**Unconventional Power**

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**Summary**

A collection of drabbles that surrounds the trio and other minor characters.

(Chapters 1-116 are 100 word drabbles while Chapter 117+ are of various length)
“Get me one,” she says, a hope wrapped up in a command. Little Jesse clamors up the tree and brings her a shiny red apple, which she loves, even when they find it filled with worms.

“Somewhere romantic,” she says and Jesse scales the gutters, hoisting her up with rope and laying out blankets on the roof. A storm catches them unaware yet they stay, high above it all.

“No,” she growls and puts the clerical collar in another tree. A symbol. Jesse chops the tree down.

“Jesus take your wheel?” Tulip asks and reminds him of how they climbed.
“You can sleep here,” Jesse said, opening up the attic. He’d loaded it up with a musty old mattress, sheets stained with who even knew what, a pillow with feathers turned to lead a decade past… and a blanket from his own bed, because fuck, he couldn’t give his mate total shit.

To his surprise, Cass was grinning. “I’m a literal bat in the belfry,” he breathed.

“You’re nuts?”

“Aye, that too.”

No extra toothbrush or towel, but they’d worry about that tomorrow. The sun was coming and Cass went straight to bed…

…and found Jesse’s smell in the sheets.
They’re out in the shade behind the church, lounging on equally beat up lawn chairs. Hands behind his head, Jesse figures this is as good a time as any to ask. He grins before he says it:

“Managed to fix the air conditioner yet?”

The string of expletives Cass lets loose is mighty entertaining.

“No,” he pouted, “but I got you somethin’ better, hold on,” and five minutes latter Cass is dropping a chainsaw at Jesse’s feet.

“… where did you get that?”


“…and how’s this gonna fix the heat?”

“Just take it ya bloody bastard.”
People who knew forgot that Cass was old. Hell, Cass sometimes forgot. Amazing what a youthful look could do for you though: missing out on the rants against change, the viral fear, the “In my day–”s and the “Your goddamn generation”s. No. He rolled with the times and kept up with the press. Could use the technology and throw out the latest phrase. If he looked young he could stay young, and the rest of the world helped Cass along.

Still, sometimes he wished padre could see it. Not wisdom or any such shite… but something.

“A person like you…”
Chapter 5

Love bred grief bred anger bred violence - resulting in a smashed iPad of all things. Considering you couldn’t raise three kids these days without one (and it was, by proxy, his fault) Jesse had offered to replace it for Emily.

He just needed to break it in first.

“What are we watchin’?” Cass asked, shoulder to shoulder and thigh to thigh.

Jesse smirked. “You ready to be fucked, man?”

Cass did a double-take… then got it. “Aw no, we’re not watchin’ that shite film!”

“I am.”


Best $3.99 ever spent.
“Honest means?” Cass hummed, considering. “Underground boxin’.”

Jesse scoffed. “C’mon.”

“Vampire, mate. And there’s a lot to be made in that. Don’t know how honest though.”

“Alright. Stupidest thing?”

“Runner off the Empire State. Poor police bastards tried to arrest my head—only part left.”

“Jesus. Laziest?”

“Straight year of Netflix streaming.”

Jesse cracked a grin. “No way.”

“Way. Whole. Fuckin’. Year. I ate and showered once a blue bloody moon, nothin’ else. Didn’t even get through a third of what’s there.”

“Wouldn’t mind doing that sometime,” Jesse muttered.

“Aye. Recommended.”

“Noted. Best thing?”

Cass was silent.

“Well?”

 “… comin’ here, padre.”
“Why, Ms. Marnie Pomeranze!”

Jesse and Cass watched in fascination as Tulip froze, beer halfway to her lips. “Fuck me sideways,” she muttered before greeting the deputy in the crowded bar, her smile firmly in place.

“Fancy running into you. Still keeping to the speed limits?”

“Oh yes, sir.”

“And that man of yours?”

“Comin’ around any day now. You’re sweet to ask.”

Cass and Jesse exchanged looks.

