The Mechanics of Love
by invisiblebookwm

Summary

Loosely based on the manga *Absolute Boyfriend*. Dean is less than amused when, for his birthday, Gabriel signs him up for a month-long trial with Castiel, a humanoid robot prototype developed by Heaven Technologies to be the perfect boyfriend. At first, Dean is not thrilled at the new addition to his household, but as he spends more time with the robot, Dean finds himself slowly falling in love.

Notes

- Written for the 2012 *DeanCasBigBang*.
- Artwork by the amazingly talented *artmetica*.
- Soundtrack: *Mediafire* | *Grooveshark*
- This fic can also be found at my *livejournal* or for download *here*. 

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Chapter 1

Dean's surrounded by scorching heat and fire, but he's so badly beaten up he can't even pick himself up to get away. All he can do is lie on the ground, bleeding from the multiple lacerations Alastair left on him before leaving him to burn. He's going to die here all alone, and worst of all, he deserves it after everything he’s done.

“I'm sorry, Sam,” Dean chokes out. His only regret is that he won't be able to see Sam one last time to tell the overgrown lug that he's proud of him, that he loves him. The thought of the grief his younger brother will go through once he finds out he's lost the last remaining member of his family gives Dean enough strength to try for escape, but he only manages to drag himself a few more feet away from the blaze before collapsing. He coughs violently from the exertion, feeling increasingly light-headed as the fire eats up whatever precious oxygen is left in the warehouse.

“God Dammit,” Dean whispers, his voice breaking. Tears caused by a combination of sorrow and the thickening smoke mix with sweat and soot as they trickle down his face. It won't be long until the fire reaches him. Dean wonders morbidly if he'll die struggling to breathe as the smoke clogs up his lungs or screaming in agony as the flames burns him into ash.

There's a sudden crashing noise and a pair of boots appear in the line of Dean's sight. Dean squints up at the figure, but all his blurry vision can make out is a smudge of beige, black and white. The only feature he can distinguish clearly is a pair of bright blue eyes that glow with the reflection of the fiery hell encircling them.

“You gotta get out of here,” Dean croaks, not wanting someone else to die with him.

The figure doesn't move, simply continuing to stare down at Dean, uncaring of the raging inferno threatening to swallow them whole.

“You hear me? You have to leave!” Dean makes a weak gesture in the direction of where he knows the exit is. “Just leave me here,” he says more insistently as he feels-more-than-sees the person crouch down next to him. Dean sees the blurry head tilt.

“You don't think you deserved to be saved.” There's confusion in the man's tone, like he can't understand why Dean would consider himself so unworthy. Before Dean can protest any further, his savior reaches out and grips Dean tightly by the shoulder.

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Dean jolts awake in a cold sweat, every muscle in his body tense and quivering. His breaths burst out of him in short, ragged pants. He lies there for a moment with his hands clenched tightly around the cool sheets swathing his body as he tries to shake off the last remnants of the nightmare.

Dean actually counts himself lucky that the recurring nightmares (as horrible and taxing as they
are) are one of the only lingering effect of his close brush with death – he could've wound up suffering from severe Post-traumatic Stress Disorder and lived the rest of his life anxious and depressed, flinching every time someone struck a lighter. As it is, the nightmares have lessened in severity and occurrence over time, so yeah, Dean counts himself lucky. Since his break up with Lisa a few months ago though, the nightmares have returned with a vengeance. More often than not, Dean wakes up with a scream caught in his throat.

The place on left Dean's shoulder where the unknown man had gripped him throbs in time with the rapid pounding of his heart. Unconsciously, Dean's hand flies to his shoulder, feeling the bump of slightly raised skin beneath the thin t-shirt he's wearing. He grasps it tightly as he focuses on taking deep, calming breaths of air and relaxing his body.

The handprint scar branded into the skin of his shoulder is the only proof Dean has that his mysterious savior wasn't just a hallucination brought on by oxygen deprivation. Dean had blacked out in the process of being carried out of the fire and woke up in the back of an ambulance with an oxygen mask over his mouth and nose and only the paramedics in sight. When he'd questioned them later, they said that he'd been discovered lying a safe distance away from the fire and that fire-fighters had found no one else in the vicinity. The handprint was the only burn he'd sustained from the fire and the doctors had been unable to explain how a man could've left such a mark.

Dean traces the smoothness of the handprint scar pensively. He sometimes wonders about his mysterious rescuer – who he was, why he'd been at the warehouse district that late at night, and why he'd risked his life to save a complete stranger. Most of all, Dean wonders what the stranger had seen in him to make him think that Dean was worth saving. His right fist clenches tightly as he feels the phantom sensation of the cold steel of a gun in his hand again, a child's shrill cry of terror echoing in his head. No, as far Dean's concerned, dying in agony in that fire would've been fitting punishment for his past actions.

Dean shakes his head, stopping himself before he gets even more entangled in the painful memories of his past. His hand fumbles around his bedside table until he finds the small remote that controls his sound system. He hits the play button and the soothing melody of Led Zeppelin's *Stairway to Heaven* filters out through the speakers he's got mounted in every room in the tiny apartment. Dean settles back into bed and allows the music to flow through him.

By the time the song ends, his body has lost most of it's previous tension. Dean glances over at blinking digits on his bedside clock. It's a little earlier than he normally gets up, but there's no way he's getting back to sleep. Dean drags his body out of bed and into the shower, hoping the water will wash away the last dregs of the nightmare.

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One cold shower and a cup of strong, black coffee later, Dean feels marginally more human. It's easier to push the dark memories away when he's sitting at the kitchen counter, eating his breakfast with bright sunlight pouring in the windows. He washes down the last bit of his omelet with a final swallow of hot coffee before dumping both mug and plate into the sink to be washed later. He needs to get to work. He pours the rest of the coffee from the pot into a tumbler, slings his briefcase-messenger bag over his shoulder and heads out.
After Sam moved in with Jessica last semester, Dean had moved into his own small place midway between Stanford and San Francisco so he could easily visit Sam if he wanted to (or vice versa) while having a shorter commute to work in the city. It only takes him about an hour by train to get to his work place compared to the almost two hour long journey before, but every minute of it is boring as hell. Dean would give anything to be in his ’67 Chevy Impala cruising down the highway, but parking's a bitch to find in the city so that's a no go.

Dean breaks the monotony of the journey by listening to the brand-new ipod Ellen and Jo had given him for Christmas. He usually loathes all the newfangled technology that comes out faster than anyone could possibly need or keep up with, but Ash had uploaded what seemed to be the entire discography of every classic rock band in existence onto the ipod and even Dean couldn't resist that. He hasn't gone as far as buying an ipod jack for the impala like Sam suggested though, preferring to stick with the old, battered box of cassette tapes he keeps in the glove compartment.

Lynyrd Skynyrd's *Free Bird* comes on on his shuffle playlist. Dean scrolls through his massive song library looking for something else. He's just not in a very *Free Bird* mood this morning, no matter how epic that guitar solo at the end is.

*If I leave here tomorrow...Would you still remember me?*

Dean finally selects Metallica just as Ronnie Van Zant starts crooning *Free Bird's* opening line into his ear. Dean grins in satisfaction as the first beats of *Enter Sandman* begin. There's nothing like a bit of Metallica to pump a person up in the morning. Unable to help himself, Dean surreptitiously taps his foot to the beat. Despite how his morning has started, maybe things won't be so bad today.

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Dean sadly presses pause and tucks his ipod away when he arrives in front of Sandover's with 5 minutes to spare. He straightens his shirt and pulls on his blazer before stepping foot into the building. He normally starts out the day looking neat and tidy as per the company's strict regulations, but by the end of the first hour, he's got his sleeves rolled up to his elbows, his first button undone and his hair ruffled from running his hand through it multiple times in frustration. Dean's just thankful that he's not high up enough in the office food chain that he has to wear a freaking tie and slick down his hair. As it is, he can feel his soul being sucked away by the evil that is corporate capitalism as he swipes in at security and makes his way towards his cubicle in the customer service department.

Despite only having a GED to his name, Dean's easy charm put customers at ease, so after a short trial period, Sandover had hired him on as a full-time customer service representative. To be perfectly honest, Dean hates his job, but he sticks with it because Sandover pays better than most companies out there and hell would freeze over before Dean would even consider going back to his old ways of getting money.

Dean needs that extra bit of money because despite Sam being a full-ride student, he still relies on Dean for other expenses. Dean's refusal to allow Sam take on a part-time job – preferring the kid to concentrate solely on his studies – means that they both have to get by on Dean's monthly checks alone. Dean's hoping that his excellent track record with customers will soon lead to a position in the sales department, or at the very least, a boost in his salary.
The better-than-average pay is the only thing that keeps Dean from going completely ballistic as he spends the first hour of work dealing with a prissy, elderly woman who is probably half-deaf. By the time he hangs up, Dean's ready to punch somebody in the face. He rips off his headset and tosses it onto his desk with a loud clatter, ignoring the blinking lights on his phone telling him that there are other customers that need attending to.

“Well, somebody's Mr. Grumpy-pants this morning.”

Dean spins his chair around to face Pamela who's wheeled her own chair over from her cubicle right across from his.

“Ugh, I've currently got the headache the size of Nebraska and...” Dean hesitates slightly before continuing. “...And I didn't sleep too good last night.”

Pamela's teasing look immediately turns more serious. “Nightmare again?”

Dean nods. “Yeah, this one was more intense than usual.”

Pamela's one of the few people that knows about Dean's nightmares since she'd found him thrashing on the couch in the workers' lounge when he'd tried to sneak in a nap during their lunch break. Embarrassed by his display of weakness, Dean had sworn her to secrecy before adamantly ignoring her for the rest of the day. The next day, she'd called him out on it, swatted him on the head and made him apologize before continuing on with their usual flirty banter like nothing had changed.

“I'll bring you a batch of my herbal stuff tomorrow.” Pamela makes a note of it on her phone. “Should help a bit.”

Dean scrunches up his face in disgust.

“If you keep making that expression, your face will freeze that way and it'd be such a waste of a pretty face,” Pamela scolds teasingly. “Besides, you know my stuff works way better than all that crap the docs try to make you take.”

It's true. Pamela's concoction may taste like absolute shit, but it's helped Dean sleep better than any of the medication he's been prescribed has - the last few bottles of pills are still sitting in Dean's bathroom cabinet mostly untouched.

“Pamela, have I told you how much I love you?” Dean groans out.

“Yes, but you can always say it again,” Pamela says, winking at him.

“Well then, I love you. I love you. I love you,” Dean declares.

“Awww, Dean. You really know how to make a girl feel special.” Pamela grins at him. “For that, I'll do this for now.” She reaches out and begins to massage Dean's throbbing temples gently.

“I really love you.” Dean sighs and leans into the soothing ministrations. He can feel the pounding in his head ease off a little.

Pamela pulls off after a few minutes. “Better?”

“Loads.” Dean nods gratefully at her. “Sometimes, I wish hadn't broken it off with Lisa. At least she would wake me up before the nightmares really got going.” Dean can't help the pang of sadness that tugs at his chest as he remembers how the past year with Lisa had been some of the
best times of his life. “Damn, she was a saint for putting up with my baggage.” Lisa had been so sweet, so patient, so understanding. She'd never pushed him, just been there when he'd needed her.

“Oh sweetie, you broke up with Lisa for a reason.”

“Yeah, I know. She wanted marriage, kids – the whole freaking white picket fence scenario and I couldn't do it. Not with Sam still relying on me.” Dean sighs, running a hand down his face. “I just miss it, you know? The warmth of a body next to me on the bed, or the pleasure of coming home to a smile. I just wish there was someone—”

“Do my ears deceive me? Is Dean Winchester finally bemoaning the single life?” A loud voice rings out. Dean flinches as Gabriel's head pops up from the other side of his left cubicle partition. Dean loves Gabriel most of the time, but he's not really in the mood for the other man's antics today.

“Well, good for you! You'd hadn't said anything for the last few months so I was worried that Lisa had scared you celibate.”

“Hello, Gabriel,” Pamela says, rolling her eyes. “Ever heard of a private conversation?”

“Fear not, Dean! I have the perfect solution for you!” Gabriel continues, completely ignoring Pamela. “I've ordered you a super-special something for your birthday.”

“Oh god, Gabriel. Please tell me you didn't order me a stripper or something,” Dean groans, recalling the kiss-o-gram Gabriel had sent their boss on their boss's birthday last year.

“No, not a stripper. Not something so mundane. I've got you something better! Trust me, You'll love it.”

Before Dean can question Gabriel further, Gabriel skips away, probably off to steal a lollipop from one of the many receptionists' candy bowls.

“I'm screwed, aren't I?” Dean moans, burying his face into his heads.

“I'm sure it isn't that bad,” Pamela says, trying to comfort him. “He's probably gotten you a drilldo or something.”

Dean moans even louder.

“Or maybe,” Pamela says, grinning wickedly. “He's gotten you one of those sparkly dildos from Twilight that you can ice in the fridge for 'authenticity'.”

Dean glares at Pamela. “Not. Helping,” he grits out. “And please never, ever tell me how you know about that Twilight thing.”

Dean jams his headset back on and quickly jabs one of the blinking lights on his phone in order to avoid listening to Pamela list all the lurid sex toys she can think of. The best case scenario he can hope for is that whatever Gabriel's ordered for him won't be delivered to him while he's at work.

