longs to shift sideways, to press his side against Cas and see if that will strengthen the connection. It’s a crazy thought. He pushes it aside.

The sound of grating stone fills his ears, and his curiosity is getting the better of him when a hand lands on his shoulder. Jumping slightly Dean opens his eyes and looks up. Cas isn’t glowing anymore. He’s not looking at Dean, either, but rather down at the wall in front of them.

There’s a hole in it now. Dean can’t see anything but darkness, but then Cas reaches into the opening and pulls out a large square of black dusty cloth. Dean turns his body towards him and watches as Cas unfolds the cloth and reveals a thick, leather bound book inside.

The relief that slams into him is nearly overwhelming. He lets out a sharp exhale, falling back on his tailbone in the mud, not caring that he’s getting covered in the stuff. “We found it.”

Cas runs his hand over the surface of the journal, his fingers twitching slightly. “There’s power here. A lot.”

“I don’t get it… in a wall?” He looks around him, “The place is falling apart. It would have been found eventually.”
“I don’t think so.” Cas looks back at the broken stones at their feet and the sigil carved into them; scattered. “The spell was protecting the stone. It would have not broken. Only someone familiar with the language of the angels could release the binding.”

And how fishy is that? What were the chances that the only way to find the journal would be through angelic interference? Cas had said that the angels weren’t involved in this, but the circumstances are just too great. He believes Cas is innocent, no doubt, but he’s starting to question the intentions of the rest of them.

Cas carefully folds the cloth back over it, protecting its aged leather from the elements. Dean follows his move and stands, cringing with the knowledge that his ass is covered with muddy earth.

“Well, we got what we came for. Can we get the hell out of here, now?”

Cas nods briskly, bringing the journal close to his body.

Dean only has a second to prepare himself before Cas touches his shoulder, and then the world shifts.

*************************

He does better this time. He’s grounded in just a moment, his stomach actually staying in place and not climbing up towards his throat. It’s still a little dizzying, and Dean isn’t aware that he’s leaning on Cas until Cas shifts against him. Dean pulls away instantly, his body feeling like fire where they had touched.

Cas is eyeing him warily, as if he’s sure Dean will lash out at any moment.

It bothers him more than it probably should.
Turning away Dean immediately shouts Sam’s name, moving through the map room towards the kitchen. A chair’s pulled out from the table, as if Sam’s been sitting there at some point. He heads for the hallway, pushing open doors as he walks. “Sam?”

Cas trails behind him, his eyes narrowed and his lips downturned.

“Where the hell is he?” Dean says under his breath to no one in particular. His heart has started beating faster; dread slowly squeezing its way in. Cutting a corner he quickens his steps to the dungeon.

“Sammy!”

The dungeon door is shut, and Dean makes wide strides to it before jerking the hinge and pulling it open.

There’s no one there.

No Sam. No Crowley and no Rowena.

It’s every worry he’s had in the past few hours come to life, and Dean’s throat closes up and a sickening sensation swells in his belly. He jerks around and shoulders past Cas who’s come to stand behind him, his eyes wide and conveying almost as much worry as Dean feels. Cas doesn’t take offense to the forceful push, just sidesteps to balance himself out and then the next moment he’s swinging around as well, hurriedly following behind, his eyes darting left and right around the bunker.

“I’ll be back.”

He vanishes immediately, and Dean grinds his teeth, stumbling in his search a moment. Great. Now he’s gone, too. He swallows the sense of painful disappointment, and forces it down and out of his thoughts. He doesn’t have time to dwell on the apparent betrayal he feels from Cas leaving; not when Sam has disappeared to God knows where.
He’s back in the hallways and searching every room on the way, and is cutting the corner to check the garage when Cas suddenly appears again directly in front of him. Dean just barely stops from slamming into him, his heart pounding fast and loud. “Holy –“

“I’m sorry; I didn’t mean to alarm you.” Cas spares him an apologetic look before his eyes grow serious again. “I searched every room in the bunker, as well as the outside proximity.” He pauses, swallowing so hard that his adam’s apple bobs. “He’s not here, Dean. Neither is Crowley or Rowena.”

Dean stands like a statue, eyes wide and mouth slightly ajar. After a moment he lets out a huff of air and stumbles backwards, his back hitting the stone of the wall. He had known not to leave Sam alone.

“Dean… I don’t think that Crowley or Rowena are involved.”

Dean jerks his head up, his mouth twisted in a frown. “What?” He bites out harshly.

Cas’ gaze, heavy and growing in unease, does not waiver. “There is a residual power in the bunker – one that I recognize.”

Dean shakes his head, lowering his gaze from Cas’ because he can’t stand the weight of it. “No.”

Cas takes a hesitant step towards him, his hand lifting like he’s about to touch Dean, but he stops midway and lowers it again. “We’ll find him. We can stop him now; we have the journal.” Cas holds it out from his body like it’s the answer to all their prayers.

Dean snarls at the thing, running shaking hands through his hair. “It’s a fucking journal, Cas.”

“A journal with detailed descriptions about the only other Cambion known to exist.” Cas does touch him then, curling his hand tightly on Dean’s shoulder. He looks just as unnerved as Dean, but there’s a hint of stubborn determination there that Dean desperately needs, and that gives him a small ounce of hope.

At least one of us still has some fight left. The thing is; Sam’s the only thing Dean has left. Even during their two years apart, Dean’s kept himself going with the knowledge that Sam is alive and well. He’d checked in on him countless times over the years, something that Sam doesn’t even
know, and seeing his brother ‘fighting the good fight’ despite being alone had given him hope. Maybe there’s more in store for Sam than Dean’s own ‘fool’s paradise’.

He needs to believe that. He needs it to function. If he doesn’t have that, he’s as good as lost.
Dazed and Confused

Chapter Summary

I was so strung out about this chapter I had to smoke to actually write it. LOL. Which means I've written a chapter while PRETTY high.

No clue how that's gonna pan out.

Hope it's not THAT bad.

After his bout of hopelessness Dean loses control again, his break down taking an aggressive turn. He shouts and rages, overturning bookshelves and throwing furniture. It’s not until he’s slammed his fist into a wall and hears the snap that he ceases, standing in the middle of the wrecked room with a heaving chest. He can feel warmth rushing down his fingers and twitches them, the sticky blood smearing. Before he has time to realize what’s happening Cas’ hand is clenched around his shoulder and Dean shivers at the sudden tingling warmth that fills him.

The pain in his hand fades almost instantly but Cas’ grip does not ease. Dean turns with a snarl, ready to cut into him, but the fierce expression on the angels face makes his throat close up and his back straighten. A shiver of something resembling fear runs down his spine when he remembers that Cas is something more than human; something ancient and more powerful than he can probably imagine.

“This is not helping.”

Dean feels like a child. He feels foolish and out of control, and he struggles to get a hold of himself again, stumbling away from Cas and dragging a hand over his face. It’s the hand that’s still covered in blood, and he cringes when he feels it smear across his skin. He wipes it off with the sleeve of his coat, and realizes he’s still wearing Cas’ trench. Pulling it off he carelessly tosses it aside. He looks down the journal Cas has in his hand. “Well, we might as well break open that thing.” He takes it from Cas, running a shaking hand through his hair and heading to the library. A part of him is still skeptical that the answers they need will be within its pages, but he’s more than willing to give it a try if it means getting Sam back.

Inside the library he pulls out a chair and falls heavily into it. He lays the journal on the table and looks down at its leather bound cover. It’s old, cracked with age and fading in color. “Feels like I’m supposed to be wearing gloves or something.” He mutters while Castiel moves to stand at the side of the table. Always standing. Would it kill the guy to actually sit down?
“I’m sure if you’re gentle it will be fine.”

Dean looks down at his hands, large and covered with small white scars from years of fighting and taking his own frustration out on the closest wall. It’s the same hands that have dealt the killing blow time and time again, the same hands that’ve failed to save his little brother. The same hands that have let so many die…

A part of Dean is scared that the moment he touches the pages they’ll crumble beneath his fingertips. Swallowing past the sudden lump in his throat is hard. Aware of Cas’ eyes on him, Dean carefully takes hold of the weathered edge of the journal. It makes a stiff, crisp sound as he opens it, and then Dean is frowning down at delicate looking scrawl, slightly faded but luckily still dark enough to actually read.

The state of the journal doesn’t matter, though, not when it’s written in another language.

Something bitter and sharp blooms in quick succession low in his belly. “Of course.”

Cas frowns and edges closer, leaning slightly over Dean’s shoulder and makes a faint noise. He lays a hand on his shoulder and squeezes. Dean forgets how to breathe.

“It’s okay. I know how to fix this. I’ll be back.”

Before he can question the angel he’s gone with a burst of wind. Dean waits a few beats, looking around the library with a scowl. Seconds later Cas reappears with the sound of fluttering wings. He’s got things with him. A small round wooden bowl and bag of what looks like herbs. He empties the bag into the bowl, and mutters under his breath as he waves a hand over it. The herbs catch fire.

Dean jumps in slight surprise. “What the hell?”

Cas doesn’t spare him a glance, just stares down at the bowl until the flame dies down to a steady, pungent smoke. He holds his hand out, his fingers twitching. “The journal.”

Dean arches his brow but pushes it over. He watches as Cas carefully pulls it closer and lifts the
bowl in his hands. He starts muttering under his breath again, and Dean tries to make sense of the strange, unfamiliar language. Hearing it slip softly from between Cas’ lips is almost calming, and Dean finds himself edging a bit closer in his seat, as if he’ll actually be able to feel the words against his skin.

Cas waves his hand over the smoke, drifting it down onto the journal. The fog lingers atop its pages like a sea, swaying back and forth a long while before fading. Cas turns to him then, moving closer. “I’ll need to…”

Dean startles, pressing against the back of his chair with an arched brow. “What?”

“In order for this to work, you’ll need to inhale the smoke as well.”

“What’s it going to do?”

Cas huffs, an almost put out expression crossing his features. Dean can’t help but blink stupidly at that.

“Just be still.”

Cas bends until their faces are on the same level, the bowl held between them. Dean figures he can move away if he wants to, but he doesn’t. He sits there almost frozen, caught in the blue of Cas’ gaze. The angel’s not watching him, but rather staring down at the bowl as he speaks in that weird language again, Enochian, Dean figures. He lifts his hand and starts wafting the smoke towards Dean. It’s a spicy fragrance, with a bit of warmth mixed somewhere within, and Dean inhales deep on instinct. He supposes he should be weary of this, but strangely enough he trusts Cas not to poison him.

He looks through the smoke, his eyes drifting down to the dark stubble covering Cas’ jaw. It’s a bit more than a five o’clock shadow, something substantial in appearance. For some reason Dean imagines Cas is usually more closely shaved. He likes the beard, though, thinks that it fits his angular jaw perfectly. It’s certainly makes the color of his lips stand out. Dean watches as they move to form words, mesmerized.

Cas stops talking, and it takes Dean a few beats to realize he has no reason anymore to be staring at his lips. He darts his eyes upwards and sucks in a sharp inhale when he’s met with deep blue. Cas’ pupils are dilated. There’s a heated intensity to his eyes that Deans never seen before and it makes
warmth rush low in his belly. His tongue comes out to dart across his lower lip, and Cas’ eyes track the movement. Dean swallows, clenches his hand on the edge of the table. There’s an urge tickling at the back of his mind, and he wonders what it would be like to satisfy it, indulge for just a moment.

Cas is drawing straight the next minute, though, and Dean doesn’t have the chance to find out. “That should work.”

His voice sounds tight and slightly broken and Dean wants to linger on it, to pull it apart piece by piece and break it down to bare clarity. His gaze flicks back up at Cas, and like magic the angel’s eyes shift to meet his. Their gazes hold. Dean tugs his bottom lip between his teeth and Cas visibly swallows.

This time it’s Dean who looks away, his face flaming. He looks instead at the journal again, and blinks stupidly down at it because it’s suddenly in perfect, readable English. “What the… Dude, does this mean I can read in different languages now?”

Cas’ lips tilt slightly upwards. “I’m afraid not. The spell just gives you the ability to understand this particular text.”

Oh, well. He supposes that the only thing he really needs to be able to decipher is the journal. Still, it would have been awesome to know something like Latin, seeing as nearly every ancient spell book in the bunker is written in it. But beggars can’t be choosers. At the top of the page the date reads March seventh, fifteen sixty-five. His eyes linger on that a moment, again reminded of just how old the item in front of him is.