“I knew I recognized you…”

It took ten minutes. When he was gone they jumped on her.

“The fuck?” Jesse demanded.

“Marnie?” Cass said.

Tulip glared. “You’re one to talk, Proinsais.”

“…”

“…”

“… fair.”
Chapter 8

It hurt every time.

Not that most people knew, and those who did seemed to forget. Not human, right? But taking shotgun blasts to the gut, chainsaws nipping at his throat, stakes, knives, obliterating his body from 30,000 feet... it was unimaginable torture every bloody time.

Cass watched a documentary on war vets once. How a single shot could fuck you up mentally, if nothing else. While watching he stuck his hand in a sunbeam—skin charred, roasting, bubbling and melting off bone—and wondered if he’d lost something important.

Not human...yeah. Had fuck all to do with drinking blood.
Chapter 9

The air conditioner is fixed on a Sunday morning, when a storm blows through and all the Annville residents come to church bundled in sweatshirts. ‘Cause that’s just how fate will fuck with you.

Cass claims it’s voodoo. Jesse slaps his thighs and yells, “Miracle!”

It’s neither of these things. Rather, it’s a woman damn near the end of her rope, armed with her Daddy’s toolbox and the ‘Net. Just a woman determined to do what needed doing.

The boys stand in the air despite the high winds outside, whooping and horsing about.

Emily, bless her, stands to the side.
Chapter 10

Tulip said he was boring the shit out of her. Cass said boring was the worst thing he could possibly be.

Jesse wondered when the hell “good” had become synonymous with “boring.”

… so he just didn’t accept that.

Jesse gave some poor bastard the time of day and got a vampire as a best mate. Defending his honor saved a boy one hell of a beating… and started the greatest joke in Annville history. Jesse stuck by his church and a creation of heaven *plowed right into his soul.*

Boring. Right.

Jesse would just keep doing what he was doing.
Chapter 11

Shit happens. Cass knew it well. Best case scenario the one who threw the turd would be the one to eat it, but sometimes when that shit hit the proverbial fan it splattered out, coating all manner of poor, innocent bystanders.

Mixed metaphors aside, Cass had fucked up. Unintentionally. As usual.

Midday bar fight had somehow gotten the best of him. All it took was one asshole, an unexpected shove, and Cass was crashing through the door—into the damn blazing sun.

Lucky for him he had a partner to cover and shield him.

Unlucky for Jesse… human skin still burns.
Tulip loved to dress Jesse, like the dolls she never had as a kid: muscled back in a fine tailored jacket, dirty knees peeking out from raggedy jeans, a rakish hat, far from sensible shoes, jewelry and makeup to pretty him up, or temporary tats to harden his edges. Jesse glowed under the attention of a knowledgeable, fashionable hand.

Fuck but she missed that.

“You’re lettin’ me have this, Jesse Custer,” Tulip said. “All black is sinful. But nothing *but* black is a sin.”

“Thought *I* determined the sins…”

Still, he gave sermon that day in a burgundy, cashmere scarf.
“Look,” Susan laughed, pointing at table four. “Says a lot about a group, huh?”

Jana nodded. That preacher and his buds were sharing a plate of fries… carefully divided for personal taste, with the woman eating them plain, the preacher with ketchup, and the Irishman with a poached egg he’d ordered special. Fine in theory, except that they kept stealing and cross-mixing and faint “what the fuck Cass’s kept drifting their way.

The girls shared a grin.

“Bet you I can start a war by askin’ their burger preference.”

“You do and I’m not cleaning up the mess.”
Chapter 14

An abomination: anything disliked or abhorred. Invoking aversion, loathing, detestation—a vile, shameful, detestable thing. Even *unnatural*. Cass had some space left on his arm and had thought about filling it for a while. All those ugly words written in pretty, looping ink.

“You realize how amazing you are, right?”

Cass stilled. “Wha’?”