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By the time Dean gets home at night, he's completely spent. The one good thing about his exhaustion is that he'll be way too tired to dream. He eats microwaved leftovers for dinner and spends the rest of the night watching episodes of *Dr. Sexy MD* he has saved on his DVR.

As he crawls into his queen-sized bed later, he's struck by how alone he is. Dean's last thought before he drifts off into sleep is that maybe Gabriel has a point about him being single for too long and that he should try dipping his toe back in that dating pool.

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Chapter 2

Dean's having a much better morning having slept soundly through the night, but the pleasant morning is interrupted by the abrupt ringing of his doorbell. Wondering who the hell would be by so early in the morning, Dean quickly finishes up buttoning his shirt and makes his way through his apartment to the front door. He yanks the door open and finds himself face-to-face with a delivery man.

“Good morning,” the delivery man chirps in a way too chipper tone. “I'm looking for a Mr. Dean Winchester?”

“Yeah, that's me,” Dean replies.

“We have a package for you sent by Heaven Technologies at the request of a Mr. Gabriel Novak.”

Gabriel's present has arrived.

That wakes Dean right up.

“If you sign here, please?” The delivery man thrusts his clipboard and pen at Dean. Dean scrawls his signature on the dotted line with a little hesitation.

“Everything seems to be in order,” the delivery man says after looking over the document and checking off a few boxes. He tears off the bottom part of the sheet and hands it to Dean. “Here's your receipt. We'll have your package right up.”

Dean watches with wide eyes as two burly delivery men come grunting up the stairs carrying a large, shiny, metallic box. He steps back to allow the two men to squeeze past him into his apartment. When they lower the box to the ground, Dean can see that it comes to just below his waist and is about as wide.

What the hell has Gabriel bought him?

Dean examines the outside of the box from top to bottom once the men have left, but the smooth, flat surfaces give no indication of what could possibly be inside. The only embellishment is the words HEAVEN TECHNOLOGIES stamped across the top in large, silver block letters. Dubiously, Dean undoes the four locks on sides of the box and slides the top off.

Nestled on the foam cushion inside the box is a naked man.

Dean swears violently and recoils away from the box so hard, he falls backwards and practically cracks his tail bone on the floor.

Gabriel might be the master prankster, but even he wouldn't go as far as sending someone a corpse as a birthday gift - It's gotta be a mannequin or doll of some kind. Dean scrambles back to his feet and peers back inside the box.

The 'man' hasn't woken up or moved from his original curled-up, fetal position.

Dean gingerly pulls an official looking document from a panel next to the man's head, hoping it
will hold some clue as to what his gift is.

Dear Mr. Winchester,

We would like the thank you for registering to participate in Heaven Technologies' month-long trial with one of our very own 'Angels'. The information we will gather from your interactions with the humanoid robot prototype will enable us to discover any problematic areas with our product and its services, thus allowing us to provide a more satisfactory experience for our future customers once official production and distribution of our product begins.

As stated on the application forms filled out during the sign-up process, this model of 'Angel' is designed to be your ideal romantic partner. The prototype that has been sent to your residence has been customized with the personal information provided to us.

So it's a robot. That explains a lot.

Abandoning the letter for the moment, Dean stoops down closer to examine his gift more carefully.

The robot really is very realistic. If it wasn't for it's unnatural stillness, Dean would definitely have mistaken it for a real, live human. He runs a careful finger along its naked shoulder. The synthetic skin certainly feels exactly like real human skin would and doesn't have that rubbery, plastic look to it that most robots Dean's seen on Discovery channel documentaries have.

Studying its face, Dean can't help but notice that it's also very attractive with high cheekbones, pink, full lips and the faint shadow of stubble along its jaw line. Dean can understand why the company would call its robots 'Angels' if they all looked this heavenly. The robot's smooth, pale skin contrasts nicely with its mop of slightly messy, dark brown hair, and its lean body has good muscle tone. To put it simply, if it'd been a real person Dean had spotted it at a bar, Dean would've seriously considered hitting on it.

In a second panel next to the robot is what seems to be the instruction manual. Dean picks it up and flips past the first few pages of text before he stops on the one titled “How to activate your Angel”.

Activating your very own angel is very simple and hassle-free! All it takes is a kiss on the lips then sit back and bask in the pleasure your angel can bring you!

He has to kiss the damn thing to turn it on? Un-freaking-believable.

Torn between the curiosity to know how the robot would work and the desire to call Gabriel and get him to send the thing back, Dean stares at the robot for a few moments. In the end, curiosity wins out.

“Here goes nothing.” Dean kneels down close and brushes his lips against the robot's. Those few seconds of contact are enough to give Dean the impression of how soft the robot's lips are. Dean pulls back and waits expectantly.

Nothing happens.
There's no whirring sound of activation, no twitch of movement, no nothing. Dean pokes it in the shoulder, hoping to get some kind of reaction, but the thing remains as still as ever.

“Well, that was a complete waste,” Deam grumbles, feeling a little foolish. “Trust Gabriel to get me something that doesn't even work.”

Dean catches sight of the clock as he stands up and swears. He's spent way too much time examining the robot and now he's running late for work. Dean grabs his work stuff and dashes out the door, not noticing the flutter of lashes and the flash of blue that appears as the robot opens its eyes.

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For the first time since he's started working at Sandover's, Dean is late so he's really not too happy as he corners Gabriel at the water cooler later.

“You got me a robot? No, not just a robot! A frigging Sex-bot!” Dean hisses.

“It's not just a sex-bot! Though if the specs Heaven Technologies showed me are true, then the sex would be fantastic!” Gabriel grins at Dean, but falters at Dean's thunderous expression. “I thought it would be an unusual but fun gift! I mean, it's not just for sex. The thing is supposed to be for companionship as well! The brochure said that they were capable of holding full conversations on your favorite topics and gauging your emotions and responding appropriately.”

“It can do all that?” Dean asks skeptically.

“Yeah! And more! I submitted all this information about what you like and stuff so they could adjust the robot to suit your needs.” Gabriel takes on a more serious look. “Look, man. I swear I didn't order the robot for you as a joke. If not for sex, I honestly thought you could use the company. I saw how much your break up with Lisa hurt you. Plus it's been a few months, but you don't seem interested in getting back in the game. I just figured it wouldn't hurt to have something to liven up your place.” It's one of those rare moments where Gabriel is being absolutely sincere.

Dean sighs, pinching the bridge of his nose. Any annoyance at Gabriel is slowly draining away. “How did you manage to get your hands on something like this anyways?”

Gabriel shrugs. “Got some really legit looking letter in the mail formally asking me if I was interested. I was already dating Kali so I was going to toss it, but you just came to mind and I signed you up.”

“Right. Well, despite your good intentions, I'm sorry to inform you that the thing doesn't work.”

“What?”

“Yeah. I kissed it to power up just like it said in the instruc –“

“Wait, you have to kiss it to activate it?” Gabriel exclaims, his eyes lighting up. He's back to his teasing in less than a second, all traces of his previous earnestness gone. “It's like Sleeping Beauty!
Only true love's kiss will break the spell!” Gabriel dissolves into peals of laughter.

“Shut up, Gabe,” Dean growls. “The damn instruction manual said so.”

“Maybe you didn't do it right! Maybe you have to use tongue! Or maybe your kissing skills sucked so badly that the robot chose to remain asleep rather than wake up and have to face you.”

Gabriel spends the rest of the day snickering at Dean so much that it makes Dean question his friendship with shorter man all over again.

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Dean's surprised to see the lights in his apartment on when he arrives home at night. He smells the delicious scent of cooking meat wafting from the kitchen.

“Sam?” He calls out upon hearing the clatter of utensils. Dean figures it's probably his younger brother trying to surprise him with dinner even though his birthday isn't until next Tuesday. He makes his way to the kitchen and stops short, gaping.

It's definitely not Sam.

Actually, it's the robot, looking very much up and running as it bustles around the kitchen wearing nothing but Dean's ratty, green apron. Dean's vantage point affords him a very good look at the robot's nicely-shaped ass before Dean realizes what he's doing and quickly looks away. He clears his throat awkwardly to draw attention to himself.

“Hello, Dean,” it says in greeting as it turns around to face him.

Again, Dean is struck by how attractive the robot is. He finds himself staring for a few seconds longer than appropriate as he admires the robot's features before he remembers the weird situation he is in. “What the hell are you doing?” he blurts out.

“I am making you dinner,” the robot replies, lifting the ketchup bottle it's holding a little higher. “Please have a seat. It shall be ready shortly.”

“Give me that,” Dean says, striding over and trying to grab the bottle out of the robot's grasp. He accidentally yanks a little too hard. The bottle goes flying through the air and breaks upon on impact with the ground. A good amount of the red, sticky sauce splatters everywhere. Dean swears as he grabs a kitchen rag and attempts to mop up the mess.

There's a knock on his door.

“Dean? Are you okay in there?” A woman calls out.

“Shit!” Dean panics. There's no way he's going to explain to his landlady who the robot is and what it's doing in Dean's apartment, especially when it's stark naked save for the apron. He really doesn't want Missouri, the older woman who's been nothing but kind and motherly to him, thinking he's into kinky sex games.
He grabs the robot and herds it toward his bedroom. “Stay in here and don't make sound,” he instructs as he shoves the robot in and shuts the door firmly after it.

“Dean?” More knocking comes from behind his front door. "If you don't open this door in the next 30 seconds, I'm going to get the master key."

Dean skids to a halt in front of the door, runs a hand through his hair in an attempt to smooth it down before adopting a casual pose and pulling open the door. “Hey, Missouri.” His breezy manner is ruined a bit by the fact he's still breathing a little hard.

“Is everything okay? I heard something crash.” Missouri attempts to peer around him into the apartment.

“It's all good. I just dropped a ketchup bottle on the floor is all.”

Missouri narrows her eyes at him. “Don't you try to lie to me, Dean Winchester.”

“Honest! I can show you the mess on the floor if you'd like.” Dean widens his eyes innocently.

“Alright, boy. You let me know if you need anything, you hear? I told Bobby that I'd keep an eye on you when he sent you over here.”

“You know I will, Missouri. Thanks!” Dean waves her goodbye and shuts the door. He hates being so dismissive, but he's got bigger problems to deal with right now.

The robot looks up from where it's sitting at the foot of his bed as Dean enters the bedroom.

“Since we're both in the bedroom, would you like to have sex now?” it asks.

Dean gapes at the robot for a good 10 seconds. “Jesus Christ! No!” He rummages around his closet for a while before he pulls out a pair of bright-orange boxer shorts given to him by Gabriel that he's never worn and a faded gray AC/DC t-shirt that's tight on him now. “Put these on,” he orders. “Then come back outside.”

He practically runs out of the room as the robot shamelessly pulls off the apron. Thankfully, Dean's able to get out before he's catches a glimpse of anything. Somehow the thought that the robot is junkless like a Ken doll crosses his mind and Dean shudders. He distracts himself from further disturbing thoughts involving the robot and nudity by cleaning up the remaining ketchup on the floor.

“I don't understand your refusal at sex,” the robot says once it returns outside. “This vessel was designed to appeal to you.” The robot plucks at the t-shirt it's now wearing. “You don't have to be shy around me - we'll be seeing each other naked when we engage in sexual intercourse.”

“Stop saying 'sex' or 'sexual intercourse' or any other word related to sex because we are not having sex! Not now, not ever!” Dean snaps.

“If you do not wish to have sex at this moment, would you like to have dinner?” The robot asks, missing Dean's point completely.

Dean wants to slam his head against a desk. He gives up.
“Sure, dinner sounds great.” He perches himself onto one of the chairs at the kitchen counter that doubles as a mini-dining table. Moments later, he's got the juiciest looking bacon-cheeseburger sitting in front of him with golden potato wedges that look equally as appetizing on the side.

“According to the information on your personal profile uploaded into my data banks, this is one of your favorite dishes. Please enjoy.”

Dean ignores the robot's weird comment in favor of taking a bite out of the burger. He's unable to hold back a moan as meat juice dribbles down his chin. Any reservations he had about the robot is temporarily forgotten in the face of one of the most delicious things Dean has had the pleasure of putting in his mouth.

“This is amazing!” he exclaims after swallowing. “How'd you learn to cook like this?”

“I have many recipes stored in my data banks. It's only a matter of accessing them and carrying out the instructions properly. Being a good cook is one of my customizations since it was one of the aspects you desired in your perfect boyfriend.”

Dean wonders what else Gabriel had submitted in the trial application. He takes another big bite of the burger and chews slowly, wanting to savor each mouthful.

"So the burger is satisfactory?"

Dean looks up and sees the robot watching him intently. “Totally.” The only burgers Dean can think of that could measure up to this one are the ones Ellen whip up at The Roadhouse. “Thanks for this, er...wait...what do I call you?”

“My default name is Castiel.”

“Alright, Cas then.”

“Cas?” The robot tilts its head a little.

“Yeah, you know, a nickname. Castiel is a bit of a mouthful to say. Cas is easy.”

“Of course, Dean. You may call me whatever you wish, including monikers such as honey, darling, pumpkin, swee–“

“I get the picture.” Dean holds up a hand to stop Castiel continuing. “Anyways, thanks for the burger, Cas.”

“It was my pleasure.” The robot nods then proceeds to starting cleaning the pan he used to cook the burger. This gives Dean the opportunity to observe the robot.

Castiel is really unlike any robot Dean's ever seen anywhere. There's no wires visible, no tinny, monotonous toned voice, no sounds of parts moving – essentially no external sign of Castiel being a robot at all. The only barely-noticeable giveaway is a slight stiffness to the robot's movements, but even that could be written off as nothing.