March 7th, 1565

A father and son passed by the Monastery today while I sat within the temple. I could hear their voices outside the brick. They say the Spanish have come, docking at Cebu in the west and converting the people to their own religion. I know little of the strangers than whispers about their venturous minded King and Pious Queen. The others say nothing, but I know they question their appearance just as I do.
Dean scowls and turns the page, reading over the entry quickly. Frustrating building he flips through the pages with probably less finesse than needed for something so old. As his eyes scan over various similar ordinary entries he swears darkly. “How the hell is reading about some lame Monk’s life supposed to help us get Sam back? How’s it supposed to help us kill Jess? Rowena was blowing smoke up our asses. There’s nothing here.”

*He can’t do this.* How is he supposed to just sit around reading some damned book while Sam’s god knows where most likely being tortured? Every second that ticks by is a second too long. They don’t have time to read through every single page hoping it’ll have the answers they need. If something happens to Sam…

He’s not aware of how close Cas has drawn until there’s a hand settling firmly on his shoulder, and he looks up at Cas with wide eyes. Cas’ gaze washes over him and somehow succeeds in dragging him back from the brink. It’s almost unreal – the effect that the angel has on him.

“What have you read so far?” Cas asks softly.

Dean turns away with a sigh, shrugging helplessly. “He mentioned the Spanish landing on some island in the first entry, but everything after that is just normal, mundane shit.”

Cas’ brow furrow as he leans over Dean’s shoulder. He scowls down at the journal and reaches over Dean to shuffle through the pages. Dean feels the heat of his body against his back and isn’t sure if he wants to lean forward to escape it, or push backwards and soak it all in.

“As interesting as the life of a monk no doubt is … “ Cas doesn’t even flinch when Dean snorts. “I’m sure we can skip ahead until we find…. Ah, yes. Here.” He taps two fingertips on the page he’s stopped at and slides the journal closer to Dean again, stepping away.

Dean feels his absence immediately. He swallows thickly and leans forward and squints at the paper.

*March 27th, 1565*
The Spanish have come. I saw them walking along the path in the jungle towards the village. There were only a few, too small for a full voyage, which leads me to believe the others at Cebu still. The villagers are weary of their appearance.

I noticed one more than the others. He stood taller than the rest, and seemed authoritative in nature. Just as I went to look away he turned to me. His eyes were dark, and his gaze was heavy.

April 7th, 1565

The Spaniard came to the Monastery today. He had stood outside in the rain for a long while, staring blankly at nothing. The others walked silently around him and he did not move. When I left the temple he still remained. When I moved to approach him he turned and left. He did not speak.

Dean carefully pulls at the edge of the page, turning it to the next entry.

April 9th, 1565

I spoke to the Spaniard today. He approached me during my search for enlightenment, asking why I do so. I explained to him the path to becoming Bodhisatta. He told me about his Queen, Isabella, and how she is a holy woman, evangelic. I asked the Spaniard if he is a spiritual man. He looked at me and did not answer.

Dean reads over the last few sentences. There’s certain familiarity about the last entry that he can’t help but associate with. He’s struggled with tremulous doubts concerning faith a long time. Even now, when proof of its existence standing not five feet away. He doesn’t know much about the Spanish Inquisition and almost nothing about the Spain in the sixteenth century, but if there’s one thing he seems to remember is that religion was a big deal to them.
He turns the page, his eyes skimming over its entry before turning again. He’s flipped at least five pages before finally spotting something that stands out. Francisco. He reads the entry.

April 15th, 1565

I blessed the villagers today. Francisco stood nearby and watched. After they had left he’d asked why they bow to myself and the others. He’s confused when I tell him the villagers hold us in sacred ideal because our closeness to enlightenment. The Spaniard tells me that he is a devout Catholic. He tells me about the Sacrament of Penance, and asks if my religion has something similar. I tell him that the path to Enlightenment is a way of life, and that sometimes villagers ask for our blessings; but never our forgiveness. Francisco is quiet. I tell him that I cannot take away his sins, but I can offer solace.

Dean isn’t away that he’s been staring silently at nothing until Cas calls his name. He looks up at him and shakes his head, rubbing at the back of his neck. “It’s just… it’s not what I was expecting.” Dropping his hand back to the table Dean sighs. “So this Monk and Spaniard, they’ve got this thing going, you know?” It’s clear that Cas doesn’t, in fact, know. Dean rolls his eyes. “All I mean is that there’s some connection there from the beginning. It’s a friendship. Or at least it’s turning into one.” He looks back down at the parchment pages. “You can’t help but at what point that turns. It’s like I’m waiting for it happen in every sentence. For something to suddenly change; the Monk to realize that this guy is …”

“Jesse?” Cas asks when Dean doesn’t finish.

“Yeah.” Not in the terms of him actually being Jesse, but more so in thought of everything that Jesse embodies; pure evil and without conscious or guilt.

“Perhaps he’s fooled the Monk?” Cas moves close to Dean’s side, looking down at the journal.

“Maybe.” Then again, even Jesse hadn’t seemed evil in the beginning. When Dean and Sam had first met him, he’d been nothing but a scared kid with a power that he couldn’t control. Jesus, it was
crazy how much people could change. Suddenly feeling sick to his stomach Dean pushes up from the chair. “I gotta … I’m just –” Shit. He’s so screwed up right now.

“All right?”

Cas makes a move towards him and Dean takes a quick step back. “Yeah. I’m just beat, man. I feel like I haven’t slept in years.” He scrubs a hand over his eyes. “I’m going to grab a shower. Try to wake myself up a little. You wanna take a go at that?” He makes a vague gesture towards the journal, and doesn’t even wait for some type of acknowledgement before twisting on his feet and escaping.

The walls of the hallway seem to narrow as he walks, and suddenly he’s having trouble breathing, jerking at the neck of his shirt and trying to remember to put one foot in front of the other. He shoulders open the door of the shower room, and stumbles in past the row of stalls towards the one at the very end. He rips his over shirt and tee off before kicking out of his shoes and pants, grabbing at the wall when he starts to fall sideways when a boot catches on his jeans. When he’s finally free of every stitch he twist’s the knob on the shower and freezing water hits him.

Dean sucks in a sharp gasp, iciness slapping against the back of his neck and shoulders. It’s as cold as Siberia but it helps his chest unclench. Swallowing past the lump in his throat Dean leans forward and lays his forehead against the damp ceramic of the wall, the water rushing down his back and making his teeth start to chatter.

He’s got to pull himself together.

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They trade off, in the end.

When Dean’s vision blurs from reading Cas takes over. He walks when he reads, Dean’s notices. Shoulders slightly slumped forward and head bent low, his eyes flitting left and right at an alarming speed. Dean has a feeling that Cas could read through the book in one sitting, and for some reason that settles uncomfortably in his belly. Sam is his brother. He should be the one that finds the answer to saving him. It’s his responsibility. So he takes the book from Cas, pulling it away from his hands
with a jerky sense of urgency. Cas says nothing, just easily hands it over and drifts away as Dean becomes consumed in its pages again.

He gets frustrated a lot. The click of the pendulum in the grandfather clock of the library is like thunder to his ears, and the silence of the kitchen consumes. They’ve gone through almost half of the journal and while almost every entry has something to do about the Spaniard, Dean still hasn’t read anything that would really help them.

The Monk goes on to describe a friendship that blooms between he and Francisco. Despite the difference in their religion, the Spaniard reveals his sins and thoughts to the Monk, and while the Monk is never able to give him absolution, the Spaniard doesn’t seem to mind.

Through the words of the Monk, Dean becomes familiar with Francisco’s sins. He discovers the blinding guilt of the Spaniard, the blood spilled while in service to first King Ferdinand, and upon his death, the Queen Elizabeth. Dean feels a sort of painful clench in his belly when he reads over the Spaniards desperate urge to drown out his own guilt with alcohol and carnal pleasures.

When he gets to the part about the Spaniards foolhardy desire to gain the acceptance of his father, Dean shoves the book off on Cas again.

He walks so quickly from the room he might as well have been running.

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The first thing Sam is aware of is the smell.

It’s a deep, bitter rank, one tinged with sick and foul things and it sparks something at the back of his mind, a distant memory always lingering. His heart does a quick, frantic staccato and Sam closes his throat against the sourness threatening to rise. Despite not wanting to he forces his eyes open. Beneath him is grime covered cement. He shifts, feeling it’s stickiness below his hands and where wet his cheek. Its smell clings to him, and with a shaky breath he scrubs the back of his hand against his skin, trying to rid himself of the worst of it.
“Look who’s finally up. I hope you enjoyed your nap.”

Swinging around Sam makes to stand but a boot slams hard into his nose, resulting in a telltale loud snap that flares pain. He lands hard on his right shoulder, the increase to his pain jarring enough that he stays on the ground, teeth clenched so tightly they ache.

“I’ve got to admit,” The sound of Jesse’s footsteps begin to circle. “I didn’t think you would be stupid enough to go back to that shit hole you call a home, let alone split up.”

The footsteps stop directly in front of Sam’s head and he braces himself for impact. It never comes, though. Instead Jesse is suddenly squatting in front of him; back hunched and head lowered as he gazes almost curiously down at Sam. Despite his defiant glare, Sam scuffles away instinctively, some part of him realizing that the person in front of him is maybe the most powerful being in the world.

“You know, no matter where I went there was just something about the Winchesters that I couldn’t get out of my head.” Jesse’s eyes narrow, his brows drawing deep in contemplation. “What is it that’s so special about you? How is it that you two somehow worm your way into our brains?” Jesse’s face twist’s as he speaks, and he taps his middle and index finger against his right temple so hard that Sam hears a deep thud, thud.

Sucking air short and sharply through his nose leaves a stinging pain at the back of each inhale. He tries to keep his gaze on Jesse while testing his peripherals for either a way out, or a weapon. There are bars just beyond Jesse. Just to the right the door to the cell is open. If he can distract Jesse for only a moment he may have a chance at getting out. He doesn’t know what the hell he’ll do next, but he figures he’ll come to that when the moment hits

“And don’t even get me started on Castiel.” Jesse scoffs and rolls his eyes. “All angels, for that matter.”

Feeling at the ground below him his fingers curl around a large piece of stone. He grips and without a moments hesitation hits it upside Jesse’s head. The Cambion makes a cut off sound of surprise and sways. Sam leaps to his feet, nearly falling over himself in his rush. His hand closes around the steel of a bar before his feet leaving the ground and then he’s flying backwards, a rush of air pressing against his back before he slams into a wall. He can’t breathe for a moment, his vision black and a jarring sense of vertigo swarming him. His feet still dangle in the air, and Sam stretches them out towards the floor, as if being grounded will give him more of an advantage somehow.

Jesse draws fully to his feet again, his face a tight mask of fury. He holds one of his hands up, his fingers curling towards his palm.
Sam’s eyes shoot wide when a squeezing sensation grips his neck. His hands come up, fingernails clawing at nothing but his own skin in a feeble attempt to release the invisible choke hold.

“I should kill you.” Jesse seethes, standing just below Sam now. His grip closes tighter and Sam’s eyes bulge as his windpipe sort of pops and pushes in on itself, a feeling that is almost more uncomfortable than it is painful.

For a moment he’s sure that Jesse’s going to kill him. That he’s going to crush his tracheal. Terror shocks his system so quickly that Sam feels like his heart will give out before Jesse can finish him off.

And then, suddenly, he’s free.

Air surges into his lungs and brain so quickly that his head hurts. He coughs, and curls a little in on himself when it makes his throat scream in protest. Even if Jesse hadn’t killed him, he’s no doubt left some lasting effects.

“But where would be the fun in that?”

Sam eyes dart to the cell entrance, where two demons enter. They’re both men, one nearly as tall as Sam and almost painfully thin, and the other about three inches shorter but large in size. He’s wearing a filthy blue button down uniform tee, and an old greasy trucker hat that has the silhouette of a naked woman with abnormally large breast. When they draw closer the overwhelming smell of grease and bad B.O. wafts from the larger man and Sam imagines that the demon’s nabbed some poor trucker.

“Well, lookie who we have here.” The large one, Dale – by the name tag on his uniform, says. The thin one grins. His teeth are crooked, yellowed, and his gums receding.

Sam doesn’t have a chance to prepare himself before Dale slams a thick, meaty fist into his face, and he’s flung backwards against the cement wall again, this time his skull slamming painfully against it. His vision swims. Arms surround him, jerking him forcefully to his feet and holding him in place. He feels queasy, disoriented, and can do nothing but hang in Dale’s arms as the other demon grabs his hands and lift them upwards. Seconds later he feels shackles close around first one wrist, and then the other. When Dale releases him Sam slumps downwards, the chains hanging from the ceiling the only thing keeping his knees from hitting the floor. His arms protest at the sharp jerk.
There’s blood dribbling over one of his eyes, and he squints against it, his vision going momentarily red. He jerks feebly at the shackles, his breathing beginning to speed up again in both fear and anger. The two demons are standing just in front of him, gloating, laughing at his helplessness.