“Don’t mean this in no creepy, governmental way,” Jesse hastened to assure. “But you regenerate, yeah? Never get sick? Your biology is crazy different. Fuck, Cass, you’re probably the cure to cancer or something. It’s awesome.”

Awesome?

“Oh.”

Hell, maybe he’d go and get that word instead.
Cass had always loved cartoons and he felt like one now, walking briskly through the church only to come to a screeching halt, eyes wide and one leg comically in the air.

That areseface kid was in the pews. Sobbing.

“Cass, you ain’t equipt for this shite,” he whispered.

But fuck the kid was really bawling, and Cass was a sensitive soul. Also a glutton for punishment, so… it took him nearly five minutes to get what he was saying, god dammit, but when he did–

*I miss eating*, and a gesture to his cup.

“… I miss the sun, lad.”
Chapter 16

Tulip woke Jesse from his doze, pointing at Cass with a ‘do something about this’ expression. That done she tilted her head back and fell in to a nap all her own, leaving Jesse with their twitching friend.

“Hey,” he murmured. “You doing okay?”

“Aye, just… last time I flew I was bein’ hunted, you know?” Cass swallowed hard, but Jesse knew—fear wasn’t exactly rational.

Long minutes passed, Cass shook, and then suddenly it was all worth it.

“That’s what you’re braving this for,” he said.

There, following the night sky below them, glittering blue, was their coveted Pacific Ocean.
Chapter 17

Word travels like magic in a small town. Doesn’t matter if it’s only two to an event and both men have reasons enough to keep silent, sooner or later rumors will spread, quick and deadly as a virus.

Cass has a shot of bourbon when he hears about Jesse and Donnie in the gas-station restroom. He shatters the glass between his fingers and palm.

Cass goes, bloodied, to Donnie’s house, where he shows him every cut and embedded bit of glass. The stretch of skin and dripping, mangled flesh.

For touching Jesse Custer, Cass will do all that and more.
“You for real?” Cass said.

Finding Jesse sinning up his church was no rarity. The two of them had run through all the seven deadly’s since Cass had arrived, though he honestly hadn’t expected to add animal cruelty to the list.

Because honestly, that was the only term for Jesse singing a pup fucking Cotton-Eyed Joe.

Jesse grinned. “He likes it,” and the mutt hopped along with where did you come from? obviously unable to answer the damn question. No visible tags…

“You keeping him?”

“Sure intend to. You mind?”

Mind? Fuck no. Cass had been a stray once too.
Jesse bent over his podium, nearly resting his head against the edge. “And please—please—stop changing up the church’s sign.”

He thought he heard someone snickering, but by the time Jesse looked up the whole town was stone-faced. He waved his hand with a sigh and they shuffled out, all of them looking frustratingly innocent. All this time and he still had no clue who was doing it. Probably the teenage boys: only they could come up with stuff like “spread your ass-crack for the lord.”

Walking out, Jesse saw “Jess and Cass open your holes.”

Alright. That one could stay.
Cass slept with Jesse. Jesse slept with Tulip. Tulip helped out Cass if Jesse wasn’t around. The three got together if there was time and patience.


They needed a bigger bed, but without the funds they just stuck two together (thank you, Cass’ strength). Funds were spent on food or stollen from back pockets. They were good environmentalists who saved water with shared showers. If someone judged, they shared the fights too.

Oddly enough, they were happy.
Part 1 of 6

Texas wasn’t exactly a hot bed of tolerance and open-minded opinions. Which was just too bad: Jesse’s beautiful state and he couldn’t openly wear the most beautiful things.

“What about this?” he said, turning the monitor. Cass pushed Tommy away to look, then grimaced.

“Nearly thirty for that pattern? Fuck no—*ah*, don’t repeat that.”

Jesse snorted. “This?”

“Looks flimsy. Gotta survive my teeth, remember.”

“*Shh*, kids. Alright this then?”

Slowly Cass nodded, pupils dilating. “Ay… not sure how well you’d fit in it though, eh?”

“Sorta the point,” Jesse smirked.