Once Dean's finished eating, he brings his empty plates over to the sink where Castiel is still scrubbing vigorously at the pan.
“Thanks again for the meal, Cas,” he says. “It really hit the spot.” Dean reaches over to dump the plate into the sink, their hands brushing together slightly. The back of Dean's hand tingles a bit at the contact. He quickly withdraws his hand and stammers out, “I...I'll be in the living room watching some TV. Come out when you're done here, ok?”

“Ok, Dean.” The robot nods in acknowledgement.

Dean grabs a beer from the fridge then retreats to the living room. He resists the urge to rub the spot where their hands touched. He doesn't understand why his body is reacting this way. Sure, Castiel is as good looking, but he's a frigging robot! Maybe he really is more starved for companionship than he thought.

Dean runs a hand over his face before switching the TV on. Exhausted by the day's work, he finds himself being lulled into sleep by the background TV noise.

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Chapter 3

When Dean blinks awake the next morning, he immediately has the distinct feeling that someone is watching him. Cracking open an eye, he spots Castiel perched on the arm of the couch near his feet with its unblinking gaze fixed on him.

“Hello, Dean. What were you dreaming about?”

Dean scrambles up into sitting position. “What? Do you get your freak on by watching other people sleep? What time is it anyways?”

“You look peaceful when you sleep,” Castiel comments. “It is approximately 6:10 AM. I was going to wake you in 5 minutes so that you would have sufficient time to get ready for work.”

Dean rolls off the couch. Castiel stands up as well.

“Wait, where did you sleep?” Dean asks.

“I do not require sleep. For your convenience, I run a energy source developed by Heaven Technologies called 'grace'. I do not need to be recharged, thus saving massive electricity bills on your part.”

Does this mean the robot spent the entire night just watching him sleep?

Dean blinks a few times at Castiel. “It's too early for this,” he mutters and heads toward his bathroom to shower and change for work.

Dean's pulling on his socks when he spots the letter from Heaven Technologies lying folded up on his bedside table. He hesitates slightly before picking it up. He skims over it quickly, finding the passage he's looking for under the confidentiality agreement - instructions on how to return Castiel to Heaven Technologies.

Sure, the first night with Castiel hadn't been as bad as he'd initially thought it was going to be, actually it had been kind of nice, but Dean doesn't need the robot. He's not going to use Castiel in the way the robot was meant to be used. He might as well return the robot to the company so that they can find a more suitable candidate. Dean copies down the name and number he's supposed to call before leaving his bedroom.

Castiel is in the kitchen with breakfast waiting for him. The bacon and eggs on the plate are arranged into the design of a smiley-face. A tiny worm of guilt settles in Dean's chest as he watches the robot fetch him a fork and knife, but he squashes it down. He shouldn't even be feeling bad about this - Castiel isn't a person, he's a freaking machine.

Dean distracts himself from this train of thought by taking a deep whiff of the food in front of him. It all looks and smells as delicious as the burger from last night had.

“I swear to god, Cas. If you keep this up, I'm going to become obese,” Dean says as he digs in, choosing to ignore the little voice that whispers to him that the robot isn't going to around long enough to do that. He pauses with a piece of bacon halfway to his mouth. “You're not just fattening me up so that you can drag me back to your base to feed me to your evil robot overlords, are you?”
Castiel just cants his head at him. The confused puppy expression on his face kind of adorable.

Dean shakes his head when he realizes what he just thought and proceeds to concentrate more than necessary on his food so he can avoid looking at the robot before him. As delicious as the meal is, Dean's glad when he's finished so he can get out of the suddenly stifling apartment.

"Have a good day at work," Castiel says, handing Dean his thermos of hot coffee. Before Dean can react, the robot leans forward and gives him a light kiss on the cheek.

"Don't do that!" Dean yelps, jumping away.

"My apologies, Dean." The robot pulls back too.

"It's alright, Cas. I'll see you." Dean mutters, keeping his eyes averted and hurrying out the door. As he turns the corner of the corridor, he spots Castiel still standing at the open door, watching him. Feeling even more guilty, Dean gives Castiel a little a wave before continuing down the steps of the building.

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Dean makes the call during his short 10 minute coffee break in the morning. He stares at his phone with the digits glowing back at him for a good 5 of those minutes before Pamela finally snaps him out of his reverie by threatening to go find a priest to marry them if he keeps staring at it. Dean flips her the bird but hits dial as soon as she's gone.

"Hello, Balthazar Roche's office," A female voice comes from the other side.

"Hello, um...is Mr. Roche available to speak with right now?"

"I'm sorry. Mr. Roche isn't in the office right now."

"Oh..." Dean is slightly disappointed. He'd been hoping to get this over with as soon as possible. "When will he be back?"

"I'm afraid Mr. Roche won't be returning to work until Monday. Would you like to leave him a message?"

"Erm...Yeah, sure. My name is Dean Winchester. I'm calling him regarding the return of one of Heaven Technologies' products."

"Of course, sir. May I inquire the name of the product of which you wish to return?"

"Um...it's name is Castiel. It's an 'Angel'. A prototype actually."

"Alright, sir. If you'd leave me your contact details, I'll have Mr. Roche get back to you as soon as possible."
Dean rattles off his phone number and email address before ending the call.

Damn. Looks like he'll be keeping Castiel a little longer.

Dean stops by Gabriel's desk on the way back to his own. “Hey, Gabe.”

Gabriel's cubicle is its usual mess with his work papers strewned across his desk and his multiple boxes of sweets and cookies lined up along the sides. He's got a definitely not-safe-for-work poster of a scantily clad, busty woman blowing a kiss on one hung on one side and a collection of colorful candy wrappers tacked up on the other.

“Dean-o, my man! What's up?” Gabriel spins his chair around to face Dean. “You manage to get that robot working?”

Dean is momentarily distracted by the bright yellow tie Gabriel is wearing today. Upon closer examination, Dean can make out the pattern of cupcakes on it.

"Earth to Dean?"

"Wha-?" Dean tears his eyes away from the unusual tie. "Oh yeah, I got home and the things was running."

“So Prince Charming's kiss worked after all!” Gabriel crows.

Dean blushed. “Shut up, Gabe.”

“Soooooo? How was it? Did you guys...” Gabriel leans forward and whispers. “…spend the night doing the horizontal mambo?”


"C'mon, Dean. People get their jollies off with blow-up dolls. Robots are probably the next thing coming. You're ahead of the times, man!”

“I'm going to ignore everything you just said,” Dean says before rubbing the back of his neck nervously. “Actually, I just thought that I let you know that I've decided to return Castiel to Heaven Technologies.”

Gabriel's expression goes from one of amusement to one of anger so fast, Dean wonders how the guy doesn't have emotional whiplash.

“You what?” Gabriel asks softly.

Dean fights the urge to step back at the venomous tone in Gabriel's voice. “I've decided to...return Castiel.”

“Why?”

“I...I don't need him. I mean, I'm not going to use him so I-”

“So you just decided to throw him away like a piece of garbage! He...This...” Gabriel seems so furious that he can't even get a word out. Dean doesn't think he's ever seen Gabriel so mad.
“Woah...chill out, dude. I'm sorry if I hurt your feelings by not wanting to keep your present. I totally appreciate it, ok?” Dean says in a placating tone. He's not even sure why Gabriel is so angry.

“That's not what this is about!” Gabriel snaps, standing up. Gabriel is a good foot shorter than Dean, but Dean can't help but cower a little under Gabriel's fury. The shorter man glares up at him.

“You don't get it. Castiel's special.” Gabriel stares into Dean's eyes a little longer as if searching for something before he finally deflates. “I'm disappointed in you, Dean Winchester.” The man heaves a sigh and marches away, leaving Dean staring bewilderingly after him.

“What the hell?” Dean murmurs. “The way he reacted, you'd think I'd broke his little brother's heart of something.”

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Dean is still puzzling over Gabriel's over-the-top anger when he arrives home that night. The earlier guilt from this morning returns when he sees that Castiel is waiting to greet him at the door.

“Hello, Dean.”

“Hey, Cas.” Dean tosses his work bag onto one of the dining stools and sits down heavily on the other.

“You seem tired.”

“Bad day at work is all.”

“Would you like to have sex? The pleasure may cheer you up.”

Dean groans, burying his face in to his hands.

Maybe it's not such a bad thing that he's returning Castiel after all.

“How many times do I have to tell you, Cas? No sex for us so stop asking, ok?”

“I'm sorry, Dean.” The robot does look a little apologetic, a small furrow marring his brow.

Dean sighs. “It's fine, Cas. I'm assuming you cooked me something again?”

“Oh, Yes!” The robot proceeds to serve Dean up another wonderful dish, pasta this time.

Dean quickly starts eating. The hot meal has an immediate lightening effect on his dark mood.

“Your brother called today,” Castiel mentions to him when they are both sitting on the couch watching the latest episode of Dr. Sexy together later.
“He did? You didn't pick up, did you?” Dean asks, slightly panicked at the prospect of his brother and Castiel speaking to each other.

“No, I wasn't sure I was allowed. He left a message on your messaging system.”

Dean fumbles for one of his cordless phones and dials his voice mail.

“Hey, Dean. It's Sam. You're not picking up your cell so I figured I'd just leave a message here for you for when you get home from work. I'm just calling to remind you that Jess and I are coming over a little earlier tomorrow, then we can head over to The Roadhouse together for your birthday bash. That's it. Can't wait to see you, bro.”

Dean stares at the phone in his hand as if it's personally offended him.

Shit. Sam's coming over. With Jess. And Castiel will be here. Shit.

Dean glances over at the robot who is intently watching a nurse and an intern make out on the television screen.

How the hell is he supposed to pull this off?

“Hey, Cas?”

The robot turns his attention away from the show and onto Dean. “Yes, Dean.”

“I need you to do something for me, ok? Something huge.”

“Of course, Dean. Anything.”

Dean turns down the volume of the television before continuing, “Here's the deal. My younger brother and his girlfriend are coming over tomorrow and I need you to act normal.”

“Of course, Dean.”

“This is serious, Cas,” Dean says, looking Castiel dead in the eye. “Sam and Jess can't find out that you're a robot. That means no randomly asking me if I want to have sex or talking about your 'data banks' or anything like that. Do you think you could do that? Just for an hour or two?”

“Of course, Dean.”

Oh, yeah. This is going to go great.

“Look, I'll make you a deal. If this all goes smoothly, then I promise I'll bring you out on Sunday.”

“On a date?”

Dean's stomach does a flip at the 'd' word, but he nods anyways. “Yeah, Cas. A date.”

Castiel's lips quirk upward in semblance of a very small smile. The robot's been quite expressionless for the short while Dean's had him so the barely-there human expression surprises
Dean a lot. It delights him as well.

Dean spends the rest of the night making up a plausible back story for Castiel, getting Castiel to memorize it, then trying to educate Castiel on the finer points of being human. By the time he falls into bed, he's even more exhausted than usual but a little less worried that Castiel is going to blow things tomorrow.

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“You need clothes,” Dean comments through a mouthful of toasted bagel. “I’d let you wear my stuff, but Sammy has freaky observation skills, he’ll notice that you’re wearing my clothes and ask why. We have to go to the mall and pick something up for you.”

Castiel's been wearing Dean's hand-me-downs for the last few days and as they prepare for the shopping expedition, Dean finds himself scouring his closet for more clothes that will fit Castiel. With some difficulty, he manages to find another old pair of jeans and a shirt for Castiel to wear in public.

“Here.” He shoves the clothes into Castiel's arms. “Change into these. We'll get going when you're done.”

Dean rushes out of the room as Castiel obediently begins to change out of his current clothing. It seems that Dean has yet to be able to teach the robot modesty. Dean grabs his keys, his phone and his wallet and takes another sip of his coffee as he waits. He's slightly apprehensive about finally taking Castiel out in public, but he's pretty sure he can handle it.

“I am ready, Dean.”

Dean spins around on his seat and almost spits out his coffee. He ends up swallowing the entire mouthful and coughing as the scalding-hot liquid burns its way down his throat.

Castiel looks good. Correction. He looks damn good.

The jeans are loose on Castiel so they hang low on his hips. There's just enough room that Dean could hook his thumbs on the insides of the waistband and tug Castiel closer if he wanted. It's the same with the shirt. Castiel's collar bone peeks out from under the collar, begging to be licked and nipped at until there are bruises left behind. The marks would announce to the world that Castiel was his.

“You need a belt,” Dean croaks out, his throat suddenly very dry. “And a jacket.”

Dean finds Castiel a good belt, but the only jacket he can find that will remotely fit Castiel is a tan trenchcoat he'd gotten for a costume party a few years ago when he'd gone as Constantine. The coat is now tight across Dean's broader frame, but it's about a size too big on Castiel's slighter stature. It hangs off Castiel's shoulder in a boxy shape which is actually a good thing for Dean as it obscures all those tempting flashes of skin from sight.

“Alright, let's go.”

It's a short distance over to the local mall, but Dean never a misses a chance to take his impala out for a spin during the weekends.

“If there's one thing you need to know, it's that this car is the most important object in the entire universe,” Dean announces, running a hand along the impala's sturdy frame. “She's my baby.”