Sam grinds his teeth and glares up at them. “Is that the best you can do?” He knows it’s stupid; that in order for him to come out of this unscarred the safest thing to do is hold his tongue. But the sight of them finding pleasure in his own weakness is something that makes him bitter with self-hatred and he needs to lash out.

They stop laughing instantly, the tall thin one throwing a disbelieving smirk to Dale before he moves forward and then Sam can’t think anymore, can barely breathe as blow after blow lands against his stomach and ribs. They aren’t as hard as Dales, but they hurt like a bitch regardless. It goes on for what seems forever, before, surprisingly, Jesse calls the demon off.

“Enough. We don’t want to break him immediately.” Jesse’s eyes rake over Sam with a mad sort of glee. “Not yet, at least.”

Sam tries to hold onto conscious, and he might have had a chance if it weren’t for the final blow across his skull.

The world goes dark.

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Dean’s standing in the kitchen making yet another pot of coffee when Cas walks in. He glances up from his task and finds the angel scowling down at the journal in his hands. He’s not paying attention to where he’s walks, and if not for Dean grunting out his name he’d have probably collided with the kitchen chair.

Cas looks up with wide eyes, as if he’s momentarily stunned and confused about where he even is.
He recovers quickly, though, rushing around the table and stopping so close in front of Dean that Dean feels his electric heat press against his own body. He swallows and tries his best to not react.

“He recovers quickly, though, rushing around the table and stopping so close in front of Dean that Dean feels his electric heat press against his own body. He swallows and tries his best to not react.”

“Dean, here, look at this.” Cas sidles sideways, their shoulders nearly touching. He moves the journal so Dean can see, his long fingers skimming over the page before settling at the beginning of the entry.

Dean’s distracted by his hands a moment before kicking into gear and taking a look at what Cas is trying to show him. It’s an entry dated about two weeks after the last Dean had read, and it’s short; barely an entry at all. He frowns. “What the hell does that mean?”

“I have walked the road to Enlightenment.” Cas stares down at the single passage a moment longer before shaking his head. “It has to be significant.”

“Yeah? Well good luck with that.”

Dean turns around and finishes pouring the coffee grinds into the machines back. After a moment he feels Cas move away, the loss of his heat significantly different than seemingly biting cold air of the bunker.

Whatever this thing he feels around the angel is, he can’t help but be overwhelmed by it. He’d be a fool not to recognize the obvious attraction he has for Cas, but there’s more to it somehow, something that feels significant and almost familiar.

To be honest he’s surprised that he’s not more of a mess. Dean’s always been aware that he falls a little more center wards on the Kinsey Scale, but it’s something that he’s mostly kept to himself. Surrounding himself in the opposite sex and displaying an over exaggerated hetero macho act has become second nature. Sure, he’s had a few slip ups, but never anything big enough to cause a serious melt down or threaten his masculinity. Because some terrified part of his own psyche is afraid that indulging in that side of him will mean losing what it means to be a man.

Shit. Honest to god he could probably use a therapist or two.

The coffee pot finishes brewing and Dean grabs a mug, filling it to the brim before sitting it in front of Cas at the table. Cas glances up from the pages and stares at the mug a moment before looking up at Dean, and Dean freezes when he realizes what he’s just done.
He coughs awkwardly and shuffles back around to fix another cup for himself. “Sorry, I’m just used to Sam being here and I …” He doesn’t finish. The lump in his throat is too large to speak around. Dean hears the scrape of the mug sliding against the table before Cas speaks.

“No, it’s okay. I don’t exactly require substance, but I’ve always enjoyed the taste of coffee.” A beat of silence passes, and when Cas speaks again his voice is so low that Dean barely hears it. “Thank you.”

Dean swallows dryly and bobs his head, taking a burning gulp of his coffee. “So, have you found anything in that –” The swift flutter of wings cut off his words. A sudden burst of air against his back makes him twist around, and he finds that the chair where Cas had been empty, the journal laid open on the table.

After a moments pause he shuffles over and takes the seat where Cas had been. It’s still warm.

The first floor of the Library is nearly empty when Cas flashes in. A few pieces of paper flutter from the top of a desk near him as his wings settle, and the angel that sits there scowls at him as she gathers them together again.

The lighting is dim here, soft and warm and flickering from oil lamps attached to the walls. Cas has always found them odd, considering that the Library holds artifacts and writings as old as the world itself. But the Keeper has always been known for his oddities, and Cas isn’t going to be the first to question his ways.

He glances around, looking for him now, and turns to head up the wide carpeted staircase leading to the next level when not spotting him. No one quite knows how large the Library really is. Some say that it goes on forever, and the last thing Cas wants is to search for an eternity. For not the first time he wishes that he’d made more of an effort to learn about the Keeper. Though in the past he’d cared about nothing more than being a good soldier, and the urge to indulge in something other than his chosen path had never crossed his mind.
Dean Winchester had changed all that.

He clutches the folded paper in his pocket, thinking about Dean now, guilt weighing heavy on his shoulders. He’d ripped the paper swiftly from the journal before vanishing from the bunkers kitchen. Cas has a feeling that this is something he needs to verify on his own, though. Not that he won’t tell Dean, it’s just that the hunter has a habit of jumping the gun and Cas has a feeling that he needs to go about this carefully; with *finesse*.

He won’t risk Dean’s safety.

He’d searched at least six levels before his fingers start to twitch in his pocket. Angels look up and watch as he passes, and some even try to approach but he narrows his eyes at them and moves away before they have a chance. The way they look up to him is tiring. He doesn’t like it. He doesn’t think he’s every liked it, and he’s certainly not deserving of it. Though he may be an Archangel now, he still feels lowlier than the grime at the bottom of his shoes. Once upon a time he would have given everything to prove his worth; to please both is Father and his brothers and sisters. But now all he feels is a distant sort of bitterness towards it all. The blatant fact that Heaven doesn’t feel like home weighs heavy on him. But then again neither does Earth.

He’s lost.

Movement to his right draws Cas from his thoughts, and he glances up to see Pravuil staring unblinkingly at him from his spot against a bookshelf. The lamp light flickers over his face, and Cas gazes over his features, from his closely shaven head, to his broad bone structure. There’s so much depth in his gaze, a dark sort of secretive *mystique*.

Pravuil finally looks away, glancing across the rest of the room before pushing off of the shelf. He lifts his hand, beckoning Cas with a flick of his finger towards a door that appears out of nowhere. It’s placed between a gap in the book shelf, and Cas frowns at its impossible existence because he knows it hadn’t been there before.

Pravuil glances back at him before opening the door and walking into darkness. Cas hesitates. He takes one more look around him, and then follows. The door shuts behind him, and everything goes black.

Instinct takes over his hand curls towards the sleeve of his jacket, where his angel blade is hidden. Light flashes to life and Cas blinks against it until the glare isn’t blinding. They’re in a room. It’s not very large. Books line every wall and there’s a thick, deeply rich crimson rug in the center of the floor. A dark mahogany desk takes up a large part of the room. It’s piled high with papers and leather
bound books, no doubt priceless manuscripts kept hidden from the world. The only other piece of furniture is a chair just in front of Cas, large and white with slightly sunken in cushions. It’s got a furred black throw tossed carelessly over its back and for some reason Cas is caught off guard by it. It’s not like angels are privy to comfort, after all.

“I knew you would find out sooner or later.”

Cas draws straight and clenches his jaw. He pulls out the folded paper from his pocket. “You knew, all this time, and you didn’t come forward.”

Pravuil turns to him; his eyes linger first on Cas’ face and then drift down to the page. His gaze holds. “Is that…”

Cas unfolds it and begins to read. “‘The asuras came to me again. It shared with me the brilliance of creation, and through its eyes I am closer to becoming Bodhisattva than ever. I will soon be as Vretil.’”

The corners of Pravuil mouth turns down. “I never did like that name. But we have so many, brother, don’t we?”

“Did you make yourself known to the Monk?”

“Yes. But I think the question you want to ask is ‘did I use him as a vessel?’” Prevuil does not blink. “I did.”

“How did you kill the Cambion?” The question rushes out. “Jesse has Sam Winchester even now, if we don’t…” He chokes. He can’t even finish.

Pravuil’s face darkens and he pushes off of the desk, moving to stand just in front of a book shelf. He lifts a hand to graze his fingertips over their spines. “Humans are so strange. It was almost jarring; being inside of his skin. It was my first time. I’d never had the need before.” He sighs softly, shaking his head. “There was a time, not too long ago, when we filled heaven with our own empyreal brilliance. Now look at us.” He pulls a book from its place, studies its leather bound surface. “I wonder if he had meant this for us. To envy them, as we do. It does make you wonder, doesn’t it?”
Cas moves forward, his eyes pleading. “Please, brother. I have to help them.”

“I know you do.” Pravuil returns the book to its shelf and turns to study Cas. “I’ve watched you, you know. Since the very beginning when Father showed an interest in you.”

Cas flinches at that, drawing back as if he’s been physically hit. “What do you mean?”

“There’s so much you don’t know. That you don’t remember because of Naomi’s desire to quiet you.”

“How do we defeat Jesse?” Cas all but croaks. What Naomi had done to him still cuts deep. He feels used and broken, cut to shreds and then patched back unevenly. So many of his memories feel missing and he doesn’t even know how to begin retrieving them again.

He’s honestly not sure if he wants to.

“I don’t know.”

It’s the last thing that he’d expected to hear, and rage fills him so suddenly that he finds himself shoving Pravuil against the book shelf with enough force that a few fall from their place. “You’re lying.”

Pravuil holds Cas’ gaze and lifts his hands to curl them around the sleeve of Cas’ trench. “I’m not, brother.”

“You have to be!” It makes no sense! How else could the Cambion have been defeated? “You had to have found a way. What is it? How did you do it?”

“I learned nothing, other than the fact that I am weaker than I even imagined.”

A faltering noise of disbelief bubbles up from Cas’ throat and his grip falls loose on Pravuil’s collar.

“I knew. The entire time, I knew. And yet I could do nothing.”
Cas finally releases him, stumbling backwards. “I don’t understand.”

The look Pravuil fixes him with is loaded with such familiar emotion that Cas crumbles under its weight. “No, brother, you may be the only one that does.”

He tries to keep his hopes up. Tells himself just one more page, the answers will be sitting there in bold writing with the flip of his wrist. He’s walked all the floors of the bunkers twice now. Has gone through yet another pot of coffee and feels so high strung from caffeine that he’s actually afraid for his own wellbeing.

The Spaniard reveals his secret to the Monk. He tells him that he has powers that he cannot control; powers that drive him to commit unspeakable horrors and which ultimately smoother him in depression and self-deprecation. Dean knows everything there is to know about the Spaniard, has read over his entire life through the Monks words, but the one thing he has yet to come across is a way to kill Jesse.

Now he’s on the last page - a page that he can’t read.

For a minute he thinks that whatever spell Cas had cast has worn off, but when he back tracks he’s able to read the other pages like normal. His grip on the journal tightens so much that paper rips between his fingertips. He swears and opens his hand to let it flutter down to the floor, breathing a sigh of relief when he sees that it’s a page he’s already read.

Cas has been gone for what seems like an entire day, but what Dean knows is really only two hours or so. He’s a whole different version of pissed off over that, though. It’s not like the angel’s obligated to stick with him, but Dean sure as hell feels a little too irritated about his leaving to think otherwise. He knows it’s not logical, so he forces himself to not think about the angel. To not feel betrayed by his absence; or admit how screwed up his own head is at the moment.

He’s stomping his way to the library when he hears the tale-tell sound of wings fluttering. Cas
appears outside the doorway of the War room. Someone is with him, someone unfamiliar, and Dean draws tense *instantly*. Everything about this guy looks threatening, from his hard cut eyes to his overpowering presence.

“T’ve brought someone who can help.”

Dean very slowly drags his eyes off of the stranger and looks at Cas. “Let me guess, another angel?”

“Dean, this is Pravuil. He is the Keeper of Heaven’s Library.”

The man, Pravuil – Jesus what’s with angels and their names – lifts his chin slightly and looks Dean over, his eyes losing none of their harshness. “Dean Winchester. I had hoped I would meet you one day.”