Tommy got impatient. “Mr. Preacher what are you lookin’ at??”
Part 2 of 6

“Nothin’ but borin’ grown-up stuff,” Cass answered, grabbing Tommy by the ankles and turning him upside down. He shrieked in good fun, letting out an even louder wail when Cass threw him onto the couch. Wrestling with his sister gave Cass time for another peek.

“No much of a selection, is there?” he groused.

“No… the, uh, full-body merch ain’t much better.”

“Try another site then.”

Jesse typed a quick “3Wishes” and immediately got “Male Prisoner Guilty Pleasure.” He snorted.

“Like old times in the jail cell,” he muttered.

“What’s that?” Cass called, voice strained.

“Want to get arrested?”

“What?”
“C’mere you brat,” Cass said and managed to get a squirming Alice under one arm, Tommy in the other. “Corralling a bunch of brain-dead kiddies, oh yes, great fun—don’t you two wanna go to bed?”

Alice cast him a look of pure horror. “It’s the afternoon!”

“Sounds like sleepy-time to ol’ Cass.”

“No!”

“How about yes?”

“No!”

“I wouldn’t mind heading to bed,” Jesse said, his tone leaving absolutely nothing to the imagination. Cass cursed at his blush—which Alice poked at, fascinated—and swung Tommy away from that oh so delicate part of his anatomy.

“Just buy the damn stuff!”
“Damn! Damn!”

“Told you brats not to repeat that, shite—”

“Shite!”

“No.”

“What’s Mr. Preacher buyin’?”

“… Halloween costumes.”

“Cool! Be a dragon!”

Jesse shook his head. Offering to babysit your assistant’s kids—the assistant with a crush on you, no less—with the sole purpose of skimming church funds and using her computer to buy you and your vampire over-priced lingerie… even Jesse didn’t know where that sat on the sin scale. Probably pretty damn high.

Still, they didn’t deserve this. Over-priced and cheap looking. He tried again, wondering if they could just fit into the pretty women’s stuff.

… That was a thought.
Chapter 25

Part 5 of 6

Jesse got the history deleted just in time for Cass to dump the third real youngin’ in his lap. Fuck. What was her name again?

“Where’d the pretties go?” Cass asked. The other two engaged, Cass briefly snuck his hand down Jesse’s pants, giving the lace panties there a sharp tweak. “Just get more like these. A lot more.”

“Don’t have the money,” Jesse murmured, lighting a cigarette. “Not with those prices. Not after the bras. Hold on, got a better idea,” and he pulled out his phone.

A minute later cackling laughter filled his ears.

“Worth it,” Jesse whispered.
Cass was busy teaching the kids how to carve an apple pipe (‘Now you’re not tellin’ your ma about this, yeah?’) when the doorbell rang. Jesse carefully pecked around the curtains before opening the door. Tulip stood there, snickering.

“Still got a taste for it then?” was her greeting.

“Damn straight,” Jesse grinned. “Your payment?”

“Private show—from you both—and pictures. Also dinner.”

“Dinner dinner or…?”

“Hell no, ‘dinner’ off a those fine abs of yours.”

Jesse laughed and flexed. “Deal.”

Tulip handed him the box of lingerie—her old favorites.

“Pleasure doing business with you, Preacher.” She winked. “See you tonight.”
He wondered at first what was worth it down here.

Dust in his lungs as he learned to breathe. Sweat as he experienced heat. The screams of mortals hurt. Butchering their language by defiling the Lord’s name... boredom. To say nothing of the abomination that kept getting in their way. Bad enough for such a creature to lay hands on them; worse that its hands brought feelings of pain and fear—the very act of dying itself.

But this?

Fiore stuffed another of these... Cheetos into his mouth. Taste, fullness, powder on his hands.

This might be worth it.

Maybe.
“Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned, oh yes I have.”

Jesse jumped a damn foot at hearing Cass’ voice in the confessional. Snickering filtered through the lattice, taunting him.

“The hell you doing here, Cass?” he hissed.