“It's nice,” is all Castiel says. “And I do not understand why the car would be female. It is not alive, thus it has no gender.”
“Don't listen to him, baby. He doesn't know what he's talking about,” Dean murmurs to the car, patting the impala's dash gently. “And you!” He angles himself toward Castiel as he pulls out onto the road that will take them to the mall. “First things first, all cars and ships are girls. Next thing, nice? That's all you have to say about my baby? She is so much more than nice!” Dean spends the rest of the drive to the mall waxing on about the impala and why she's better than all those new, flashy cars with silly features like being able to tell you your horoscope for the day.

"And what's with the self-parking thing? If you can't park your own car then you shouldn't be allowed to drive," Dean gripes as he pulls into the mall. He's still a little bit peeved over Castiel's casual stance toward his car. Dean steers the impala smoothly into a parking spot near the entrance and switches the engine off. He turns toward Castiel. “Are you starting to appreciate my baby a little more now?”

“Yes, Dean.”

“Never mind.” Dean sighs, knowing that his entire lecture has gone over Castiel's head. “I'm thinking we start at the thrift store. If we can't find something in there, we can go over to Target next.”

Castiel follows Dean obediently to the thrift store nestled in the corner of the mall. The inside of the store is a mess of clothes, shoes and other knick-knacks that other people have donated. Dean notices that Castiel seems overwhelmed by all the choices in front of him, but Dean's been shopping at places like this since he was a kid and maneuvers through the aisles like a pro. He snatches up anything that seems like it'd fit Castiel, is in decent shape and not a hideous shade or pattern.

“See anything you like?” He asks as he returns to where Castiel is still sifting through a rack at the front of the store.

“I don't know.” Castiel frowns at a shirt that is a particularly horrible puke-yellow color.

“It's not that hard, Cas. You just pick what you like,” Dean says as he snatches the horrendous shirt away from Castiel and tosses it behind a pile of knit sweaters where it will hopefully never see the light of day again.

“What I like?”

“Yeah, you know? What looks good to you. What you want.” Castiel still seems confused so Dean decides to simplify it even more. “I picked some stuff for you. You can choose from there.” He leads Castiel over to a display table and lays out the couple of shirts he's snagged. “Which one do you want?”

“Want?” Again, Castiel seems by confused by the concept.

“Yeah, like what do you want to wear? What do you want to see on yourself?” Castiel takes another long moment thinking about until Dean eventually just sighs in exasperation. He holds up two of the shirts he chose. “Just pick one of these two shirts.”

“I don't know. Which do you like, Dean?”

Dean finally realizes that the concept of want and choice are foreign to Castiel as poetry is to fish.
“This isn't about what I want, Cas. This is about what you want. It's simple. Do you like brown or blue?”

There's another slight pause before Castiel finally answers slowly. “I suppose, I...like the blue.”

“Then blue it is.” Dean's glad Castiel likes the blue because he may or may not have chosen the shirt because it matched the shade of Castiel's eyes almost perfectly.

Dean leads Castiel slowly through picking which shirts he wants and soon they've got a couple of shirts chosen.

“Alright, dude. You're getting the hang of this.” Dean claps Castiel on the back. “Now you're going to try doing it without my help. Yes, by yourself,” Dean says when Castiel's head jerks around to looks at him, his eyes slightly wide. “You're going to go to that rack of jeans over there and pick out two pairs you like, ok? I'm going to go see if I can find you a decent pair of shoes. I'll come find you afterwards. I expect you to have found something.” Dean gives Castiel a shove toward the pants section of the shop before heading for the shoe racks at the back.

Dean manages to find a sturdy pair of boots in Castiel's size. He grabs them and heads over toward where the pants are. He finds Castiel quickly, but the robot is not alone.

“You'd look great in these. You have a great ass,” one of the shop girls is saying to Castiel as she holds up a pair for Castiel to see.

“Thank you.” Castiel doesn't seem to understand that the shop girl is flirting with him. Dean feels a sudden surge of protectiveness over Castiel's innocence. He glowers at the back of the oblivious shop girl.

“No, seriously. These would look great too.” This time the girl goes even further and holds the jeans up against Castiel, making sure to press her hands against his ass as she does.

“Dean says I have to choose what I like and I don't think I like those. There's too much of this decoration on the back,” Castiel says, gesturing to the gaudy sequins that cover the entirety of the back-pockets of the jeans.

“Dean? Who's Dean?”

“That'd be me, sweetheart,” Dean practically growls at her.

The girl jumps around at the sound of his voice, eyes widening in surprise. “Oh, um...hi,” she squeaks out, cowering slightly under Dean's menacing glare. “Well, now that you're here, I'll leave you two to it then,” She sputters before hurrying away.

“Dean, I think I like these two.” Castiel holds up two pair of jeans for Dean to examine. One's a lighter shade of blue, the other darker. Both are plain and just the tiniest bit thread-bare.

“Good job, Cas. They'll do.” Dean shoots Castiel a thumbs up. The robot quirks his lips up in that tiny smile in return.

“Oh, now you gotta try all this on. I'm not going to have Sam thinking I picked a hobo off the street because this stuff doesn't fit.” Dean herds Castiel toward the changing room at the back. Luckily, the stall is almost as big as a normal handicapped one so Dean and Castiel are able to fit inside.
“Alright, try these on.” Dean thrusts a combination of clothing they've collected toward Castiel.

Castiel immediately begins to strip, revealing a large expanse of smooth, pale skin and a perfectly-toned chest and stomach before Dean quickly drops his eyes to the floor. The already-tiny space of the stall is suddenly suffocating and Dean can practically feel the movement in the air as Castiel changes next to him. Dean concentrates on the blackened remains of someone's leftover gum stuck in the carpet near his feet to distract himself from the semi-naked body next to him.

“Dean?”

When Dean looks back up, Castiel is fully-clothed. Everything fits nicely.

“Perfect.” Dean nods. “Next outfit.”

The entire process of Castiel trying on clothes is basically torture for Dean. He even resorts to imagining Bobby and his dad in pink, frilly underwear which is scarring on so many levels but serves to distract him from his rising lust. It's a relief when Castiel is finally done and Dean's able to get back out in the open.

Dean ends up buying 3 shirts, 2 button-downs to wear over them, both pairs of jeans and the boots for Castiel. Dean figures it'll be enough to tide them over until he can send Castiel back to Heaven Technologies. First, he has to make sure he and Castiel make it through bonding time with Sam and Jess later.

They make a quick stop at another store to pick up some underwear for Castiel – because there's no way Dean is sharing his with someone else – before they head home to prepare for Sam and Jess's arrival.

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Castiel's all dressed up in one of his new outfits at 7:30pm. Sam's expected to arrive at 8:00pm, but knowing his brother, Sam will be here early. Dean paces back and forth nervously as the minutes go by.

“You sure you know what you're supposed to do? What you're supposed to say?” He asks Castiel for the what's probably the hundredth time in the last hour.

“Yes, Dean.”

Dean continues to pace when he notices Castiel doing something strange enough that he pauses to watch. Castiel's forefinger is twitching slightly in a tapping motion. It's a tiny movement at irregular intervals, but it's there.

“Cas, are you nervous?” Dean asks, fascinated by such a human reaction from something not human.

“I...” Castiel seems to think about it. “I suppose I am. I'm worried I'll do something that will cause
your brother to dislike me, and I w...want your brother to like me. He's important to you.” Castiel frowns. “Nervousness is an unpleasant feeling.”

“Tell me about it, dude.” Dean chuckles, his own apprehensiveness receding in the face of reassuring Castiel. “Just remember what we went over and we'll make it through this.”

Castiel doesn't seem all that comforted by Dean's words. “But-”

Dean leans forward and catches Castiel's eye. “You'll be fine, Cas. Sam and Jess are good people and they're going to like you. I mean, I like you fine.”

“You like me?” The question is asked so simply and innocently, Dean feels like he's in the third grade.

“Yeah, Cas. I like you,” he answers just as plainly.

Castiel smiles that tiny smile again. This time it's a little bigger, enough so that the corners of Castiel's eyes crinkle and his nose wrinkles. A small tendril of warmth flickers in his chest and Dean finds himself wanting to see that smile more often.

“Why don't we go over your cover story one last time before they get here?”

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20 minutes later, Dean's doorbell rings and all of Dean's anxiety comes rushing back in a flash. It's too late to turn back now though. He pulls open the door to reveal his brother and Jessica smiling widely from across the threshold.

“Hey, Sammy!” He greets his brother warmly, forgetting that he doesn't do 'chick-flick moments' and pulling Sam into a hug.

Sam returns the hug just as tightly before pulling back. “Hey, Dean. How many times do I have to tell you that Sammy is a chubby twelve year old? It's Sam.”

“Whatsoever, Sammy.” Dean rolls his eyes before turning toward Jessica and embracing her too. “Jessica!”

“Hi, Dean. I know you're not just hugging me to cop a feel, are you?”

“Well, I just can't help myself, gorgeous.” Dean winks at her. Jessica giggles.

“And who is this?”

Dean tenses and slowly turns around. It's the moment of truth. His brother has finally spotted Castiel who's been standing quietly behind them observing the happy reunion.

“Oh yeah, uh...this is Cas...Castiel Novak. He's staying over for a bit.”
“Novak... as in Gabriel?”

“Yes, I am Gabriel's cousin. It's nice to meet you,” Castiel says politely. He steps forward and offers his hand to Sam.

“Likewise, Castiel. I'm Sam, Dean's younger brother. Anything he's told you about me isn't true.” Sam shakes Castiel's hand.

“So you're not the best younger brother there could be?” Castiel asks, tilting his head.

Sam tosses his head back in a full body laugh. “I like you, Castiel,” he says, clapping Castiel on the shoulder. “Did you really say that about me, Dean?”

“Cas is just being polite,” Dean grumbles.

“Oh-huh. You know I'm awesome.” Sam turns back and tugs Jessica forward to his side. “Cas,” Sam says, easily adopting the nickname his brother coined. “This is Jessica, my girlfriend.”

“Hello,” Castiel offers his hand again.

Jessica smiles sweetly at him as they shake hands. “Hi, Cas. Pleasure to meet you.”

“The pleasure is all mine,” Castiel replies.

“Alright, now that everybody knows everybody. Why don't we head over the living room?” Sam suggests.

“What? Why? I thought we were going to The Roadhouse,” Dean protests. He'd been hoping to get going as soon as possible, before Sam had enough time to figure out something was up with Castiel.

“C'mon, Dean. It's barely 8:00pm. Your bash doesn't officially start until 9:00pm. Even then, it'll take a while for things to get hopping. We have time.” Sam leads the group to the living room where they all settle down. Dean fights down an internal panic attack.

Sam glances around. “The place is cleaner than usual,” he observes. “Is Dean making you do the cleaning in exchange for letting you stay?”

“Dean has been very gracious to me,” Castiel replies just as he and Dean had rehearsed earlier. “He was kind enough to let me stay here since Gabriel is busy with Kali.”

“Yeah, I wouldn't want to hear my older brother's sex noises either.” Sam winks his nose up at the thought. "God knows how many times I've had to though, back when we were still living together. Dean should be paying me compensation for the trauma."

Sam and Jess ask a bit more about Castiel. Dean tenses whenever there's a particularly tricky question, but Castiel handles them all very well. It's hard to believe that the guy sitting here and chatting with Sam and Jess is the same socially-awkward robot that arrived a few days ago. Soon, Dean finds himself loosening up and having a good time too. Unknowingly, by relaxing back into the cushions a bit more, he's pressed against Castiel thigh to shoulder.

“We should get going, dude,” Sam finally says, getting up and stretching out his 6'4” frame. “Birthday boy can't be late to his own party.”
“It's not even really my birthday until Tuesday,” Dean argues good-naturedly.

“My birthday was just earlier this week,” Castiel comments.

Dean freezes. This isn't something they went over.

“Oh? When was it?” Jess inquires.

“It was on Thursday.” Castiel answers.

Thursday. The day Dean woke Castiel up. Dean's lips tingle as he recalls the soft kiss of life he'd planted on the robot that day.

“Then tonight's party is a double bash then!” Jessica's excited squeals interrupts Dean's thoughts.

“Huh? Oh, Cas isn't coming tonight,” he interjects quickly.

“What? Why? What've you got going on, Cas?”

“I haven't really got anything...” Castiel eyes drop to the floor.

“Then you're coming with!” Jess loops one arm around Cas's and starts tugging him toward the door.

Castiel follows reluctantly. “Only if Dean's okay with it.”

“Jesus, Dean. It's like you've got him trained or something,” Sam says loudly, not noticing Dean's slight flinch at how close to the truth Sam actually is. “Don't worry about it, Cas. As Dean's younger brother, I'm officially inviting you to the bash so now you've got to come.”

Castiel sends Dean a questioning look. Dean sighs and nods at Castiel. There's no way Sam or Jess are just going to leave Cas behind by himself so it looks like Cas is coming with.

“Alright, let's go then.” Dean can only hope things keep going smoothly.

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So far the night is going better than Dean could've hoped and he's having more fun than he's had in a long while. He does make sure to keep an eye on Castiel though he really shouldn't have worried. All his friends there take to Castiel immediately. The robot impresses Ellen and Jo so much with his ability to down a dozen shots without blinking that they are practically ready to adopt him.

The only real moment of panic Dean has is when Gabriel shows up. Dean grabs the man and drags him over to a quieter corner before Gabriel has taken a few steps into the bar.

“What's up, Dean?” There's still an icy tone to Gabriel's voice.

“Look, man. I'm sorry that I want to return Castiel, but I need a favor.”
“Why should I do anything for you?” Gabriel makes as if to leave, but Dean grabs his wrist.

“Please, Gabe. I’m desperate over here.”