Dean bristles. “What is that supposed to mean?”

“Pravuil has insight about the journal.” Cas cuts in.

“You don’t say?” He locks his jaw and turns the journal to hold it open in front of Cas. The bitterness that swirls in Dean’s belly is like poison. “How ironic, considering I’m pretty sure that this page is written in angel-speak.” He’d finally recognized the fine scrawling from the ruins in the Philippians.

Cas doesn’t say anything, just reaches out and takes the journal. He stares down at it in silence, his eyes quickly darting left and right as he reads.

“I thought you said angels weren’t involved in this thing?” He knows he sounds confrontational, but hell, the evidence is *right there*.

Cas looks up at him instantly, his eyes wide and a bit weary. “I – it’s not what you –”

“He didn’t lie to you.”
The newcomer speaks, moves from behind Cas and comes to stand directly in front of Dean. Dean straightens his back and narrows his eyes. “Why do I get the feeling there’s a ‘but’ at the end of that sentence.”

“He didn’t lie to you because he had no idea. No one did.”

“No one but you?” Because it’s so blatantly obvious by now, and goddammit Dean’s just tired. He’s tired of not knowing and tired of reaching. He feels burnt out and desperate, teetering over the edge of losing it completely. And Jesus, he feels helpless.

Cas’ eyes soften as he watches Dean. “We should sit.”

Dean’s too exhausted to do anything but sigh and turn, trudging heavy footed past Cas and the other angel to the War Room. He takes a seat at the large map table, watching as the angels enter.

Cas moves to stand slightly to his left, his arms hanging loosely at his sides. Pravuil pushes past him and around the table, his fingertips trailing on its surface and his eyes scanning its intricate display. “This would be a lovely addition…” He says softly, almost to himself.

Dean scrunches his brow and looks at Cas, who clears his throat almost sheepishly as if the other angel’s behavior is almost embarrassing to him. Like his expression says ‘this isn’t normally how we are’.

“You come across many great works of art in the Library,” Pravuil says, still looking down at the map. “And I have read sacred text’s that would destroy entire worlds if left in the wrong hands.” Pravuil glances up and stares pointedly at the journal sitting on the table in front of Dean. “That journal is one such text.”

Dean rolls his eyes. “Well not according to anything I’ve read.”

“You’ve discovered the existence of a Cambion.” Pravuil points out.

“Yeah, and he’s been dead for centuries! I don’t see how that matters.”
“That’s because you do not understand what you read.” Pravuil looks down at the journal again, at
the last page written in his own language. “But others would.”

“So what is it, and how come this Monk knew the ‘sacred language of the angels’?”

“He didn’t. I wrote it. And it is a spell.”

About a dozen questions slam into Dean, and he struggles to speak a moment, picking through each
one as if to test its importance. “What the hell do you mean you wrote it?”

Cas clears his throat. “Pravuil… he shared form with the Monk.”

It’s obvious the angel’s stumbling over words, trying to find ones that sound not as major as Dean
knows them to really be. He blinks at Cas a moment with a sort of deadpan expression. “Shared form
with. As in possessed?”

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Dean’s question echo’s in the silence that follows, and Cas very carefully nods his head. “Yes.”

Dean purses his lips and nods, muttering undert his breathe. “So, are you gonna tell me that the
Monk asked for it, too?”

The last thing Cas wants is for Dean distrusting him anymore than he already does, and he struggles
to come up with something that will put him at ease without outright lying. Pravuil beats him to it.

“No, he did not ask for it. In fact, he was quite alarmed when I first made myself known to him.”
Dean twitches visibly in the chair and Cas tenses, trying to quickly decide if it would be more beneficial to hold Dean back should he attack. He imagines doing so would make it look like he’s siding with the other angel, but Cas doesn’t want to risk Dean’s safety. Luckily it’s a choice that he’ll not need to make, because Pravuil starts speaking again before the hunter can make a move.

“Just as the Monk, I had discovered the Spaniards secret. And while he still had not fully grasped what that meant, I knew of the danger. When I told him of the threat he was quite accepting of my offer of help.”

“Help.” Dean spits out bitterly. “Since when is turning some poor schmuck into a vegetable helping?”

“I do not understand how what I am doing could be considered such.”

Dean finally does shove away from the table, and Cas shifts forward with an anxious speed, his eyes darting back and forth between Dean and Pravuil, who continues to stand impassively.

“The fact that you don’t even know says everything.” Dean bites out, turning his angry gaze then to Cas. “Tell me again why the hell we need this guy, Cas?”

Something swells in Cas’ chest at the knowledge that Dean is looking to him for advisement. That he trusts him enough.

“Forgive me,” Pravuil continues, drawing both Cas’ and Dean’s eyes again. “You seem to be under the impression that what I share with the Monk is plenary in nature, when in fact it is more of a coexistence.”

“What the hell does that mean?”

Realization strikes Cas, and he feels a bit sheepish, because it’s so obvious. His eyes look over Pravuil as he answers Dean. “He possesses the Monk, but the Monk is sentient.”

“Wait. Hold on. Are you saying that …” Dean cringes. “Dude… are you still in him?”
Prauil nods easily, the intense cut of his eyes flitting from Dean to Cas and back again.

Now that Cas knows, the signs are obvious. Even the way Pravuil carries himself, his silent nature and controlled countenance, reminds Cas of the times he’d walked the many long, stone hallways of the Ki Monastery. He’d looked in on the Tibetan Monks awash in their dark gray robes, the sounds of their combined chanting like the chorus of Heaven itself, and the smell of their burning incense seeping into his skin until he’d smell like them for days.

“We have an agreement. Though my extended longevity he’s able to gain infinite knowledge and I have a suitable body to sustain.”

“And he’s just, what? In there watching everything?”

“He is quite happy, I assure you.”

“And how do you know that?”

“He tells me so.” Pravuil shoots back instantly, gaze unblinking.

Cas watches as Dean tries to process that, a spider web of questions no doubt growing by the second.

“The two of you… talk?”

“We converse often. I find among the masses of my own kind, he is a much welcomed companion.”

Cas lingers on that a moment. Has there ever been bad blood between the Keeper and the heavenly host? Nothing sticks out in his memory, but then again he has very limited knowledge about Pravuil as it is. Surely if anything defining had ever happened he would have heard about it? Unless…

The thought of Naomi causes something sour to swell low in his belly, and Cas pushes the memories aside for a later time in which he can better drown in his own lack of self-worth.
“Is this what happens every time an angel possesses someone?” Dean’s asks. “Because I recently spoke with someone possessed by an angel and according to him, it was all just blacked out.”

“It’s not the normal procedure, no.” Cas feels himself visibly flinch when Dean casts a look his way, his eyes questioning. Of course Dean would be curious, would want to know how Jimmy Novack was faring. Cas has so far very delicately tiptoed his way around that inevitable question, and he struggles to think of a way to do so again should Dean ask aloud. “We’re getting off course.” He’s changes the subject, moving forward to look down at the journal. “We need to go over the spell. I’ve never seen anything like it.”

“The Monk and I spent time sharing this body. I would listen in on his conversations with the Spaniard, sometimes joining, and in turn gathering as much information on the Cambion as possible. While I was away from the Monk I sought out as many ancient texts and manuscript I could find. And then, I discovered this.” He moves his hand forward, his fingertips slightly grazing over the faded ink of the spell. “It was one of the oldest spells I had ever come upon, written in Elamite and carved into a stone slab buried deep within the ruins of Persepolis. The spell describes a ritual, dark in nature and only to be used in the most dire of situations. It was a means to open a gateway that should never be opened; a doorway leading straight to the Void.”

Cas’ eyes shoot wide and his head jerks up. The Void. He’d only ever heard the word spoken a hand full of times in his existence, and always in whisper. The possible existence of the Void has never been anything more than a ghost story, but if Pravuil has proof of its existence… well, that changes everything.

“I’m sorry, the what?”

“Does anyone else know of the spells existence?” He chokes out, his throat bone dry.

Prevaueil shakes his head. “No. After I memorized the spell, I destroyed the tablet, only ever copying its words once.” He looks down at the journal again. “Here.”

“That’s why you hid the journal.”

“Yes, and no. I needed to be sure that if Naomi were to ever get to me, I’d have some way to unearth it again.”
“Hey!” Dean barks out suddenly, his face scrunched in annoyed frustration. “Can someone explain what the hell is going on?”

It strikes Cas that Dean knows nothing about the Void, that even before his memories were erased he had known nothing. The idea of speaking clearly to him for the first time without lying or holding back feels like his own personal Heaven. “The Void is a myth among angels. Not a good one. It’s a place that is said to exist.”

“Place?”

“Not a location, no. I am sure you’ve heard the saying ‘In the beginning, there was darkness…” At Dean’s nodding shrug Cas continues. “Well, from how the stories go that darkness was less… figurative in nature. Some say that before creation, dark, malicious beings existed. And then God sealed them away.” The theory had never had any real evidence behind it, and some angels were so abhor to the idea that they thought of it as heresy.

“And this,” Dean jabs his fingertips against the journals page. “Opens up a door to… these things?” Dean’s eyes narrow on Pravuil. “Why the hell would you be interested in a spell like that?”

“You mistake my intentions. They were not towards whatever beings may exist within the Void, but the Void itself.”

“The spell was to trap the Cambion.” Cas muses aloud.

Dean shoves away from the table, shaking his head angrily. “I still don’t see how the hell this is supposed to help us free Sam and destroy Jesse.”

“It’s simple. The best way to destroy your enemy would be what I believe you humans call, ‘Fighting fire with fire’. What better way to fight a Cambion than with another Cambion? The spell worked in sealing the Spaniard away, but I believe I can also use it to retrieve him.”
Sorry.

This image is currently unavailable.
Hair of the Dog

Chapter Summary

Dean goes to the aid of a friend while Sam struggles against Jesse.

In true Supernatural form, enjoy this sweet, sweet filler.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

*He’s insane.* Dean stares from Pravuil to Cas, and back again. He’s waiting for something to happen, for one of them to laugh and shout ‘surprise!’ because clearly this is a joke. It doesn’t happen. Dean balks. “You’re joking, right?”

“I know that it seems crazy,” Cas moves forward. “But he’s right. It’s the only thing we have.”

“The hell it is!” Dean grabs the journal, slamming it shut like that will keep Pravuil from doing anything stupid. “We’re already at the mercy of one Cambion, and you want to free another? So what, they can team up together and destroy the entire world?”

“I don’t believe it will be so.” Pravuil answers. “The Cambion has a connection to the Monk. If we could only explain what’s –“

*Screw that.* Dean spits out angrily. “I’m not risking it. Anyone with half a mind would know what a bad idea this is. I don’t know how the hell *you,*” he jabs a finger at Cas. “Don’t understand that.”

“Sometimes you have to take chances, Dean.” Cas says earnestly. “And we have no other options.”

“But why bring another *out? Why* can’t we just seal Jesse away like you did with the first Cambion?”

“Because if not for Francisco I wouldn’t have been able to do the spell in the first place.” Pravuil sighs. “You don’t understand. This spell – what it does, where it *leads…* We would be opening a gateway to a dimension filled with nothing but chaos, which means that anything within that dimension can make its way to our world as well. Francisco knew this. He was the only barrier between this world and that. If not for his strength *anything* could have come out; and it almost


“Overtook him.”

“So how the hell are we supposed to open the gateway without something coming out now? It’s not like Jesse’s going to show up to help.”

“Things are different now. We have the journal.”

Dean swears sharply, pushing the journal away from him in disgust. “Again, I don’t see how this thing is supposed to help.”

“The journal acts as a tether.” Cas explains, carefully reaching out to pull it towards him, his hand hovering over its cover. “It has a direct connection to both the Monk and Francisco. I believe that it will act as a link to the Spaniard. Instead of a doorway, it will be like a small pinprick in the fabric of the Void, one shining directly on the Cambion.”

“Yeah, well this all sounds a bit too easy, not to mention there’s something that doesn’t add up.” Dean turns narrowed eyes from Cas to Pravuil. “You said Francisco helped ward off whatever the hell’s in the Void, which means he knew what you were doing.” He gives a bitter laugh, shaking his head. “That don’t sound like any monster I know.”

Pravuil’s jaw clenches slightly. “One cannot help their own nature, but they can resist it.”

“Oh, come on,” Dean snorts condescendingly, “You really expect me to believe that crap? Bottom line, this guy was evil. Say we do the spell, what’s to stop him from taking us all out?” He sneers, his chin lifting. “For all we know you’re working with Jesse.”