“Confessin’ a’ course. You gonna hear me or not?” He didn’t wait, just cleared his throat. “How many hail mary’s for lyin’ to two angels, stealin’ all their cash, and blown’ it on hookers and some absolutely stunning controlled substances?”

Jesse lowered his head into his hands. “A lot. The fuck, Cass?”

“... also for kissin’ your girlfriend.”

“Oh my god, get out.”
Emily wondered if Jesse knew what he was doing when he leaned in like that. If, somehow, whatever was going on with him lately extended outwards to her... and some sick part of Emily hoped that was the case, because if it was she could say she had *something* of his, at the very least.

Jesse’s hair was nearly brushing her’s. His fingers, almost grazing. His eyes straying like he *almost* wanted to look.

His lips...

“Got a bandaid,” he said.

*Gonna use that to fix us?* Emily wanted to ask. Scream it, curse it.

You really think you can?
Chapter 30

Ruth looked at the dead girl hanging by her ankles, covered in literal shit, and finally after twenty years said ‘fuck you’ to this godforsaken town.

“C’mere,” she growled and corralled ten sobbing women, dressed in nothing but bras and panties, covered in their own kind of filth that had nothing to do with the mud on their legs.

They didn’t go back to the whorehouse. Ruth didn’t let them cry for long. She taught them how to punch and kick, tear, bite, swing a bat...

... build a bazooka.

Mr. Quincannon was in for one hell of a surprise.
Chapter 31

Chapter Summary

A continuation of #20-26 (and this ridiculousness is ENTIRELY mobius-loop's fault, FYI ;)

Part 1 of 6

Work at the diner had been killer and all Emily wanted was five minutes peace; just a moment without three rambunctious kids, or overdue bills--

--or the strange feeling that accompanied a wiped Internet history, when you sure as hell hadn’t done that yourself.

Emily breathed out as evenly as she could. “Jesse Custer, if you let that vagabond watch porn with my kids in the house.”

Except a simple system restore later and Emily was looking at frilly pink panties, corsets, whips, an edible cotton candy bra...

“No,” she intoned.

Funny thing was, short circuiting happened to humans too.
Chapter 32

Part 2 of 6

Emily rebooted when Tommy shoved something large and red up into her face. She jumped, wailing on the keyboard until all those godawful images disappeared. Luckily her little boy was too busy with... whatever this was.

“Look, ma! Uncle Cass showed us how to make apple pipes and said that I could use it soon as I knew what sex was, but he said it would be rotten as... oh yeah! As a sinner’s ass by the time I found out so can you tell me now, Ma? ... oh oops. He said not to tell. Sorry.”

Emily closed her eyes.
“Uncle Cass?” she managed.

Tommy was already distracted though. He’d abandoned the (smoking?) apple on the carpet and crawled into Emily’s lap, trying to type “sex” into Google. She’d never hated Google so much as she did in that moment. That awful, knowledgeable search engine. Emily hefted Tommy into her arms.

“Hey!”

“You’ll learn about that when you’re older,” she managed, hoofing it into the kitchen. There was Alice, sitting at the table and... taping cans of beans together?

The beans were all on her counter.

Emily swallowed hard. “Alice, dear... what are you doing?”

“Making a bazooka, ma!”
Part 4 of 6

Something like a white rage settled over Emily, and the only thing stopping her from tracking Jesse Custer down was that she was pretty damn sure he didn’t know how to build a bazooka. That man was a lot of things, but inventive was not one of them. Give him a pistol or just give him his fist.

That girl of his on the other hand...

Emily snatched the cans and tape from her daughter, ignoring her outraged cry. She would admit that Ms. Priscilla-Jean scared the crap out of her, but they needed to talk.

Third ring--Jesse picked up.
“Emily?” he said, clearly startled. No more than she was frankly, though Emily recovered first.

“Did you let that woman into my house?” she hissed, voice low.

“Uh...” There was only one “that woman” in Annville. “Just for a sec maybe...?”

“She teach my baby how to build a goddamn bazooka?”