Gabriel regards Dean carefully, then sighs at Dean's earnest face. “Alright, dude. What d'ya need?”

“Castiel is here. The robot.” Dean gestures toward where Castiel is sitting. “And I kind of told everyone he was your cousin.”

Gabriel turns to watch Castiel. “And you need me to carry on your little charade.”

“Yes!” Dean nods. “Please, Gabe. You're the only other person here that knows the truth about him. You're the only one I can rely on for this.”

Gabriel watches Castiel for a few more seconds before turning back to Dean. “Alright, I'll do it.”

“Great! Tha–”


“What?” Dean asks, hoping that he's not about to sign up to streak naked through the office or something equally humiliating.

“I'll do it if you'll reconsider sending Castiel back to Heaven Technologies.”

Dean blinks. It's not what he was expecting. Again, he wonders why Gabriel is so hung up over Castiel. “Alright, I'll think about it,” He promises.

“I'm holding you to that, Winchester,” Gabriel levels Dean with a serious look before swaggering over to where Castiel is sitting calling out loudly, “Hey Cous! How you doing? Did ya miss your good ol' cousin, Gabriel?”

Dean can see Castiel's look of confusion at the unknown man now slinging an arm over his shoulder before relaxing at the mention of the name “Gabriel”. As Dean watches, Gabriel plays the part of the teasing but doting cousin perfectly, spouting out countless embarrassing childhood stories that never happened. Soon, he's got the crowd roaring with laughter and Dean feels warm seeing how well Castiel is fitting in.

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Dean's sitting at one of the booths taking a breather from dancing when a familiar figure comes up to his table.

“Hello, Dean.”

Dean's heart leaps to his throat while his stomach drops. He swallows hard. “Hello, Lisa.”

He hasn't seen her since their break-up, but here she is now, standing there in front of him looking
as breathtakingly beautiful as ever. Dean's heart aches a little.

“I just came over to wish you a happy birthday.”

“Yeah, thanks.”

They lapse into awkward silence.

“So you look good,” she begins tentatively.

“So do you,” Dean replies. “Amazing, actually.”

Lisa chuckles softly. “You always knew how to sweet-talk a girl.”

“Yeah, well...”

“Do you mind if I...?” Lisa gestures at the empty spot next to him.

“Sure, go ahead.” Dean takes a deep breath as she sits down next to him. He can smell her sweet perfume. “So how have you been?”

“I...I've been good, I guess.” She glances downward. “Actually, I...I kind of miss you.”

“I miss you too,” Dean says honestly.

Lisa looks up at his confession. “I find myself wondering if we made a mistake. Breaking up.”

“Liza,” Dean signs. “We broke up for a reason.”

“If this is about getting married and having kids and all that. I can wait. I just want to be with you.”

Dean's torn. Half of him wants to pull Lisa into an embrace and never let her go again, the other half wants to run away and never look back.

“Lisa, we can't. I can't.”

“C'mon, Dean,” She whispers coaxingly as she slides closer to him. “We were good together, weren't we?”

“Lisa, I...” Dean opens his mouth, unsure of what to say.

“Hi, Lisa.” Suddenly Sam's there.

“Oh...hi, Sam.” Lisa immediately pulls backs a bit.

“Do you mind if I grab Dean? I want him to show the others this pool trick he knows.”

“Sure,” Lisa says, but she gives Dean a disappointed look as he's pulled away by Sam.

“I hope you weren't going to do something foolish, Dean,” Sam says once they're a safe distance away.
“C’mon, Sam. I thought you liked Lisa.”

“I do, but I just spent the last few months watching you all broken up over her. You’re finally moving on. Don’t ruin that, man.”

Dean sighs. “Sam...”

“Besides, I think you got your eye on somebody else, right?”

“What? What are you talking about?”

Sam rolls his eyes. “Please, Dean. I caught the way you were looking at Cas.”

“You are way off base, man,” Dean protests.

Sam grins at him. “You were totally gazing at Cas with goo goo eyes the entire time Jess and I were at your place.”

Dean gapes at his brother.

“And if you want my honest opinion, dude's totally into to you too.”

“Sam!” Dean finally manages to find his voice. “It's not like that! He's just staying over for a little while, that's all!”

“So you're telling me that if a girl hit on Cas, you wouldn't be jealous at all?” His brother asks him, raising an eyebrow.

“No! I wouldn't be.” Dean is quite adamant.

“Alright, you won't mind what's happening right behind you then.”

Dean spins around and spots Castiel perched at the bar. He's not alone though. There's a blond girl practically crawling onto his lap. A hot streak of possessiveness flashes through Dean. All other thought other than having to rescue Castiel leaves his mind at the sight.

“Excuse me, Sam.” Dean leaves his brother who is now chuckling softly in favor for hurrying toward Castiel. Castiel has a wide-eyed terrified look on his face, leaning away as the girl presses closer to him.

“Cas, man! What's up?” Dean slurs, staggering up against Castiel, pretending to be drunk. The girl immediately draws back. “Chastity, right?” Dean says, recognizing her. “Sorry, I gotta steal Cas over here for a while. Need his opinion on something.” Not bothering to hear her reply, Dean drags Castiel away.

“Thank you, Dean.” Castiel looks at him gratefully. “I believe she wanted to exchange sexual favors. She kept proposing we go somewhere more private though I told her that I didn't want to go with her.”

“Cas, next time a girl is coming on too strong. Just push past her.”

Castiel shakes his head. “I am unable to cause harm to any human in any way. It is part of my
“programming.”

“Not even a gentle shove? It's not like you're going to throw her on the floor.”

“I'm not sure, but I would not like to test my limits.”

“Wow,” Dean murmurs, then pauses. “So it's kinda like in those Isaac Asimov's novels. The Three Laws of Robotics.”

Castiel just tilts his head at him.

“Seriously, Cas. We need to catch you up on pop culture. In fact...” Dean glances around. “You want to blow this joint?”

“Blow...what?” Another head tilt.

“D'you want to get out of here? We can go home, pop in a movie.”

“Wouldn't it be rude for you to leave your celebration early?”

“No one's going to notice. Things will start winding down soon anyways.”

“Ok.” Castiel smiles at him. “I would like to watch a movie with you.”

“Perfect.”

By the time they make it back to the apartment, it's way past midnight. Dean quickly showers and slips into his shirt and sweatpants combo. He goes through his DVD collection as Castiel showers too. Knowing that he's actually too tired to stay awake for much longer, he pops in a random comedy. They start the movie once Castiel returns to the living room. Dean doesn't say anything as the robot curls in close, even going as far as putting his arm around Castiel's shoulder. He drifts off to sleep with Castiel's comforting warmth at his side.

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When Dean wakes up, the warmth that was at his side last night is missing.

“Cas?” He calls out as he opens his eyes blearily.

“Good morning, Dean.” Castiel is sitting at the kitchen counter, flipping through one of the numerous car magazines Dean has lying around. “I didn't make breakfast because I didn't want to wake you. I thought you would want more rest after the late night.”

Dean does indeed feel well-rested despite all the alcohol he had last night. “What time is it?”

“A little after 10:30am.”

“Alright. Let me get dressed and stuff and we'll get going.”

“On our date?”

Instead of apprehension, Dean just feels warm affection. “Yeah, Cas. Our date.”

Castiel smiles. “I was worried you'd forgotten.”

“No way, man. I made a promise, and Dean Winchester is a man of his word.” Dean heads toward the bedroom. “Don't bother making breakfast. We'll snag something to eat while we're out.”

The weather is good in that 'sun is shining and birds are chirping' kind of way so Dean decides to bring Castiel to the big park he likes to go. On the drive over, Dean rolls down the windows so that the fresh air can blow through the car. Feeling lighter than he has in a long time, Dean blasts his music and sings loudly off-key. If Castiel minds the noise, he doesn't make it known. When Dean glances over at the robot, Castiel is watching the scenery rush by with a small smile on his face, the wind whipping his already-tousled hair into a bigger mess.

At the park, Dean leads to Castiel to one of the trails that winds around the lakeside. As they walk side-by-side in companionable silence, it just seems natural for Dean to slip his hand into Castiel's and entwine their fingers.

“Hey, I want to show you something,” Dean says and tugs Castiel off the well-beaten path to a smaller trail that's partially hidden between two hedges. From the leaves littered across it, one can tell that not many people venture down here. The path slopes gently to a tiny, pebbled beach with a short dock extending into the water. The sun glitters off the the surface of the lake. The only sounds to be heard are of the lake water lapping against the shore, leaves rustling in the light breeze and the occasional bird call from the trees. It's easy for Dean to imagine that he and Castiel are the only two people left in the world.

“It's beautiful here,” Castiel says in a soft voice, as if he doesn't want to shatter the tranquility of
the natural landscape. They walk to the end of the dock and stare out at its rippling waters.

“Not many people know of this place so it's pretty deserted most of the time. It's why I come down here when I need to clear my head. I really needed a place where I could just forget everything for while, especially back when I...” A flash of orange and red and heat crosses Dean's mind, but Dean pushes the memory away. He's not letting anything ruin this day.

“Dean?” Castiel is staring at him worriedly.

Dean smiles at him. “I'm good, Cas.” He squeezes the robot's hand reassuringly. “You're the first person I've brought here, you know.”

“Thank you for sharing something so special with me.”

They linger there for a little while, just breathing in the sweet air and listening to the nature around before Dean's stomach decides to interrupt by letting loose a loud rumble.

“Sorry.” Dean pats his stomach. “Guess that's our cue to leave.”

Dean leads Cas back to the main path. They walk a little further when Dean spots the red and white umbrella of a food vendor ahead.

"C'mon, Cas. We can have a picnic lunch!"

Dean buys two hot-dogs with fries and smotheres them with all the toppings.

“I don't need sustenance, Dean,” Castiel protests as Dean pays.

“Shut up, Cas. Just because you don't need to eat doesn't mean that you can't appreciate the finer things in life.” Dean thrusts one of the massive hot-dogs into Castiel's hands. "Let's go a find a spot to sit down."

They find a sunny spot on a gentle slope of a grassy hill to eat. Dean watches in amusement as Castiel dubiously takes his first bite of hot-dog. The way his eyes light up at the taste brings a bubble of laughter out of Dean.

“Woah, slow down. Don't want you to choke,” He says as Castiel proceeds to gobble down the hot-dog at an alarming speed.

“Thith ith tho guhd,” Castiel says around a mouthful. “Cath we haf muh?”

Dean laughs again. “Sure, Cas. You can have as much as you want. Here, try the fries.” Dean slathers them with a good amount of ketchup before handing the entire carton to Castiel.

Castiel demolishes the fries in record time.

"I should enter you in in one of those food eating contests. At the speeds you eat at, we'd make a fortune in prize money," Dean jokes.

"What kind of food would that entail?"

"Oh, all sorts. It's amazing what people would shovel into their stomachs.” Dean wrinkles his nose
in disgust. "I wouldn't mind entering a pie eating contest one of these days though," he says as an afterthought. "Mmmmmhhmmmm... pie." Dean licks his lips just thinking about it.

“I would be open to trying more kinds of food with you, Dean,” Castiel says after swallowing the last of his hot-dog.

There's a little smudge of mustard at the corner of his mouth. Dean can't help but lean forward and wipe it clean with his thumb. His breath catches in this throat when he realizes how close their faces are. He pulls back quickly.

"Dean?"

Dean clears his throat awkwardly. "Uh...sure, Cas. I'll bring you around to try more food, but what we should do for now?" Dean pauses to think. "There's the botanical garden that we could stroll through, or we could rent bikes and bike around the lake. Lots to do here. It's part of why I like this park."

"I don't mind what we do, Dean. I've been enjoying myself thoroughly."

"Ok, let's just walk around then. See what comes our way."

After they've discarded the now-empty containers of food, they continue wandering down the many pathways of the park. Castiel pauses by one of the park's many colorful play structures.

“They're so small and so happy,” he murmurs. He watches with wide eyes, completely enraptured by the children playing there.

They sit down on a few park benches nearby and watch the children shriek and run about before Dean realizes how two grown men sitting and watching children play might look a bit creepy and makes them move on. The next thing, they come across has him grinning though.

“Oh man, swings!” Dean races forward toward the empty swing-set. “C'mon, Cas!” He calls over his shoulder. He plops down on one of the seats, not caring that he's way too old for swings.

“I do not know how to play in this structure, Dean.” Castiel follows behind hesitantly.

“No problem! I'll teach you.”

The robot sits gingerly down on a swing.

“Alright, first you push yourself back as far as you can go and then just lift your legs straight out in front of you so you get a bit of forward momentum to start you off.” Dean demonstrates. “Then as you swing back, bend your knees back and use your body momentum to push back and then forward again and then back again.” Soon, Dean's got a good rhythm going and is swinging high. He lets out a whoop.

“C'mon, Cas! You try.”

Castiel pushes off and starts swinging too. At first, he's got that terrified look on his face before it morphs into one of surprise then joy as he gets higher and higher.

“This is wonderful! I feel like I'm flying,” Castiel calls out as they swing in sync.
“Right? This is why I love the swings.” Dean closes his eyes, loving the disorienting feeling of not being able to see the world rushing by. For a little while, he’s four again and his mother is pushing him on the self-hung swing they’d had in the front yard.

They swing for a couple more minutes, receiving surprised looks from several people passing by and a few disapproving ones from mothers with their children, before Dean spots a group of kids heading over.

“We gotta go, Cas. Those kids want to use the swings and these things aren't technically meant for grown men.” He jumps off.