Pravuil suddenly slams a hand against the top of the table with a growl of anger. The lights above them flash and Dean stands stiffly, his hand already hovering over the knife at his belt while Cas is in a sort of frozen half step, wide eyes shifting from Dean and the other angel.

“You know nothing.” Pravuil glares at Dean, the flickering lights overhead casting shadows over his face. “He was plagued with the truth of his own existence. He was a slave to his own nature and prayed for death; anything that would end the pain caused at his hands. He begged to be locked away.”

Dean doesn’t flinch. He loves Sam, goddammit more than words can even express, but he won’t be
the trigger that sets into motion what he knows will be disastrous. He’s been down that road before and he can’t do it. Not again. Without a word he surges forward and grabs the journal. “I dare anyone to follow me.” He bites out darkly, his gaze even falling on Cas, who takes a step back with an expression on his face that somehow resembles hurt.

“Dean, you can’t destroy it.” Cas says slowly, softly, as if he’s afraid to tip Dean over the edge.

“I’m not!” Dean barks over his shoulder as he stomps from the room. “I’m just keeping it away from you two idiots.” Without another word he leaves the War Room and head’s down to the garage. He’s got to get the hell away.

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“He does not understand.”

Cas sighs inwardly. Pravuil is still staring at the spot where Dean had left, his hands curling into fists against the glass of the table. Cas thinks about the way he had caressed the journal, the way his expression had changed – just barely– when talking about the Cambion.

“You’re right, he doesn’t.” But Cas does, because Cas is Pravuil. He sees so much of himself in the Keeper that it’s like looking at a mirror imagine; and Pravuil’s reflection is just as shattered.

“He doesn’t have time.” Pravuil says softly, drawing straight again as his arms fall at his side. “The longer we wait, the more at danger his brother is.”

“He’ll come around. He always does.”

Pravuil looks at Cas, his sharp eyes penetrating past skin and bone to the very core of him, where he burns bright. “I thought you’d have told him by now.”
Cas lowers his eyes. “I don’t think he’ll forgive me.”

“Castiel, we closed the gates of heaven and hell hoping that it would keep this world safe. And it did, for a time. Surely he’ll understand that.”

Cas stares down at the floor, his chest aching. “Too much time has passed. It’s selfish, I know, but I don’t want him to hate me.”

Silence falls for a while before Pravuil speaks again. “The journal…”

“He won’t destroy it. He knows it’s the only way.”

Pravuil nods, tilting his head a bit in contemplation. “He is… not what I had expected.”

Cas smiles gently, because he knows exactly what Pravuil means. From the very beginning Dean has done nothing but surprise him. “He’s been through a lot.”

“So I’ve heard. The fact that he once surrendered to the Mark, only to find his way again proves the strength of his soul. I’ve never really seen the like in another human.”

Cas’ thoughts darken at the mention of the time Dean had fallen victim to the darkness of the Mark. He remembers endless nights searching for answers with Sam and Charlie, only to come up empty time and time again. He’d never felt so helpless, not even when he had been human. For a while there Cas had been sure that they would fail Dean; that he would become just like the monsters he’d hunted.

Eventually freeing Dean of the Mark did not end their fight, though.

Something dark and sour settles in Cas’ belly at the thought of Amara, and the erroneous connection that had existed between her and Dean.

“He is the Righteous Man for a reason.”
“Yes. I can see that.” Pravuil’s voice carries a certain undertone, one that suggests deeper meaning to his words, and Cas looks at him. “There’s something else there, though, isn’t there? A certain… light.”

Cas’ throat goes dry. He stands frozen, mouth slightly open but no words come out.

“It’s strangely familiar.” Pravuil finally looks at Cas, and his eyes are dark, knowing. “I would warn you, brother, to be careful. There are those that watch you, even now.”

Cas wants to ask questions, wants to know exactly what Pravuil knows, but he’s too afraid. Afraid that by admitting what he’s done, it will endanger Dean. He’d known from the very beginning that there would one day be repercussions, but now he’s terrified in a way he wasn’t before because the grace within Dean had not faded but instead merged itself with Dean’s own soul. Cas knows what others will see it as; what they’ll see Dean as. The fact that Dean has begun to manifest abilities only makes it all the more dangerous.

Now, more than ever, he knows he has to find some way to undo what he’s done.

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Dean’s only been on the highway ten minutes when his cell rings, vibrating loudly and suddenly from his pocket. It’s unexpected and he swerves, the front right wheel of Baby going a little off the road and bumping along the clunky asphalt edge. He quickly rights the Impala before digging into his pocket, having to lever his body slightly up and sideways with his left boot pressed hard against the footrest built just to the left of his break petal. When he finally digs it out he risks a quick glance at the caller ID, blinking stupidly at a name he hadn’t expected to see, well, ever again.

Answering it he presses it against his ear, pausing a moment before letting out a slightly bemused ‘Hello’.
There’s garbled white noise on the other end that goes on so long Deans about concluded that the call hadn’t been a conscious one made, and then someone speaks.

“Well I’ll be. Looks like this here cats caught himself a mouse.”

Dean stiffens instantly. That hadn’t been Kate’s voice. “Who is this?”

The voice on the other end of the line, deep and male, speaks again. “Oh, you don’t know me, friend. Though I’ve got to say, I’ve heard a lot about you.”

“Where’s Kate?” He’s got a gut deep feeling that this is more than a new boyfriend or lover calling the ex while drunk situation.

“Don’t you worry about Kate, I’m keeping an eye on her.”

It’s a condescending taunt, and Dean’s fist clenches around the steering wheel as his eyes scan the road for a place to pull over where he can fully engage in the conversation. He takes turn into a feed store, pulling the Impala in the small parking lot and right next to where a tractor is parked. A few men standing near the thing glance over at him, pausing to frown at him before continuing in their own conversation. Dean slides the shift into park. He doesn’t kill the engine, though. He has a feeling he’ll be back on the road real soon.

“Have you hurt her?”

The other person on the end of the line sighs, a long whimsical sound that grates against the edges of Dean’s nerves. “Only a little. I was waiting to see if you were the real deal, though. Who’d have thought some simple no name, ‘born and raised in Booneville, Mississippi’ lowlife like Kate here would have known Dean freaking Winchester. It’s a small world after all.”

Dean’s lips drawn back in aggravation as he listens to the guy’s dramatically mocking tone. There’s only one type of monster that he’s ever known to be so egotistical. “Why the hell is some demon sniffing around Kate?”

“Now that’s actually a pretty interesting story,” The voice tsk’s. “Well. It’s pretty cliché, but there’s
just something so delicious about hopeless, human desperation. It’s a left-over I don’t mind reheating, you know?”

“I swear if you lay one finger on her… “ Dean warns through clenched teeth, his heart hammering an angry beat in his chest.

“Well that depends. It’s a nice place you got here, you know? I mean sure it’s a bit rough around the edges, but I’ve always like the raw energy of a dive bar.”

The voice grows quiet, and Dean sucks in an icy breath when he realizes the demon is at El Diablo. His mind flashes over all the faces of the people he’d became friends with from the bar, something dark and tremulous swelling within his chest.

“Here’s the deal, bucko, maybe I’ll kill the girl, maybe I won’t. How about you make an appearance and we’ll go from there, yeah?”

The line disconnects before Dean say anything, and he swears, throws his phone against the dashboard and slides the shift into reverse.

The two men outside shake their head and mutter as he burns rubber pulling out of the lot.

Cas is the only one in the bunker when Dean gets back. He’s still in the War room, his face tense and his arms crossed across his chest. When he sees Dean’s facial expression his own falls. “Dean? What is it?”
“I need you to do your angel thing.” Dean growls, stomping his way to stand directly in front of Cas. “Now.”

Cas flinches and Dean feels like an asshole immediately. Tsking in frustration he runs a hand through his hair, which is already sticking up from having done so repeatedly. “Something’s happened. Some demon’s got someone I know; a friend. Someone important and I don’t have the time to drive all the way to Seattle, so I need you to take us there.”

A contemplative look comes over Cas’ face. “Seattle?” He mutters.

Dean rolls his eyes. “Yes. Now can we go?! It’s a bar at –“ He never gets to finish his sentence. Suddenly that now familiar sensation of being weightless rushes over him, and Dean grinds his teeth, holding his breath like that will ease the way somehow. Before his body has time to process the change, he’s on solid ground again, and his stomach rushes to his feet. He grunts but is able to stay upright with only a little bit of swaying. He should be happy that his body is getting used to the unreal form of transportation, but he isn’t. Humans weren’t meant for flying, and he’ll never like it, no matter what form it’s in.

Dean looks around. They’re in the alleyway outside of the bar, and it’s deserted. There’s no sign of demons anywhere, which is strange. Cas glances his way with a cautious frown, and apparently Dean’s not the only one thinking that something has to be up. He reaches inside of his jacket to pull out Ruby’s knife, and Cas’ angel blade is suddenly in his right hand. They spare one last look at each other before Dean slides forward and tries the door handle. It turns and cracks open with ease. Frowning even more he pushes it slowly open, the steady guitar rift at the beginning of House of the Rising Sun playing loudly in his ears. The lights are off, and he can barely see in front of him. He carefully moves his body and checks around the corner.

The back entrance of the bar is empty. Directly across from him are the bathrooms, and he motions for Cas to watch his back as he silently pushes open the men’s bathroom door. When he sees no one he crouches down and checks for any feet under the stalls. Nothing. The women’s restroom reveals the same.

Cas watches him come back into the hallway with a tightly pinched face, his brows drawn low. Dean shakes his head silently at him as he passes. He’s on edge, sure that at any moment they’re going to walk into a whole lot of crazy. He presses his back against the corner before turning it, trying to see if the coast is clear, but everything so dark he can hardly see. The jukebox across the room near the entrance is the only light, each change of its beat a faint flicker against its glass. It casts an eerie glow over the tables and chairs nearby it, and Dean notices that some chairs are toppled over and scattered.
It’s a muffled choked off sound from further in the room that makes him rush around the safety of the corner. “Kate?”

Cas is at his side in a minute, his narrow eyes cutting against the shadows. “They’re there.”

Dean grinds his teeth and makes to move forward, but Cas’ hand shoots out suddenly and grab onto his arm. Dean’s turning, because what the fuck – when the lights flash on.

Dean blinks rapidly against the sudden brightness.

“Wow. So it’s actually true.” The voice comes from a dark haired, pale man leaning against the bar. His lips are curled in an almost cocky grin, and his brows are drawn high. He’s got striking blue eyes, and they shine as they move over Dean.

Dean’s tightens his grip on the knife handle. “Where is she?”

The man’s grin stretches and he rolls his eyes, turning his body slightly to pick up a bottle of whiskey sitting on the bar top. He pours himself a glass and takes a sip from it, resting with an elbow on the bar surface. “Well, it’s certainly not the worst introduction…”

Dean’s teeth grin. “Where the hell is she?!”

The man glances back up, for the first time his eyes roaming sideways to land on Cas. He chokes on his drink, wiping at his mouth with the back of his hand. “I wasn’t expecting an actual freaking angel. This makes things awkward.”

“Dean, he’s not a normal demon.”

Dean’s gaze flickers over to Cas. “What do you mean?”

Cas’ eyes narrow. “He’s different… more powerful.”

Dean looks at the guy again, from his leather jacket to his feet crossed casually at the ankles. He
looks just like every other douche demon, but even if he’s not, it doesn’t matter. He’s going to dust
his ass for threatening Kate. “I don’t’ give a damn what he is. I’m still going to kill him.”

Suddenly the double doors of the kitchen press open behind the bar, and a man and woman force
Kate through. She’s being held against her will, a gag stuffed in her mouth and her hands tied at her
back. About six more demons file in behind them, all coming to stand around the bar. Dean’s not
watching them, though, his eyes are on Kate, and how she’s struggling against the demons holding
her. He swears and moves forward instantly. The man at the bar makes a chiding noise and shakes
his head, and the woman holding Kate pulls out a blade and shoves it against her throat. Kate’s eyes
go wide and she makes a muffled sound of alarm, her body going stiffly still.

Dean see’s red faintly draw to the surface of her skin from where the knife presses and swears. “Let
her go!”

“Afraid I can’t do that, besides, it’s not like she didn’t see this coming, right Kate?” The demon
smirks darkly at her.

Dean’s eyes narrow, flitting from him to Kate and back again. “What do you mean?”

“She made a deal.” Cas says in soft, sudden confirmation.

Dean’s eyes widen and he stares at Kate. She’s looking straight at him, and there’s a sort of wild
vulnerability in her eyes that makes Dean cringe, because he’s seen that look before. It’s the look of a
person at the end of their line and desperate, the look of someone who will do anything to get a little
more time. There’s guilt there too, bright as damn day and so hard to look at.

Now with total understanding of what’s happening Dean cuts his eyes around them. If someone’s ten
years are up, then it’s got to mean that somewhere, waiting for the kill and hidden in invisibility, are
the damn hellhounds. As if on cue a low rumbling growl starts up from all around them.

“Yeah, you’re surrounded, dude.”

Dean bristles and glares at the demon. “Call them off.”

“Who? Oh! You mean my furry friends here?” The demon tips his head back, a slow, cocky grin
twisting his lips. “Nah.”
“You must know what I am.” Cas speaks up beside Dean, his own head tilting back and his eyes narrowing. “A demon doesn’t stand a chance against an Arch-angel.”

The demon smacks his lips as he takes another drink from his whiskey. He lifts his index finger from the glass and points it towards Cas. “That’s very true. Luckily I’m not just another demon, like you said.” He glances back at the others standing guard and rolls his eyes. “Those guys, on the other hand. Well, I wasn’t really expecting much from the beginning.”

The male demon holding Kate narrows his eyes and the female clenches her hand around the blade, a defiant glare in her eyes. Her lips peel back from her teeth angrily. “You wouldn’t –“

She doesn’t have a chance to finish her sentence before Cas is in front of them, his hands lifted and glowing as they slap against each other their foreheads. The demons scream as the light grows brighter, and Kate scrambles away from them with a cry. All hell breaks loose. Dean heads for Kate, but there’s a demon in his face suddenly and he barely blocks a blow, burying his knife in the demon’s belly. It goes down but before he can make a move a pool stick is slamming into his head. He cries out and stumbles sideways, momentarily seeing stars. He hears both Cas and Kate call out his name and suddenly Cas is at his side, smiting the demon that had landed the blow. Dean see’s one coming at Cas back and yells the angles name before throwing the knife. Cas ducks and the blade hits the demon square in the chest.

“Dean!”

Kate screams his name and Dean turns to find two demons bearing down on her, dragging her back and towards the kitchen again. He rushes to the fallen demon and jerks the blade from his chest while Cas finishes off his own and flashes to pull back one holding Kate. Dean panics when the other one seems to realize the odds aren’t in his favor, jerking Kate up by her hair and hurriedly dragging her away while she kicks and screams.

Dean rushes them with a growl, plowing himself into the demon. They both go down and start to roll, fighting to come out on top. A blow lands hard on his face and pain flares in his cheek, but he ignores it, bucking the demon off him with his weight and slashing sideways until his blade connects with the demon’s neck and breaks skin. The demon’s body jerks and red flashes under its skin before it slumps sideways, dead.

“Well that was fun!”
Dean swings around. The demon’s standing behind them up on the small stage, and he’s got Kate. His arm is wrapped tight around her throat and she’s trying to get free, pulling at his arm and gasping like she can’t get air.

Dean rushes forward, and high pitched barks and snarls surround him, closing in at him on all sides. He stumbles back with wide arms, looking downwards and trying to catch even a single glance of the hellhounds pushing him back. “Cas!”

The sound of swiftly beating wings press against the air, and in the next moment Cas appears in front of the demon.

The demon pushes Kate aside and she stumbles to the floor, coughing and clenching at her throat. Just as Cas is rushing forward with his angel blade raised the demon raises a hand and Cas is suspended mid strike, the blade hovering just over the demon’s chest. He looks down at the blade and tsk’s, shaking his head. “Not nice.”

Dean watches wide eyed as Cas goes flying backwards, narrowly missing him before hitting some tables and tumbling through chairs. His body twitches, torn between going to him and Kate, who is already scrambling to her feet and towards the door. She comes to a hard stop suddenly, like she’s slammed into an invisible wall. She searches the ground with wide, frantic eyes.

The hellhounds. Shit. “Don’t move!” He reaches out towards her like he can halt her movements even while the hounds at his heels snarl viciously.

“Knight of Hell.” Cas speaks up behind Dean as he pulls himself up with a hand against the bar top.

Something hard and heavy slams into Dean’s stomach, and his memories spring up from his subconscious. Flashes of Abaddon and Cain play across his mind, and then the weight of The Mark presses against the flesh of his arm like a ghost limb. A single name, whispered dark and seductive surfaces, and Dean clenches his teeth and glares at the demon like he’s the reason for the sudden agony in his chest.

Amara...

“What, me?” The demon snorts and waves his hand. “Hardly. Although, Cain did bring them up once; something about helping train them? I don’t know, it was a long time ago and he was a bit… well, you know.” The demon makes a faux angry face and swipes his hand across the air, his fingers curled like claws. “Plus, the guy has no sense of humor at all.”
“If not a Knight than what?”

Cas is still standing with the bar to his back, and Dean’s got a feeling that he’s got his own pack of hellhounds at his feet. He’s got blood on his face, too, and Dean notices for the first time the hot trickle of it on his own skin.

“Ah, you know. Something rare, obscure; some might even say the last of my kind.” The demon looks up, and a glare of red flickers across the white of his eyes like he’s staring deep into fire, while black veins bleed outwards around his skin there.

Dean watches the look of surprise cross Cas’ face, quickly followed by stiff wariness. He hates how uneasy that look makes him and he hates being left in the dark even more. “Who is this guy, Cas?!”

Cas briefly turns his gaze to Dean before focusing on the demon again, like he doesn’t want to risk letting the guy out of his sight. “He’s an arch demon.” He answers Dean before changing the subject completely, talking instead to the demon. “Last I heard you went by the name Naberious.” The demon takes a dramatic bow, and something twitches in Cas’ jaw. “Why are you here? Your kind weren’t really known for collecting on contracts.”

Naberious makes a look of disgust. “I’d rather die than do something so tedious. I was trying to clean up your mess when I got a call from some of my faithful.” He pulls out a cellphone from his pocket, waving it in front of them. “Isn’t it amazing how much of a person’s life you can learn on this thing? Although, I’ve got to say, some of the pictures are… daring.”

Dean feels a cold shiver roll over him and his nails bite into the flesh of his palm as he clenches his fist. “Is this some joke to you?”

Naberious face darkens, his gaze cutting into Dean. “I’m afraid not.”

“Call the damn dogs off!” Dean can’t hold it in anymore, the damned things are all but nipping at his jeans and by the way Kate is flinching more and more it’s obvious they’re drawing in on her as well. “You want me? Fine. I won’t put up a damn fight, just call the dogs off and let her go!”

Naberious grins. “Afraid I can’t do that. You have to be punished, after all.” The demon snaps his fingers again and suddenly Kate falls, laying boneless on the floor.
Dean panics, moving to go to her but the hounds at his feet snarl viciously.

“Don’t worry, she’s just asleep. I was getting tired of all the screaming.”

“Why the hell are you doing this?” Dean shouts.

“Thousands that were released because of you!” Naberious jerks forward with a hiss, his face shifting once again only this time an animal like mask falling over him, like a shadow moving over his face. “Sinners that had never seen past the darkest bowls of Hell were set free the moment you opened the gates again! I’ve stood guard for a millennial without incident, but leave it to the Winchesters and their angel to screw things up again.”

Dean acts. He’s tired of listening to this douche flare his own ego, the damn with the hellhounds at his feet. He almost makes it, too, is only a few feet away when one of the nightmarish hounds sink it’s canines into the meat of his calf. He yells and stumbles, about to bust his skull into the wood of the floor when he abruptly stops and instead smashes against something living and warm. He grabs onto Cas’ jacket as the angel’s eyes flash white. He’s places his body half in front of Dean, and his free hand is held up and glowing, holding off what Dean can suddenly see as flashes of shadows and blazing eyes. He jerks back at the sight, having not seen a hellhound since that fiasco in Shoshone, Idaho.

“If they come any closer I will destroy them all.” Cas glares menacingly at Naberious, and something in his eyes must show his sincerity because the demon twitches. “I know how much they mean to you, but I will not hesitate.”

Naberious’ jaw clenches, and his pale blue eyes narrow on Cas. “You think you know anything about me?”

“I know enough.” Cas says coolly, as if he doesn’t have a care in the world.

Dean can see the tension in his back, though. Cas is ready to fight, if he must, but there’s something about this demon’s that got him on edge, and it makes Dean’s own belly coil tighter.

“They say that each one is a part of you, thousands of pieces of a single whole. I hear that you feel each one’s death like it was your own.”
Dean’s eyes widen at that, and he stares at the demon in front of them again, for the first time stopping to consider that he’s possibly something… more.

Naberious eyes glance down at the still snarling shadows dancing around them, and then he snaps his fingers and suddenly it all stops. The hellhounds grow silent, and with their silence it’s like they vanish from Deans eyes as well. He blinks, drawing straight and looking around. He’s sure they’ve gone all together when one growls at his side, and he takes a quick step to the left and out of reach.

“Why have you brought us here? What is it that you’re after?”

Naberious’ eyes narrow on Cas, and his lip curls. “You need to be punished for what you did.” He repeats.

“And what is that?”

“Opening the gates!” Naberious growls like the hounds at their feet. “Because of what you did I’m here on Earth trying to track down every soul that escaped!”

“Cas, what is he talking about? Opening the gates?”

Cas ignores Dean, his wide eyes locked on Naberious. “It set them free – the souls. But you’re mistaken. We didn’t open the gates. We thought demons were behind it.”

Dean looks from Cas to the demon and back again. They’ve both fallen silent, brooding almost, staring each other dead in the eyes and not blinking. It’s eerie to see the look on someone other than Cas’ face, and Dean doesn’t know if he likes it. He turns to Kate, grinding his teeth when he sees her still passed out on the floor, head tilted towards him and mouth slack.

“Someone care to fill me in here?” He bites out, his glare ending on Cas and holding.

“Dean, this is Naberious, he’s the guardian of the gates of Hell. I believe your culture may know him as Cerberus.”
“Cerberus. As in the three-headed dog Cerberus?”

“Obviously, he has only the one in this form.”

“As far as you can tell.” Naberious says with a sly grin and a tone a bit too carefree for the situation.

Dean grimaces. “Dude. That is deeply disturbing.”

“He thinks we opened the gates of Hell and released his souls.” Cas remarks. “It’s why he’s on Earth.”

“What the hell do you mean by ‘opened’? When were they ever closed?” Because they had tried to close the gates years ago, but Sam had failed to complete the trails and in turn they had never closed. Dean’s thoughts go back to the night, remembering how terrified he’d been at the thought of losing Sam. It had taken everything he had to convince Sam to stop, and afterwards… afterwards when they had failed…

Dean frowns as pain flares from the back of his mind with steadying intensity.

What had happened after? Something had happened, something big. Dean remembers hauling Sam outside of the church and collapsing against the Impala with him, and then they had… the sky had…

“Dean?” Cas’ gaze on him is thick with worry.

Realizing that he’s gripping his head Dean grunts out and turns away from the angel. It makes the pain worse to look at him for some reason.

“Well that’s quite a whammy.” Naberious draws out slowly, looking at Dean through narrowed eyes that flick over to Cas. “Let me guess; your doing?”

“You’ve made a mistake.” Cas tells him. “We were not the ones that opened the gates. Your grudge is not with us.”
Naberious rolls his eyes. “Well if you didn’t do it, who did? It sure as hell wasn’t us. Why would we open both the gates of Hell and Heaven?”

“This changes things.” Cas mutters, almost as if to himself. “All this time we’ve been wrong.”

“Yeah, well you’re not the only ones.” Naberious jumps the short distance from the stage and whistles between his teeth.

The sound of nails clicking against wood followed by energetic barking surrounds him, and he looks tries again but he can’t see the Hellhounds, only hear them moving.

“Well this was pointless. And honestly I’m a bit bored, so I’ll be on my way.” He grabs the bottle of whiskey and makes his way around an upended table, heading for the bars front entrance.

“Wait!” Dean runs over and kneels beside Kate, pulling her up in his arms. He looks her over before glaring at the demon. “What about her? She’s still got a contract out on her soul.”

Naberious shakes his head. “Yeah. So?”

“So end it!”

Naberious snorts and crosses his arms over his chest. “Why would I do that? She made a deal, and her time is up.”

“You end it now, you bastard!”

The demon’s cold blue eyes bore into Dean, holding unblinking for a long moment, and Dean feels himself twitch under the intensity of the stare. “How about this. I’ll break the contract, but you’ll owe me a favor.”

“I don’t make deals with demons.”