Following his lead, Castiel hops off as well.

They walk back to the small hill they ate on and Dean flops down onto the grass, not caring whether stray twigs, grass and dirt will get on him.

“Phew! Let's lie back for a while.”

Castiel lies down next to Dean, close enough that their shoulders brush.

Dean closes his eyes and basks in the sun's warmth. He feels so happy and relaxed, he wishes could stay like this forever.

Dean falls into a light doze, but when eventually reopens his eyes, he spots a very particularly-shaped cloud.

“Hey, look! That cloud is a pineapple!”

“How can a cloud be a pineapple, Dean?” Castiel asks.

“No, Cas. I mean it looks like a pineapple.”

The robot squints up at the sky. “I don't see the pineapple.”

“Use you imagination, Cas. See there's the leafy bit and there's the spiky bottom part.”

Castiel gazes up at the sky for a long while.

Maybe the robot is incapable of imagining and make-believe.

Dean's just about to tell him to forget about it when Castiel's eyes widen.

“I think...I think I see it,” he breathes out. “It's amazing! It's definitely a cloud, but it's a pineapple too!”

Dean watched as a look of wonderment blossoms on Castiel's face. He can't help but notice that Castiel's eyes match the blue of the sky. Realizing he's been staring at Castiel for longer than is appropriate, he pulls his gaze away and points at another cloud. “What do you think that one looks like, Cas?”

They spend the next hour cloud gazing before something red darts across their vision. Castiel
immediately sits up and watches the red bit of cloth flutter in the wind.

“What is that, Dean?” Castiel cranes his neck further and further back as the kite soars ever higher in the sky.

“That's a kite, Cas.”

“A kite.” Castiel's eyes dart around rapidly as he track the kite's twisting and turning movements.

“Tell you what, Cas. I'll get you your own kite and we can come back and fly it one day.”

“Really?”

Dean really can't refuse the hopeful look on Castiel's face. “Yeah, of course, Cas.”

“Thank you, Dean.”

"We'll get you something cool. Maybe a kite in the shape of the bat signal. That'd be all sorts of awesome."

They stay there a while longer before Dean notices the sun beginning to dip in the sky.

“C'mon, Cas. We gotta get going. I still have one more thing planned for today and we need to leave now if we want to make it in time.”

“What are we doing next, Dean?” Castiel asks as they walk back towards where the impala is parked.

“Well, I did promise to educate you in pop culture so we're going to a drive-in. They're showing 'The Shining'. There's nothing like starting you off with a classic and my man, Jack.”

Dean can practically hear Sam screeching about clogged arteries and heart attacks as they pick up more greasy fast food to eat for dinner at the movie showing.

Dean's timed it perfectly so that they arrive early enough to snag a prime spot in the center. He wants Castiel to have a perfect, unobstructed view of the giant screen.

“Allright, I don't normally let anyone do this, but I'm going to make an exception for you, ok? Just this once though.” Dean gestures for Castiel to climb onto the hood of the impala. “Careful! Don't scratch her!”

They watch the movie lying back against the Impala's windshield. They're pressed together shoulder to leg, but Dean finds that he doesn't mind the lack of space between them. In the chilly night air, the heat radiating off Castiel is nice.

At first, Castiel tries asking a lot of questions about what's happening on the screen until Dean just tells him to shut up and watch. Dean spends most of the movie watching Castiel's reactions though. The robot is mostly stoic, though Dean can feel him tense at certain points of the movie, especially when Jack Nicholson starts chopping through the door.

“Did you like it?” Dean asks later on the drive home.
“It was interesting though there were many implausible scenarios, like where all the blood came from and-”

Dean sighs. “Cas, it's a movie. A scary movie at that. Of course, there's going to be some stuff that would never really happen in real life.”

“Oh.” Castiel ponders this for a few seconds. “I liked the movie though,” he finally offers.

Dean resigns himself to the fact that Castiel will probably never learn pop culture, but finds that he doesn't think it annoying like he would've with other people. Castiel's naivete is actually quite endearing so he just turns to Cas and says, “Don't ever change, Cas.”
Dean is in the process of eating the most delicious chocolate chip pancakes ever when his doorbell starts ringing. Dean glances over at Castiel who just tilts his head.

“Let's see who that is, shall we?” Dean mutters as he stands up and makes his way to the front door. He’s had enough early morning interruptions in the last few days to last him a lifetime.

Standing on the other side of the threshold are two men. One of them is a blonde wearing a low v-neck shirt. Dean thinks he looks like a complete douche. The other man is short, bushy-haired and wearing an overly large, white lab coat. The way his eyes dart around quickly as he wrings his hands makes him look a bit like a twitchy mouse.

“Can I help you?”

“Are you Dean Winchester?” The blonde man asks.

The man's British accent makes Dean dislike him even more. “Yeah, I am. Who are you?” He answers a little snippily.

“I am Balthazar Roche, Head of Customer Service at **Heaven Technologies**.” The blonde man introduces himself before gesturing to the shorter man. “This is Charles Shurley. He runs the Research and Development Department.”

“Ch...Chuck,” The shorter man stutters out. “Call me Chuck.”

“Oh right, I wasn't expecting anyone to actually come down, and so quickly too.” Dean's a little overwhelmed. "Plus it's really early in the morning."

“We apologize for the intrusion, but Castiel is an important prototype model, therefore Chuck and I are required to come and personally handle the return process,” Balthazar explains. “We came as soon as possible because we wouldn't want to burden a customer with a malfunctioning product any longer than necessary. May we enter?”

“Uh...Yeah, sure.” Dean steps aside to allow them in. “This way.” He leads them into the kitchen.

Castiel looks up as they enter.

“Hey, Cas. Some men from **Heaven Technologies** are here to take a look at you.”

“Ok, Dean.” Castiel stands up.

Dean doesn't like the way the robot's face has fallen blank and his voice carries no inflections. It's far too much like how Castiel was when he'd just gotten out of the box, as if all the humanizing the robot has developed in the last few days has been wiped away completely.

Balthazar approaches Castiel slowly. “Hello, Cassie. Do you remember me? I'm Balthazar.”

Dean bristles slightly at the nickname. Cas is Cas.
“I remember you,” The robot replies. “And Chuck.” Castiel nods at the other man. “You both were there when I was created.”

“That's right, Cassie.” Balthazar nods. “We're just here to check that you're running smoothly, ok? So why don't you have a seat and take off your shirt so that Chuck here can take a look at you?”

“Wait? Take off his shirt?” Dean interrupts even as Castiel perches himself on a kitchen stool and begins pulling off his shirt.

“Yes,” Chuck pipes up. “His control system is located in his back, between his shoulder blades. I just need to hook him up and run a quick systems check to see that everything is in order before I start the shut down sequence.” Chuck pulls out a small tool kit complete with multiple screwdrivers and pliers, but Chuck selects a small scalpel from the kit.

“Woah! What the hell are you planning to do with that?” Dean reaches out and grips Chuck's wrist. The smaller man's eyes widen and he lets out a small whimper. He sends Balthazar a panicked look.

Balthazar quickly steps in. "Dean, you should calm down and let Chuck go. He's just doing his job."

"With a scalpel?" Dean's eyes narrow and his grips tightens. He wants to know exactly what they plan to do with Castiel, especially if it involves sharp instruments of any kind.

"There's no opening hatch to Castie's control panel," Chuck gasps out. "We didn't put one in because we wanted to make Castiel as human-like as possible. I have to cut him open to get to it."

“So you're just going to slice him open like a fish? What kind of sick freaks, are you? Screw that!” Dean starts dragging Chuck toward the door. There's no way he's going to stand by and just let some men he doesn't know from Jack hurt Castiel.

"Mr. Winchester, this is nothing to Cassie. He had this procedure done to him numerous times during his evaluation period in our labs." Balthazar holds up his hands in a placating manner. "Besides, the robot doesn't feel pain."

"He doesn't feel pain?"

"Castiel was built without pain receptors. Physical pain and other discomforts would distract him from his obligation to you," Chuck says.

Dean has halted his attempt to get Chuck out the door, but still looks like he wants nothing more than to kick both men out.

“Look, do you want to return Castiel or not?” Balthazar's voice takes on an annoyed tone. "If you don't allow us to proceed with the system's check, then I'm afraid you'll have to keep Castiel for the allotted time."

“What's going to happen to Cas if I send him back now? You guys never said,” Dean asks, trying to stall for time. He reluctantly releases Chuck's wrist.

Chuck rubs at the reddening skin. “Castiel will be decommissioned. His memory drive will be
extracted and the data collected during his time with you will be analyzed to see what went wrong. The information will be used to improve the next generation of this particular 'Angel' series."

“What do you mean 'what went wrong'?” Dean asks sharply. "There's nothing wrong with Cas!"

“Well, obviously Cassie over here didn't do his job right if you want to send him back.” Balthazar says with a raised eyebrow. "Heaven Technologies has no use for 'Angels' that can't carry out their orders'.” This last part is said with a lot of vehemence, as if Balthazar loathes to say it. He reaches over and runs a finger down Castiel's arm.

Dean fights the urge to leap over and pull him away.

“I do think Castiel lacks any real wear and tear that instead of just throwing him out completely, the boss will allow us to take him apart and reuse his parts as components in other projects.” Balthazar shrugs. "After all, Cassie is worth hundreds of millions in R&D."

Dean hates the way they're talking about Castiel like he's just another household object, like a laundry machine or a television - something to be used then discarded without care.

“They're going to take him apart? Just like that.” He asks, feeling sick from just listening to Balthazar describe what will happen to Castiel.

“This particular series is customized specifically for its owner. Castiel was made for you.” Balthazar points at Dean. “That means he can't be used for anyone else. If you don't want him, then he's not needed anymore."

Dean is unable to come up with anything to say in answer to this declaration.

“So, Mr. Winchester. Shall we proceed?” Balthazar asks.

Dean looks over at Castiel, who is still sitting quietly on the kitchen stool with his back to them.

He can't do that to Castiel. He can't knowingly send Castiel off to his doom.

Dean makes a snap decision. "Forget it! Cas isn't going anywhere with you,” Dean says firmly.

“So you're not returning him then?” Balthazar asks in a casual tone that sets Dean on edge.

“No, I'm not,” he says fiercely. “Now that I know what you bastards plan to do with him, you're going to have to go through me to get to him!” Dean doesn't even consider what's going to happen once the month is up. All that matters right now is that Castiel stays.

“Allright, Mr. Winchester. If that's your choice. Chuck and I will take our leave.” Balthazar smirks at Dean and makes his way back to the front door.

Chuck hesitates a little before finally lifting his head and meeting Dean's eyes. “I...I think you made the right decision, D...Dean,” He says before scurrying after Balthazar.

Dean doesn't bother to see them out. Instead, he turns backs to Castiel, his head hung in shame.

“I'm sorry, Cas,” He says softly, unable to meet the robot's eyes. “I'm sorry for even considering letting you go.”
“Dean...”

Dean's looks up at the sound of his name. Castiel has stood up and moved to stand in front of him.

“Dean, it's okay,” Castiel says, his eyes never wavering from Dean’s. "You kept me in the end, and that’s all that matters.” Castiel smiles at him.

Dean can't stand Castiel's forgiveness, “You should be angry at me!” He yells. "Or hate me!” He clenches his hands into fists. "I was going to return you. Hand you straight back to those dicks that want to turn you into a pile of scrap metal.”

“But you didn't, Dean. Once you learned what they were going to do, you didn't let them take me. That makes you a good man.”

Dean looks at the robot who is still smiling at him. He shakes his head. “You're wrong, Cas,” He whispers. “I'm not a good man.” He closes his eyes as the memories of his past that have been surprisingly absent in the past few days come rushing to the surface. Dean can hear a gunshot and a child's scream of horror again.

A gentle touch on his shoulder - the shoulder with the handprint - pulls Dean out of the tumultuous darkness in his mind. He opens his eyes and finds himself drowning blue. Castiel is so close to him, he can feel the puff of hair brush across his cheek as Castiel breathes out his name. If Dean didn't know better, he would've sworn that the blue of Castiel's eyes matched the blue eyes of the man who had pulled him from the fire.

He pulls away from Castiel's touch. He doesn’t deserve forgiveness or comfort.

“I'm heading out, Cas. I'm late enough for work as it is.”

Castiel steps back too.

“I'll be here.”

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Dean spends the rest of the day in a dark mood - he glowers at everyone who walks past his desk and snaps at anyone who tries to talk to him. Throughout the day, he keeps experiencing flashbacks to the fire, to Alastair, to his darkest shame. Mixed in with the memories are a new imagine - Castiel strapped down to a metal table, his chest cracked open and his eyes staring at Dean accusingly.

At one point of the day, it all gets so overwhelming that he hides in the bathroom so he can have a few moments to himself. He locks the door behind him and sits on the cold tiles with his knees drawn up to his chest, head on his knees. He focuses on taking deep, steady breaths as he struggles to pull away from the chaos happening inside his head.

Finally, the day ends when he snaps and yells at a customer, which leads to him being reprimanded for his 'unacceptable behavior' and being sent home early.
Dean storms up the stairs of his building, wanting nothing more than to just fall into bed and stay there for the rest of the night. He pauses at the top stair when a familiar scent assults his nose - the scent of apple pie baking the oven. The smell steadily becomes stronger as he nears his door. There's no doubt about it – Castiel is baking in there.

The prospect of pie and seeing Castiel is like a ray of sunlight that finally breaks through the dark storm that's been hovering over Dean the whole day.

“You made me pie?” He asks as he enters the kitchen.

Castiel turns and smiles at him. There's a streak of apple sauce on one cheek and some flour in his hair. It's adorable.

“You seemed so sad this morning so I made you pie. I know it's your favorite.”

“You didn't have to,” Dean murmurs, taking a step closer.

“I know, but I wanted to.” Castiel closes the rest of the distance between them.

For the first time, Dean doesn't pull back at the invasion of his personal space.

“Now go change into something more comfortable. The pie still needs a little longer in the oven. It should be ready when you get out.”

It's Dean's turn to obediently go into the bedroom and change. By the time he gets back to the kitchen, Castiel has a nice, big slice of pie waiting for him.

So far, everything Castiel has made for Dean has been like little mouthfuls of heaven with every bite so Dean can't wait to see how the apple pie measures up. He takes a big forkful and shoves it into his mouth.

It's good - there no doubt about it - but it's missing that extra special something that makes Dean's mother's apple pie recipe better than any other one out there. The apple pie Castiel has made is on the side of too perfect (if such a thing is possible) that it feels manufactured and has lost the home-cooked quality Dean adores.


“It's good, Cas.” Dean eats another forkful. ”It's very good, but there's something missing.”

Castiel's face falls.

“Hey, it's okay,” Dean says, trying to comfort Castiel, who is looking more devestated than he should.

"But it's your favorite! I want to be able to make it to your liking!"

Dean grins at Castiel. ”This just means one thing, Cas.” Dean stands up. ”I'm going to have to teach you to make the perfect not-so-perfect apple pie myself!”

Dean rolls up his sleeves. ”Alright, Step one..."
They spend the rest of the night baking apple pie.

“Yes, stir it like that, Cas.”

“No, Cas. I don't care what the recipe you know says. I'm telling you that if you add this much, it'll taste much better.”

"You add this when it looks like that."

Dean coaches Castiel step-by-step, and by the time they're done, they have two delicious apple pies sitting on the counter.

When Dean goes to bed that night, the scent of apple pie is still wafting through the air, and for the first time and a long time, he has a real dream.

He's sitting in the kitchen of his childhood home in Lawrence, Kansas. His mom, looking as beautiful as an angel with her long blond hair glowing in the sunlight coming through the large windows, is cutting the crusts off his sandwich.

"Here you go, sweetie," She says as she places the plate in front of him.

"Thanks, mom," Dean answers as he looks up at her with a lump in his throat.

She reaches out and gently strokes his cheek. Dean closes his eyes and leans into the touch, indulging in it even if it's only a dream. When he eventually pulls back, the dream has changed. His mother is no longer standing there with her hand on his cheek - It's Castiel.

Dean should be freaking out, but he isn't. When Castiel begins to pull his hand back, Dean catches him by the wrist, tugs the hand back forward and lays a gentle kiss on the palm, then the inside of the wrist. He pulls Castiel down until the robot is sitting on his lap. Dean leans forward and kisses Castiel tenderly.

There are no explosions or fireworks that go off behind his eyelids as their lips touch. Instead, it's soft and slow and Dean just melts into it. As the kiss deepens, Castiel's hands find their way to the back of Dean's neck where they play gently with the soft hairs they find there. Dean's hands rest on Castiel's hips, his thumbs rubbing slow circles. It's intimate in a way that Dean's never experienced before and he finds himself wanting more.

Dean wakes up with an ache in his chest. He may want more, but he know it can't happen. For one, Castiel is a robot, and two, Castiel will be returned to Heaven Technologies in a few weeks. As Dean rolls over to get back to sleep, he silently vows to himself to make sure that Castiel has the best time he can have during the time he has left with Dean.
They fall into an easy routine. During the weekdays, Dean goes to work and comes home to a hot meal prepared by Castiel. Castiel has taken to experimenting with recipes he finds online so each day is a new delicious surprise. After eating and showering, some nights, they fall onto the couch and watch a movie with Dean explaining scenes to Castiel, though Castiel still fails to grasp a lot of the references. Other nights, they go through Dean's massive record collection, listening to Dean's favorites. Soon, Castiel is able to hum along to the melodies.

During one of the weekends, Dean takes Castiel the local public library with the intent of letting Castiel borrow a few books to read during the hours when Dean is at work. They return home with an arm load of books and a brand-new laminated library card for Castiel to use. The library isn't far so Castiel can walk there and swap books whenever he's finished with the old ones.

They go on long drives with the windows rolled down and music blasting. Dean takes Castiel back to the park where they finally go kite flying like Dean promised. They visit the botanical gardens, where the colors and smells of the abundant flora has Castiel completely captivated and Dean has to practically drag Castiel out of there at closing time. They go biking and hiking. They go to the beach and the forest. Dean takes Castiel everywhere he can think of, wanting to show Castiel the world. Castiel takes in each new experience with great joy and childlike wonderment and Dean feels lighter and freer than he ever has with him.

Before Dean knows it, three weeks have gone by and that’s when he receives a very unwelcome phone call.

Dean answers on the first ring.

“Hello.”

“Hello, Mr. Winchester. My name is Zachariah Adler. I’m acting CEO of Heaven Technologies.”

Remembering what they’d wanted to do to Cas, Dean is immediately on guard. “What do you want?”

“If you will check your calendar, Mr. Winchester, you'll see that this time tomorrow, it will be a week until your trial with our little 'angel' is over.’”

Dean wants to reach through the phone and punch the oily-toned dick in the face.

“You are required to bring Castiel to our offices for a systems check.”

“What? Why?” Dean's not letting any of those dicks anywhere near Castiel.

“We need to check that it is in acceptable condition.”
Dean bristles. “I can assure you that I haven't done anything to hurt Castiel.”

Zachariah lets out a chuckle. “You'll understand if the company can't just take your word for it.” There's a slight pause and Zachariah's voice takes on a more dangerous tone. “We'll expect to see you in tomorrow. Just report to the front desk.” Zachariah hangs up without waiting for confirmation from Dean.

Dean listens to the beeping of the disconnected tone before he hangs the phone up with a heavy heart. Even if he doesn't bring Castiel to *Heaven Technologies* tomorrow, they'd probably come and knock down his door. He's got no choice.

“Dean?”

Dean turns to face Castiel, his face twisting with regret.

“Cas, I...” Dean swallows hard. “I gotta bring you in Heaven tomorrow for a systems check.”

“It'll be ok, Dean. I've gone through them before.”

"It's not ok, Cas! What they want to do to you is completely soulless!” Dean slams his fist down on the table in anger. He regrets it a little when an ache starts to spread through his hand. "They shouldn't be allowed to do it!"

"I'm not human, Dean." Castiel reaches forward and begins to rub the ache from Dean's hand. "They can do what they wish with me."

It's the first time either of them have addressed Castiel's non-human status outright.

"You're more human than the lot of them!” Dean declares. He flips his hand over and grasps Castiel's in his. "You've shown me that."

"You have to bring me to them tomorrow," Castiel says, his hand gripping Dean's back tightly. "They'll come for me even if you don't."

Dean can see apprehension and fear in Castiel's eyes even as the robot tries to put up a brave front. He wants to take it away, so he offers the only comfort he can at that moment. “Cas, why don't you rest in my bed tonight? Er...with me? It's big enough for the both of us.”

Castiel's eyes widen.

Castiel may not need sleep, but he's taken to lying down and closing his eyes on the couch as Dean slumbers in the bedroom. Despite how close they've gotten over the last few weeks, Dean hasn't allowed Castiel to 'sleep' on his bed with him yet.

“I would like that, Dean.”

That night, they lie together with Dean curled around Castiel, one arm hooked around Castiel's waist. Dean presses his face into the back of Castiel's neck as he pulls the robot close. Dean holds onto Castiel tightly through the night, like he never wants to let Castiel go.
It's a very subdued mood as Dean drives him and Castiel toward *Heaven Technologies* offices the next morning.

“It's going to be ok, Cas. We'll just be in there for a minute for your check up, then we'll be out. In and out, nice and easy. Nothing to it. We'll be back home in no time.” Dean says this over and over in a futile attempt to make them both feel better. Castiel remains quiet in the seat next to him. When Dean takes a peek at the robot, Castiel is staring out the window, blankly watching the scenery flash by.

In what seems like no time at all, they arrive at a towering building of glass and chrome. Dean parks the impala and they make their way into the lobby with a heavy sense of foreboding.

“I'm Dean Winchester with Castiel here to see Zachariah?” Dean tells the receptionist.

She taps a few keys into her computer and reads over something on the screen before nodding.”of course, Mr. Winchester," She says as she flashes a too-bright smile. "If you'd like to take a seat over there, Mr. Adler will be right down."

Dean and Castiel take a seat on one of the uncomfortable, leather chairs on one side of the vast lobby. Dean takes the opportunity to take a look around. The whole place feels cold and sterile with it's high ceiling and white marble floor. There's the occasional potted plant in an attempt to make the place more welcoming, but they just look out of place.

As Dean watches, he notices two guards posted outside the sliding door, two more on the either side of the lobby and another two before the elevators. It's a lot of firepower for what's supposedly an office building. The thought that there might something more sinister going on does not comfort Dean at all. He has half a mind the just forget this whole damn thing and drag Castiel out of there.

No sooner than this thought has ended, a tall but pudgy, balding man comes strolling up to them.

“Mr. Winchester, glad you could make it.” The man offers out his hand.

Dean recognizes the smug voice. “It's not like I had much of a choice," Dean says coldly, ignoring the offered hand.

Zachariah diesn't seen to mind Dean's rudeness and turns to examine the robot who is lingering a step behind Dean. “Magnificent creation, isn't it?” He nods. “We're going to make a fortune selling people their own personal 'angels'."

Dean hates the way Zachariah acts like Castiel can't hear or understand them. “Can we just get this over with?” He doesn't want to stay here any longer than they have to.

“Of course! My office is this way.”

They ride the lift in uncomfortable silence to the top floor and are led to a pair of large double doors at the end of a hallway. There are two more guards posted at the sides.

"Raphael. Uriel." Zachariah nods at them.
"Sir," They respond, standing at attention.

Zachariah pushes open the doors to reveal a large office with floor to ceiling windows. Dean follows Zachariah inside with Castiel behind him and spots Balthazar and Chuck already sitting down at a down-sized conference table that takes up one side of the room. The two men stand up as they enter the room.

"You already know Balthazar Roche and Chuck Shurley, I believe?"

"Yeah, we've met," Dean replies tightly.

Balthazar and Chuck looks as tense as Dean feels.

“Alright then, let's get right to it then, shall we? Chuck? Will you do the honors?”

"Right away, sir!" Chuck hurries forward. "Would you mind sitting there?" Chuck gestures at a stool that's been placed in the room. Castiel obediently does so and pulls off his shirt.

Dean stands off to one side, ready to intervene if he sees Castiel in pain or something else he doesn't like. As it is, Dean has to stop himself from lunging forward as Chuck raises his scalpel and positions it on Castiel's back. It seems so wrong to just stand there and watch someone mutilate Castiel in this manner, but he remains quiet as he watches Chuck start cutting on the inside of Castiel's right shoulder blade and continues downward. Dean can see Castiel tense, but he doesn't cry out in pain, so Dean balls his hands into fists and allows Chuck to keep going.

A thin rivulet of blood appears and slides down Castiel's pale skin as the sharp blade slices into his skin, but the wound doesn't gush like it would on a normal human. Every so often, Chuck pauses to dab away the accumulated blood. When he's completed the first cut, Chuck makes another identical one on the other side so that Castiel ends up with two vertical slits running down his back.

He looks far too much like an angel's who's had his wings cut off.

Chuck gingerly pulls one slit open to reveal a chrome skeletal structure similar to a human's underneath.

It's the first time, Dean's seen real physical evidence that Castiel is actually a machine.

Thin wires and plastic tubing that pulse and glow with a silvery substance run along the 'bones'. They gather at a black box-like thing nestled between Castiel's shoulder blades - this must be the control panel Chuck talked about. Chuck plugs wires in on either side of the box and starts tapping away at the tablet attached at the other end.

Castiel's eyes flutter shut.

“Hey, stop!” Dean takes a step forward in alarm.

“It's alright, Dean. It's normal,” Balthazar says from next to Dean.

Dean settles back down, but keeps an even closer eye on Chuck. He wishes he could see what Chuck was typing away at on his tablet.
Zachariah who's been watching the whole process with undisguised glee finally speaks up after several minutes of tense silence. “Well, Chuck? What's the verdict?”

“Everything seems to be in working order, sir.”

“Excellent! Then we're done here. Once Chuck is done patching the angel up, you may take it and go, Mr. Winchester. We shall see you back here in a week.”

“Wait! What's going to happen to Castiel at the end of the month?” Dean has to ask. The question's been burning away at him since his last meeting with Balthazar and Chuck.

“I thought Balthazar already explained it to you?” Zachariah replies.

“B...but I thought that's what would happen if I returned him early,” Dean protests. He looks over at Balthazar, hoping to see some sign that what he's just been told isn't the truth. Balthazar just looks away.

“You were mistaken. What did you think we were going to do with it? Just let it hang around the office?” Zachariah chuckles to himself as if he's made a funny joke. "No, Mr. Winchester. It was Castiel's destiny to be decommissioned after the trial, no matter who it ended up with.”

“So you're just going to destroy him?” Dean shouts. "You can't do that!”

“Castiel is the rightful property of Heaven Technologies, Mr. Winchester.” Zachariah sneers. “We can do what we wish with him. Unless...”