Naberious shrugs, turning and heading for the door again.
Dean grinds his teeth. He knows that deals always end in bloodshed. Even if he did take the contract off of Kate’s soul, that doesn’t mean that something won’t happen to her after. Something that looks like an accident to anyone else. Biting his bottom lip hard he looks down at Kate. She’s still unconscious, laying still in his arms.

“Dean…”

Cas apparently can see his struggle. It’s clear by the look in the angel’s eyes that he doesn’t want Dean to do it. But it’s Kate… “Fine.”

Naberious pauses, looking over his shoulder with a slow and wicked grin. “Beautiful.” One hand comes up and flicks against the air, and almost like a magician a fiery parchment appears.

Dean purses his lips, not impressed by the magic show.

Naberious shrugs and snaps his fingers again. The paper disintegrates. “Done. Now remember, Winchester, we’ve got a deal.” His eyes burn red before he vanishes altogether.

Dean shakes his head. Freaking demons.

He gathers Kate fully in his arms and stands, making his way over to the lifted stage to lay her down. He runs his hands over her to make sure she’s not hurt. When he finds no wounds other than the faint one on her neck he sighs. Thank god.

Cas moves forward and lays his fingertips against her head. “It’s okay. She’s just exhausted and a little dehydrated. It’s worrying, but not life threatening.”

Dean takes the words in stride, all but sagging in relief. He stares down at her sleeping face a long moment before finally turning to Cas.

Cas lift’s his eyes to meet Deans, and must see the anger there because he freezes. “What?”
“The bar. You knew where it was before I could even tell you. How long have you been watching me, Cas?” He spits the name out like an insult, his fist clenching.

Cas knows the exact moment in time where the world pauses, holds still and then shifts again. It’s significant. This will always be the moment where his lies catch up to him, and Dean loses all trust in him completely. He feels the weight of it like a thousand knives sinking into his flesh.

His face must betray his thoughts, because Dean swears sharply, shaking his head and turning away from Cas with a look of disgust. His hand comes up in a familiar habit to scrub against his mouth, like he’s trying to rid his lips of something sour lingering there.

“I knew it.”

Cas stumbles over words choked at the back of his throat. *Fix this*. He has to fix this! He can’t lose Dean, not now, not after he’s remembered what it feels like to stand beside him and share the same air. To fight at his side and guard his back, all the while gazing upon him like he’s the second coming. It’s sacrilegious and pathetic and Cas hates himself for it, but he clings to it like a drop of water in the desert, terrified of being without it again.

“I had to make sure you were okay.” It’s not a lie, not completely. “I knew that we needed you as well as Sam. You’re important.”

Dean draws closer, his eyes narrowing as he crowds Cas. “Important? For who? For this war?”

Cas swallows dryly, wide eyes trying to pull away from Dean’s but held prisoner under their watchfulness. “I – You’re …” *To me. You’re important to me!* But he can’t say that, because if does he’ll lose everything.
Something that looks like pain flashes across Dean’s features, and his scowl falls as he moves even closer, his hands held up in an almost pleading manner. “Who are you, Cas? Why do you seem so familiar? There’s something in my head that doesn’t fit, and I know it’s got something to do with you.”

Sheer terror freezes over Cas. Is Dean remembering? Was everything that he’s done pointless? Would he lose it all over again? “Dean, you have to stop.” Stop picking at the wall, before something happens that Cas won’t be able to fix.

“Stop what? Did you do something to me?” Dean’s angry again, tension radiating from him like fire. “Cas if you and those sons of bitching angels did anything to me –“

The sound of a groan breaks off Dean’s words, and Cas jerks his head to see Kate awake and struggling to pull herself up on her elbows.

Dean moves instantly, wrapping an arm around her back and helping her sit. “Hey, hey, you’re alright. Take it easy.”

Kate blinks rapidly, struggling to come to full clarity. “Dean?” She grabs onto his jacket, trying to pull herself up further, and Dean maneuvers her until her legs hang over the side of the stage and her feet touch the ground.

“Hey, don’t try to stand up yet, just get your baring’s.”

Kate looks around, wide eyes darting back and forth. “What happened? Where did they go?”

“Don’t worry about them. We took care of it. They aren’t going to be coming for you again.”

“I don’t understand, how did you… What are you even doing here Dean?”

Cas watches them with a sense of being outside and looking in. He stands awkward and still, unsure if he should even be witnessing the reunion. There’s a certain intimacy to it that makes a pang of jealousy settle in his belly, and he tries not to think about the times he’d flown in to look after Dean and saw the two of them together. It’s still an ache that he hasn’t quite healed from, and he’d never
expected the two to meet again. It feels almost wrong now, looking at them, listening as Dean explains everything and Kate clings to him like he’s her savior. Which, Cas guesses he is.

His gaze shifts to Dean and lingers. He’s going to have to come clean sooner or later, about everything. Dean’s starting to remember, despite the spell that he, Hannah, Rowena and Crowley had placed years ago. Cas has a feeling that it has something to do with the residual grace that lingers inside of Dean. Then again, *lingers* isn’t exactly the right word.

“Cas.”

Cas startles from his thoughts, looking to Dean and guessing by the irritated look on the hunters face it’s not the first time he’s tried to get his attention. Cas straightens, forcing himself to the present. “Yes?”

“I said we need to get her home.”

“Oh, right. I understand.” He moves forward and lays a hand on both of their shoulders, and in the next instant they’re inside Kate’s apartment.

Dean holds onto Kate as she struggles to stay upright from the unfamiliar form of transportations, and Cas shies away when Dean glares at him. Cas knows he’s giving himself away even more by revealing that he knows where Kate lives, but he’s apparently reached some point of just not caring anymore. He’ll try to hold on to as much of this charade as he can, but *this*; the fact that he’s been watching Dean so closely for a while now, well that’s pointless to try and keep hidden anymore. Besides, some ugly masochistic part of himself wants Dean to lash out at him. He wants the hunter to cut him to and to with his words so Cas can wear them like scars against his skin.

There’s just *so much guilt*. He’s drowning in it.
Dean digs his chin a little deeper into the space between Kate’s shoulder and neck, closing his eyes and taking a deep inhale. Kate’s arms around him tighten and it’s a beautiful thing to Dean, not really because of the act itself, but the knowledge that Kate can still hug him. That she is alive. That he didn’t fail her, too.

He holds her a moment longer before pulling away. Kate sniffs and then laughs, shaking her head sheepishly and wiping at watering eyes.

“Shit. I was never this soft, I swear.”

Dean grins. “Well, almost dying can do that to a person.”

She gazes up at Dean with a sort of amazed expression. “You always were mysterious. I should have known you fight monsters or something.”

“It is the obvious guess.” He tucks a lock of hair behind her ear, smiling softly at her a moment before turning to pace the small confine of her living room. “Now are you going to tell me what in the hell could have been so important that you’d sell you soul for it?”

Kate flinches in front of him and wraps an arm around her middle. Her eyes flicker towards Castiel, who’s still standing silently at a distance, watching them both with a sort of guarded expression. Dean’s jaw twitches at the sight of him. There’s still so many things he needs answered; main being why the angel has been keeping tabs on him for months now. Months. Dean remembers every chilling sensation running down his back, every press of someone’s eyes against his skin when there was no one around. He remembers waking up in the morning, body heavy with sleep still and warm like the fourth of July because that ever-invisible presence feels like hands mapping every inch of his skin when he’s sleeping. He remembers laying his forehead on the cool, damp glass of his apartment shower, his hand pumping hard on his cock while he moans because the thought of something actually being there watching him was like fire in his veins.

The idea that Cas had been that presence both angers and wrecks him in ways that make him want to move. To press the angel up against the nearest wall and demand answers. The idea of being so close, feeling Cas’ chest press against his own and his breath hot in his face does something to him, and Dean grinds his teeth and forces his gaze back to Kate. She’s looking down with a defiant glare, one hand gripped tight against her opposite arm.

“You wouldn’t understand.”
“Oh yeah? Try me.” Because jeez he really wants to think that she’s not like all the other idiots desperate for the material life.

“You couldn’t understand!” She turns fiery brown eyes up at him. “You’re alone, Dean. Have been since the moment I met you. How could you understand something like family?”

The words strike at something settled deep and angry in his chest. Family? Goddamn pretty much the only thing he understands is that. He’s done everything in the name of family; has freaking died in the name of family. No one alive can call him out on nothing thinking family is something sacred.

Something in his features must give sight to the truth, because Kate’s eyes soften. “I should have known. We’re the same after all, huh? Always running.” Kate lets out a disbelieving laugh. “The one time a guy really is as mysterious as they look.”

“What happened?” Dean asks softly, stopping in his pacing to look down at her.

“Oh, you know, just the usual. Doped up no good mother hits a tree dead on with one year old daughter in the backseat. Mother lives with a few broken bones, but the baby’s …” Kate draws off with a choked cry, her shoulders shaking. “The baby’s car seat wasn’t strapped in, because all I was in a rush. Trying to get to my next fix. Because of that my baby went through the windshield. She couldn’t even breath, Dean. She had to have a machine just to make her heart pump!”

Dean reaches out and pulls Kate against him, wrapping his arms around her shoulders and running his palm down her hair. He wants to be mad at her still, to tell her she’d been wrong, but he can’t. He’s sold his soul time and again for Sam, and he’d gladly do it again. The thought of losing Sam is stifling; he can’t begin to comprehend what it would be like to lose a child.

“How did you even know what to do?” He asks.

Kate sniffs against his shoulder, pulling away and wiping at her face with a small humorless laugh. “I grew up in the Mississippi bayou’s. Everything there is superstition and black magic. That, and my grandma practiced obeah like she was still in Haiti.”

“So, you sold your soul for your daughter’s life.”

“Of course I did. And I’d do it again.”
She says it so quickly and with conviction that Dean has a hard time trying to tell her otherwise. He nods his head and scrubs his nails against his scalp. “Look. I get it, okay? Believe me, I do, but you can’t trust demons. They always find ways to bend the deal. Who’s to say that after nabbing your soul they don’t go back to do something to your daughter? They lie, Kate. Always.”

Kate’s expression falls and she wraps her arms tight around her middle. She doesn’t look at Dean for a while, instead looking somewhere over his shoulder. Dean turns and see’s Cas standing in the doorway, staring down awkwardly at his feet. Something clenches in his belly.

“What about that guy? He’s not human, is he?”

Dean watches as Cas shifts on his feet, moving his hand up to scratch at the back of his neck. It’s something so incredibly human, and he tries to imagine Cas as a human. The amazing thing is he’s no different. “Yeah. But he’s one of the good guys.” There’s a certain truth to the sound of his words and he realizes that he won’t stay angry at Cas. He knows that the angel’s hiding something from him, and he intends to find out what, but that doesn’t change the fact that something in Dean won’t allow him to turn his back on him.

When he turns back to Kate she’s watching him with quiet scrutiny, and Dean flinches under her gaze. “What?”

“You’ve changed.” She mummers, looking him over still. “You’re different from the person you were before. It’s strange… I feel like this is the real you, though.” Kate moves forward, laying her hand on Dean’s. “Will you stay?”

Dean holds her gaze a moment before sighing. She’s shaken still. He remembers in the past how Sam had always been the one to linger behind and offer comfort to the victims of the supernatural, but he realizes that this time, it’s his place. “Yeah. Just for a bit.”

Kate smiles and sniffs again. “Okay. Just for a bit.”
Dean stares down into his cup of coffee, watching the steam rise and curl and then evaporate into the air. The kitchen chair under him feels stiff and unfamiliar, and he shifts against it, his foot tapping restlessly against the floor. It’s been about thirty minutes since Kate had asked him to stay, and she’s just went to take a shower. Dean is antsy. Apparently so is Cas. He’s still standing, moving restlessly around the small kitchen with his hands stuffed deep in his pockets. He’s got that black overcoat on again, and it shifts around his feet as he walks. Dean remembers what it feels like laying on his shoulders, and looks away.

“I was watching over you.” Cas says suddenly, still pacing. “I was ensuring your safety.”

Dean takes a drink of his coffee. It’s hot and bitter going down. It lingers in his mouth.

“I know it wasn’t right, to hide myself from you, but I knew how you’d react if I revealed myself to you.”

“And how do you know that, Cas?”

Cas pauses, caught off guard. He looks at Dean with a frown.

Dean sighs, sitting his cup down. “How do you know how I would have reacted? You don’t know anything about me.” Cas opens his mouth, but he struggles for words. Dean clenches his teeth. “Who are you, Cas? Really?”

Cas can’t hold his gaze. He cracks, looking away with a shaky sigh. “I don’t mean you any harm. That’s the truth.”