“Unless what?” Dean is desperate for any way to save Castiel.

“Unless you'd be willing to purchase Castiel. Then Castiel's ownership would be transferred to you.”

Dean's stomach drops. There's no way he can afford to buy Castiel, but still he asks. “And how much would that cost me?”

“$500,000.00.”

Dean gapes at Zachariah. “And where the hell am I supposed to get that kind of money?”

“That is your problem, Mr. Winchester. Not mine. You have a week to get the money together or else Castiel returns to us.” Zachariah smiles unpleasantly at Dean before making his way to the door. “Now if you'll excuse me, I have an important phone call to take. Balthazar will see you out once Chuck is done.” He sweeps out of the room.

Dean lapses into silence as he contemplates the situation. Short of bank robbery, there's no way he can gather that much money in a week. Dean's not willing to let Castiel go without a fight though. He has to find a way to save Castiel. He has to.

“Castiel is ready.” Chuck's voice interrupts his thoughts. “I've just bandaged him up for now, but the cuts should be healed by tonight. Accelerated healing.”

Dean looks over at Castiel who is now standing with his shirt back on. The robot looks a little tired and shaky, but none the worse for wear.
"Cas?"

"Please, Dean. I just want to go home," Castiel whispers.

"Alright, Cas. We'll go home."

Not caring who's watching, Dean wraps an arm around Castiel's shoulder and Castiel leans against him for support. Dean can feel the robot trembling minutely. They make their way back to the car without Dean ever letting go of Castiel. When they get to the car, Castiel curls up in the front seat and closes his eyes. In that moment, he looks so small and fragile that Dean just wants to march back into that penthouse office and throw Zachariah out the window.

The drive back home is silent. Dean doesn't even turn on the radio or puts in one of his many cassette tapes - no amount of noise or music could ever drown out the defeated air in the car.

As Dean continues to drive, he quietly rages against Zachariah and Heaven Technologies. The closer they get to home, the more Dean's determination grows. If there was one word that could be used to describe Dean Winchester, 'stubborn' would be it. Dean is not letting Castiel go without a fight. No freaking way.

“I'm going to find a way to save you, Cas.” He declares breaking the silence. "I don't care what it takes. Those sonofabitches want you? They're going to have to come through me.”

Dean doesn't expect a reply so it surprises when there is one.

“I have faith in you, Dean.”

The one simple sentence fills Dean with purpose and he clings to it as he drives on

A dangerous plan begins to form.

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They spend the next fews days ignoring the elephant in the room, going about their days like Castiel isn't going to be snatched away at the end of the week. Every time, Castiel attempts to bring it up, Dean just shuts down, so eventually Castiel stops asking.

Dean hasn't forgotten though. Far from it. He remembers his promise to Castiel and that promise burns inside Dean like the raging fire that had almost killed him. Dean spends every night formulating his plan. It's beyond dangerous, probably suicidal, but it's the only way Dean can think of to getting the money in time without endangering anyone else.

He's going to have steal it. From Alastair.

Just the thought of possible seeing his old mentor again has Dean shuddering. He'd worked so hard so leave that part of his past behind, but it looks like he has no choice but to revisit it one last time if he is to have any hope of saving Castiel.

Thanks to his years of working for the man, Dean knows where Alastair keeps his money. It's just a matter of getting in and out without getting caught. Easier said than done.

Dean digs out the 9mm pistol he inherited from his father after he'd passed away. It's a beautiful thing made of stainless steel with a pearl inset grip and engraved barrel. It's the only gun Dean had kept after he'd gotten away from Alastair. He hopes he doesn't have to use it.

Dean shudders at the feel of it in his hand. For a moment, he's back in the dingy, dark room of one of the many apartments he'd visited. He can feel the retort of the gun as he fires and a child's shrill scream piercing his ears. Shaking himself out of it, he quickly stuffs the gun into his underwear drawer and adds his hunting knife for good measure. He doesn't have time to dwell on the past. Tonight is all about the future - Castiel's future. Tonight is the last night before Zachariah comes for Castiel.

Throughout entire nigt, Dean can't help but want to constantly touch Castiel. He stands close as they cook together, elbows and shoulders brushing. When they sit on the couch to watch reruns of Dr. Sexy, Dean pulls Castiel close so that Castiel can tuck his head under his chin. He leans in close and inhales deeply, breathing in the scent of his own shampoo in Castiel's hair and another fresh, clean scent that is purely Castiel.

As the episode currently draws to a close, Dean glances over to the clock. It's time.

Dean steels himself then gets up. Castiel shoots him a confused look.

“I'm craving ice-cream. I'm just going to run down to the store to get some,” He lies smoothly.

“I'll go with you,” Castiel makes the motion to stand up.

“No!” Dean says a little to vehemently and forces himself to lower his voice and smile. “No, man. You just sit tight here and keep the couch warm for me, ok?”

To Dean's relief, Castiel settles back down. “Alright, Dean.”
“I'll be back before you can even start missing me.”

As Castiel looks up at Dean, oblivious to what Dean's really planning, Dean can't help but lean forward and kiss Castiel tenderly on the forehead before hurrying out the door.

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Dean is back in the last place he wanted to be at ever again.

He's right outside the warehouse he almost died in.

He can feel the weight of his gun pressing into his back where he's tucked it into his waistband. He has the knife in his hand. It's a quieter method of getting out of trouble if he needs to.

Dean creeps along the outer wall, sticking to the shadows. He peers around the corner where the side-door is located. It opens onto a dead-end alley which means that people can only approach the door from one side. This is both an advantage and a disadvantage because it means that whoever's guarding the door will have all his attention focused in said direction, but it also means that Dean only has to watch one side of the alley as he makes his move. He also has the element of surprise on his side.

Dean scopes out the alley one more time. It seems that lady luck is favoring him tonight - there's only one goon guarding the entrance. Not wanting to waste another moment, Dean rushes forward as quick as a cat. He claps his hand over the thug's mouth while his other hand grabs the man's gun-hand. The momentum of Dean rushing into the man sends them both tumbling onto the ground. Dean refuses to loosen his grip and he twists the man's gun-hand instead. The man releases a muffled moan of pain and the gun falls out of his now slack fingers. The man swings his free arm, but the close position of their bodies makes his swinging angle awkward so he only manages to catch Dean in the shoulder. Dean quickly slams the handle of the knife against the man's temple, knocking him out cold. Dean freezes, listening carefully to see if anyone has heard the muffled thumps of their scuffle, but the night is silent around him.

Not looking a gift horse in the mouth, Dean picks the lock on the door and sneaks in. The lights are on, but nobody seems to be in. Dean's timed everything very carefully. It's the time of the night when Alastair is still waiting for money to come in from his collectors so the money is still out in the open, already conveniently bagged. Alastair will wait until he has his entire haul for the night before moving everything together to one of the banks he's got under his belt.

Dean hears no sounds of movement so he cautiously inches into the open toward the many crates on the floor. Dean's a little surprised that there's no one guarding the crates, but then again, who in their right mind would be stupid enough to steal from Alastair?

He pulls open the closest crate and recoils. It's filled with large bags of the reddish flour-like drug popularly known as Demon's Blood. Dean hates the stuff, especially after it had almost ruined Sam's life.

Dean shuts the box and moves on. He makes his way through each box as quickly as possible until he hits the jackpot. The particular crate he has open has a few cases neatly stacked. Dean quickly pulls out two of them – there'll be more than enough money in both to cover Castiel's cost. Dean's
so engrossed in his task, he doesn't hear the scuff of boots behind him until it's too late.

“Well, well, well. What do we have here, boys?”

Dean whirls around and finds himself surrounded by thugs, and there in the middle of them is the one man he dreaded running into.

Alastair's face is twisted into a cruel, mocking smile. He twirls a blade casually in his hand. The sharp edge glints dangerously under the harsh warehouse lights.

“Dean Winchester.” Dean's name rolls of Alastair's tongue like oil causing Dean to shudder. “And here I thought you'd perished in that fire.”

“Sorry to disappoint,” Dean croaks out hoarsely.

“Oh no, I'm not disappointed at all. In fact, I'm very happy you're alive. You were one of my best.” He smiles at Dean like a doting father would his son. "Using your charm and good looks to get those pesky little gnats to pay up. So different from the usual fear and intimidation tactics these idiots use. More effective too.” Alastair's voice takes on a dreamy tone. "The way you made them trust you, made them believe that you were on their side, that you cared. Those fools were practically begging you to take their money after you were done with them."

A wave of guilt and self-loathing so strong rushes through Dean as Alastair's words dredges up every memory of his years with Alastair.

“Then you had to go and grow a conscience.” Alastair's face darkens.

“I killed that that man right in front of his kid,” Dean chokes out. The words are like poison eating away at his throat as he says them. “I never wanted to hurt anyone.”

Alastair lets out a bone-chilling laugh. “And you think shaking them down for money wasn't hurting them?”

Dean grits his teeth. Alastair is right, what he had done wasn't much better than outright murder – how many families suffered because they didn't have enough money even for basic necessities after Dean had been done with them?

“I regret what I did with every fibre of my being and I will spend the rest of my life carrying that guilt.” Dean whispers, clenching his jaw.

“So I take it that you're not here to rejoin my merry little band? We could always use a man with your skills.” Alastair's eyes drift down to the two cases at Dean's feet. “I see, you're just here to rob me.”

Dean doesn't reply, but grips his knife a little tighter. His other hand drifts down into position to grab his gun.

“This is a familiar situation, isn't it?” Alastair saunters forward. “What makes you think you can win this time around?”

Dean is prepared for Alastair's lunge forward and dances backward, swiping with his own knife. He can feel the knife catch as he slices Alastair. At the same time, he grabs his gun and fires.
Several of the thugs go down when Dean hits their knee caps – Dean was always an excellent shot. Dean rolls and ducks behind a large crate as a hail of bullets rain down on him.

He manages to maneuver closer to the exit, but he's running out of ammo and Alastair seems to have an endless supply of men with guns. Soon, Dean is empty and he finds himself seized roughly by two men and pushed into kneeling position in front of Alastair. He glares up at Alastair's grinning face defiantly.

“Alastair, what are you doing? Lucifer said we had to be at Hades in 25 minutes. We don't have time to for this.” A blonde woman in a white gown appears at the main door.

“Just 5 minutes, Lilith. I'm taking care of some unfinished business.”

“Fine, Alastair. 5 minutes, then we go.”

Lilith leaves and Alastair turns his attention back to Dean. “Guess we'll have to make this short and sweet.”


Dean's head snaps around and he sees Castiel striding in, his trenchcoat billowing around him like he's in some kind of movie scene.

“Cas,” he croaks. “Get out of here!”

“Cas, huh?” Alastair grins and faces Castiel. “So this is your knight in shining armor, Dean? I'll have fun gutting him open in front of you.”

He rushes at Castiel and buries his knife into Castiel's chest. Castiel blinks down at the knife now protruding out of him, grabs it and pulls it out without so much as a flinch. He lets the knife drop to the floor.

“What the hell are you?” Alastair snarls as he backs away.

“I am Dean's angel and I am here for him.”

“Get him!” Alastair roars and the thugs lurch forward.

Dean is treated to an amazing display of fighting skill from Castiel. The robot moves gracefully as he takes out each man coming at him.

The two men holding Dean throw Dean against a crate as they abandon him to help their falling comrades. Dean's head collides with the ground hard and his vision blurs around him. He struggles to keep the world in focus. He wants to go help Cas, but he can't get his legs to support him. He can hear grunts of pain and the sound of flesh hitting flesh and bodies falling to the ground.

Suddenly all is quiet.

“Cas?” He mumbles. He wishes the world would stop spinning so he could see where the robot was.
“I'm right here, Dean.”

Dean feels Castiel crouch down next to him and when he peers up at Castiel's face, all he can see are his blue eyes. Blue eyes that are familiar. Blue eyes that belong to the man who saved him from the fire. “It was you. You saved me,” Dean manages to whisper before the darkness that's been at the edge of his vision swallows him whole.

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Epilogue

Dean wakes up in his own room. There's a comforting warmth at his side. Turning his head to the side, he sees Castiel lying stretched out beside him. He makes a move to sit up, but the movement causes his head to swim. He groans and raises a hand to his head. His movement wakes Castiel.

“Dean.”

“Cas.”

They stare at each other for a long moment, but Dean's eye are beginning to feel heavy.

“Just rest, Dean.” Castiel's whisper is a comforting caress to Dean's ears.

Dean wants to slip back into the welcoming darkness, but something is holding him back. Something important.

"Dean, you need to rest."

No, he can't. Not yet.

Dean struggles to stay awake.

_He has to know._

“Did we get the money, Cas?” He asks, even as his eyes close.

“Yes, Dean. It's all going to be ok.”

Dean manages to crack his eyes open to look at Castiel.

The robot smiles down gently at him. "You did it, Dean. You saved me."

Dean settles back down into the soft sheets and allows himself to drift off into peaceful sleep, safe with the knowledge that Castiel will be there when he wakes up.

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“I'm telling you, he wasn't human!” Alastair rages and slams his knife into the wooden table in front of him. "I stabbed him with this very knife and he didn't blink."

“Alastair, I don't appreciate my table being vandalized.”
Alastiar gulps and quickly sheathes his knife. “I'm sorry, sir.”

Lucifer turns away from the large glass windows he's been staring out of. “No matter.” He leans forward in interest. “Tell me more about this man who isn't a man.”

To be continued in “Planned Obsolescence”.

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