“That’s not what I asked.”

Cas keeps his back to Dean. He stares down at his feet a long while, and Dean wishes he knew what he were thinking. Wishes he could look inside of Cas’ head and see the answers himself, because
Cas doesn’t want to give them to him.

“I’ve watched over you for years.”

Dean mouth twitches. His grip tightens around the cup. “How many?”

Cas finally turns, giving Dean his side. He sighs and looks up, and his eyes are dark, almost sorrowful. “Almost ten years.”

Dean closes his eyes. He fights for control a moment, the sense of betrayal almost overwhelming. *Ten years.* Every single time he’s screwed up, ever life he’s let die… all his mistakes… Cas knows them all, probably. He bites out a sarcastic laugh. “What, are you like my guardian angel or something?”

Cas doesn’t look away. “Not exactly, but the thought of you being hurt, does pain me in some way.”

Dean squirms in his seat, looking away. The conversation feels personal in a way that it shouldn’t. Besides, if the thought of Dean hurt effected Cas, why the hell hadn’t the angel showed up all the times Dean could have used some heavenly assistance? It doesn’t add up. “How often did you watch me?”

“Constantly.” Cas answers softly after a moment.

They fall silent, the constant whisper of the shower across the hallway filling the space between them. Lust and anger clash inside Dean. Or perhaps it’s an entirely new sensation altogether, an overwhelming combination of the two.

Dean swallows. “Yeah? Well I hope you liked what you saw.” He means for the words to be harsh, but they lack the severity for it. Instead he feels small and naked.

“I won’t apologize for ensuring your safety, Dean.”

“Yeah. Cause you guys need me, right?” He cuts his eyes to Cas, challenging. “I’m important? Isn’t that what you said?”
Cas swallows. “Yes.”

Dean has a feeling that if he presses Cas enough, he’ll eventually give. He thinks about it; he’s sure as hell tired enough. All he wants is straight answers, or at least he thinks he does. Truth be told he’s honestly not sure anymore. Something tells him that the answers he wants are ones he’s not ready to hear, and like flipping a switch Dean lowers his eyes in defeat.

“When were the gates ever closed?”

Cas shifts, moving after a moment to lean against the counter with his arms crossed over his chest. “Two years ago.”

Two years? Two years ago Dean and Sam had been struggling to save the damn world, just like they are now. But there’d been no Jesse at that time. Instead their enemy had been the personification of the Mark; a woman as deceptive and she was malicious. So deceptive that she had fooled Dean. So Deceptive that he’d done something to his little brother that he’ll probably never forgive.

Cas watches him, with a sort of knowing look in his eyes. “It had nothing to do with Amara.”

For yet another time that night words hit Dean like a brick. He flinches sharply, his eyes automatically closing, like by enveloping himself in darkness he’ll be able to rid himself of that name and the image that comes with it. “You know who she is?”

“She was not only a threat to Earth but Heaven as well. When we heard of your battle we couldn’t help but notice.”

“Well it sure as hell would have been nice to have some help.” He doesn’t hold back the venom of his words, hoping that they’ll cut into Cas. “You know, I never really cared for the idea of religion. There’s just something …distasteful about the thought of God existing and just not giving a damn about us. Why the hell would I want to have faith in someone like that?”

Something sad weighs heavy within Cas’ gaze. “You are not the only one with a lack of faith, Dean.”
Dean doesn’t know how to handle that. He looks away while something inside of him crumbles. If an angel has lost his faith… what does that mean for humanity? “The spell. I’ll do it.”

Dean clears his throat and looks up. “Kate… she reminded me of something. Or who I used to be, maybe. I don’t know. Point is Sam’s my blood. Whatever chance we have of saving him, I’ll take it, bad or otherwise.”

“You’re doing the right thing.”

Dean snorts. “I hope so, because if we didn’t stand a chance against one Cambion, we sure as hell won’t against two.”

Cas watches as Dean and Kate say their goodbyes. He doesn’t want to, but sheer masochism forces his gaze, makes him zone in on every lingered touch. He knows what Dean and Kate had is over now, but there’s an intimate sort of knowledge in watching two people who had once been that close. There’s a bitter bite of jealousy layered over it all that Cas is shamed by. He’s reminded yet again of what it feels like to watch Dean indulge in other people or things. For Dean it’s always been sex and alcoholism, and as toxic as something like addiction is, Cas had still been jealous of Dean’s dependency on it.

Sometimes Cas wonders if he’s toxic, too.

“Be sure to tell Jimmy I said hey.” Dean says with a grin.

Kate smiles. “If I actually see him. Apparently, his ex-wife took him back. He’s been spending most of his time with her. ‘Jose is pretty much running the place now.’”
Dean laughs, shaking his head. “Well I’ll be damned. Bet that was a shock.”

Kate winks. “We still got a bet on how soon before sends the entire place up in flames.”

Dean laughs again, and this time it’s more real.

Cas can’t look away. He watches as Dean pulls her into a hug again. Cas feelings his chest ache. “Dean, we should really be going.”

Dean looks over Kate’s shoulder at him and Cas curls in a bit on himself at the look in his eyes. Kate pulls away first, running her hand down Dean’s arm before turning to look over her shoulder at Cas. Her eyes trail up and down, assessing him, and Cas feels entrapped. She breaks away from Dean and slowly approaches him. There’s something lingering in her eyes, a small spark of knowledge that makes Cas stop breathing.

“I wanted to thank you, too. You saved my life.”

Cas shifts, glancing over her shoulder to Dean, whose watching them with a sort of bewildered expression. He clears his throat. “You’re welcome.”

Kate laughs softly, looking up at him a moment longer before suddenly leaning upwards. Cas eyes widen as she applies pressure to the back of his neck and his head lowers instinctively. Suddenly they are kissing. He struggles to understand what’s happening, eyes still wide as Kate’s lips press gently against his own, and linger. She steps back after only a moment, and her grin sly. “Now I’ve thanked you.” She turns to look over her shoulder at Dean, then pats Cas on his cheek and turns from him. He lifts his gaze, following her as she closes in on Dean. Dean’s brows draw steadily higher as she moves.

“One more for old time’s sake?”

She slides her arm up Dean’s chest to rest against his shoulder, and Cas watches as Dean bends down to meet her. The kiss is a little more explorative, and Cas swallows. Shockingly enough instead of jealousy, all he can think is that in some way this means the two of them have touched. It sends an unexpected thrill low in his belly and Cas looks away. He hears Dean whisper something in her ear that makes Kate chuckle.
“So what are you going to do now that you’re not on the run?” Dean asks.

“Maybe it’s time for me to go home too.”

Dean nods and squeezes her hand. “Take care of yourself.”

“Always do.”

Cas looks up as Dean approaches. He’s got this softness to him, a sort of bitter sweet look in his eyes that makes Cas yearn for things he knows he’ll never have.

“Let’s get this show on the road.”

He fits his palm against Dean’s shoulder, and they vanish.

Sam’s eyes blink rapidly open at the sound of iron bars screeching against concrete. He squints, his vision momentarily blurred by the steady trickle of blood from the cut above his brow. One of the demons, the thin creepy one he’s named Mr. Burns, approaches and grips the hair on his head, pulling it forcefully back. Sam barely flinches. After everything he’s endured, the faint pain is nothing. They’ve worked on him for hours, cutting into his skin and bruising his body with their fist’s. His shirt’s hanging from him in tatters, and the skin there is red and raw.

“Not looking so good, are we?” The demon laughs in Sam’s face, his foul breath hitting hot against his cheek.

Sam tries to jerk his head away, but the demon’s grip is too tight and his body is too worn down. All he can do is peel his lips back from his teeth in a snarl, glaring from Mr. Burns to Jesse. The
Cambion has been absent through most of the torturing; letting his lackeys take over the job instead. Every minute that’s ticked by without having visuals on him had been an added weight to his worry. He doesn’t know what’s keeping Jesse from going after Dean, if he hasn’t already.

The thought of Dean being chained up like him somewhere makes Sam sick to his stomach. The need to *know* is overwhelming, but he’s terrified that if he mentions Dean it will spur Jesse to finally go after the other Winchester as well.

The agony of not knowing burns like the wounds on his skin.

“Why are you doing this?” He rasps out, his throat raw from where earlier Dale had choked him until he’d passed out. “Why not just kill me and get it over with?”

Jesse laughs from where he’s standing with his back to Sam. He’s standing in front of a cart that they’d wheeled in when they’d come, and Sam struggles to see what’s on its surface.

“We’ll get there, don’t worry.”

Sam shuts his eyes, trying to block out the sight of them, of everything. This is just… *it’s insane*. His entire life has been nothing but fighting. He’s tired. Has been for a long time, now. He’d give anything just to have something normal and mundane, to not go to sleep with one eye open, and to be able to wake up and just lay in bed without a threat knocking at his backdoor.

He hates that he can’t have it, and hates himself even more for taking it from Dean.

“Why are you doing this?”

Jesse doesn’t answer right away, just reaches for something on the table, lifting and examining it. It’s an iron poker. Its tip is burning hot. “You know, I don’t like Hell much. There’s too much… *filth* here. But the one good thing I can say,” He turns, holding the poker up with a grin. “There’s always a fire burning somewhere.”

Dale and Mr. Burns start to laugh, sneering in Sam’s face. He glares at them, trying to twist his body away but their grip on him tightens, holding him in place. “Stay away from me.”
Jesse comes closer, looking down at the poker almost contemplatively. “I don’t know what it is, but I’ve always felt a certain affinity for fire. There’s almost something holy about it. Even the Bible says that the Earth will be cleansed by fire.”

Sam lets out a weak, bitter laugh. “Is that what you think you’re doing? ‘Cleansing the Earth’?”

Jesse scowls. “I could care less about this earth. There’s never been anything for me here. I’d just as soon watch it burn. But Heaven, on the other hand.” His eyes flutter shut, and an almost euphoric expression crosses his face. “That’s where the power is.”

Sam scowls. “What power?”

“Hold him.”

Arms come around Sam’s shoulders and chest, and he jerks, fighting against them with wide eyes. Jesse moves forward and suddenly all Sam can do is scream as searing pain shoots from his hip and outwards. Jesse holds the poker against his skin so long that Sam smells his own flesh burning. When he finally pulls it away again he feels some of the skin pull off with it. His scream cuts off into a gutted groan, and he snaps downwards against the cuffs on his wrists when the demons release him. The pain is a sensory overload, and he slips in out an of conscious, his head swaying as he struggles to stay awake.

“You see, the demons, their tired.” Jesse continues talking like not a second had passed in their conversation, and he hadn’t just tortured Sam. “They’re sick of being chained to this place, not that I blame them. It really is a shit hole. And the angels.” Jesse spits out, angrily tossing the iron poker to the floor. It clanks loudly, resting somewhere near Sam’s feet. “The angels are the most hypocritical of them all! They’re so quick to pass judgement, to condemn, when they’re just like all the rest of the scum living on Earth.”

Sam can’t help it, he laughs. It’s just so incredibly cliché. Each shake of his body hurts like hell, but he just can’t stop. Jessie stiffens across from him, his face darkening at Sam’s amusement. One of the demons grab him by the hair again, jerking him upwards and his neck back. He stops laughing, but there’s still a grin on his face. “I’m sorry… it’s just that, that’s pretty much what every single jackass we’ve gone up against has said.” Sam sneers. “And guess what? We beat every one of them.”

The grip at his hair tightens and stings. Sam hisses, but refuses to turn his glare away from Jesse. The Cambion draws forward, his gaze just as unflinching. He moves until his face hovers near Sam’s, and then moves closer still, his lips stopping just shy of Sam’s left ear.
“I think I’m going to keep you alive. At least long enough that you can watch me torture and kill your brother.”

Sam grits his teeth, breathing hard through his nose.

“I’ll take him apart piece by piece and spread him out like a work of art. It will be almost poetic.”

Sam rages. He jerks against his chains and pulls towards Jesse, who’s just out of reach, watching him with a predatory grin.

“But until then, I’m going to hurt you. Because I can. And because I like it.”
Chapter End Notes

Dammit... lol So when I created the character for Naberious I HONESTLY didn't intend to just write Damon Salvatore, but when I was trying to think of a person for his photo it was the first thing that popped in mind and now the similarities are too hard to ignore

T_T

We're just going to ignore that part lol

Well, here...

I.E., NOTE:

THIS IS NOT A CROSS OVER. THE NABERIOUS CHARTER IS NOT THE SAME CHARACTER AS DAEMON SALVATORE!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!