“...Shit.”

Emily twitched at the laughter in the background--a man and a woman’s. “And what you gonna say, preacher, if I ask what you’re wearing right now?”

“Emily, c’mon now, wait--”

“You are never babysitting my kids again.”
Part 6 of 6

Jesse moaned, setting down the cell. A second later Cass was back pulling at the strings of the corset with his teeth, trying to tighten it around Jesse’s chest which—ha—easier said than done. Tulip was lounged out on the bed.

“Who that?” she asked, stretching.

Cass laughed, mouth full of the fabric. “Oi’ church-diner girl, reaming our Jesse out for bazookas and... preferences.”

Damn vampire hearing. “Yeah, pretty much.”

“Well shit.”

“No more babysitting, she said.”

Cass choked, swallowing threads. “Oh the bloody horror.”

“Maybe this is a blessing in disguise?” Tulip grinned, loosening her bra. “More time to play, boys.”

Chapter End Notes

(Okay I'm done with this foolishness I swear XD)
“But it’s not too late... I’m here.”

He’d known him a week and already Cass could say that Jesse wasn’t the egotistical sort. He knew his strengths and his damn prominent weaknesses, could muster up enough confidence to smirk at that asshat across the bar, but when push came to shove ol’ Jesse Custer was more likely to get down on his knees than proclaim his own, supposed perfection.

_I’m here_, he’d said. _I’m merely God’s vessel_, he’d meant.

Too bad all Annville heard Jesse’s “I’ll save you” and took that as literal truth.

Behold, the rise of false idols.
“Let me just grab somethin’ to write with, don’t want to forget anythin’ important like...”

Cass twirled the pen, tapping the paper. He got comfortable on the bed and mustered up a smile. “So! What exactly is this... thing?”

“That’s classified.”

“Got it, got it.” Suspicious wankers remain suspicious, he wrote.

“What’ll you be doin’ with it?”

“Also classified.”

Wankers are not pulling their weight--suggest fucking them up a bit.

“How you gettin’ it out of the padre then?”

“With that,” said tall, dark, and creepy, pointing to the chainsaw.

“... I see.”

Get Jesse the fuck out of here, Cass
“Kiss me,” he said and ‘What a douche,’ flew through Tulip’s mind. Literally bleeding out and all he could think was that the lap holding him was a woman’s, breasts pressed to his cheek and lips oh-so close. What a guy.

But criticism was quickly overrun by the fact that he was fucking dying and it was all Tulip’s fault. So she smashed their lips together, only surprised by how energetic a hemorrhager was.

‘Course, turned out he was fine. “You’re right, luv. I think I’m gonna make it.”

He might not be human, but he was definitely a guy.
It was easy for Quincannon, wasn’t it? Of course you wouldn’t fear judgement when there was no proof that judgement existed.

Jesse had a whole mess of power churning in his chest though. He could feel splashes of heaven and hell beneath his skin, the word of God knocking around with his soul. The ability to create through order had welded itself to Jesse’s very bones... and it was growing stronger every day.

He knew judgement existed. It was calling to him. After acquiring this--using it--Jesse knew there was only one destination left.

Belief. It was a fool’s errand.
Jesse paused with the beer halfway to his lips. “Cass... when’s your birthday?”

“Eh?” Cass scratched the back of his neck. “The hell you wanna know that for?”

“Color me curious.”

“... March 9th.” Then Cass smirked. “1897.”

Jesse shook his head. “Jesus,” he laughed. “Well shit. March ain’t too far off. Gotta figure out what you want and lemme’ know in advance, kay?”

“What?”

“Celebrate,” Jesse peered over the bottle, squinting. “I don’t know, a gift or something at least.”

Cass swallowed. “Century’s a long time, padre. Stopped celebrating decades ago.”

“... well it’s about damn time you started up again.”
Cass found her on a park-bench. He was all smiles as he approached. Tulip, not so much.

“Vampire,” she acknowledged.

“Murderer,” he shot back.

“I didn’t murder you.”

“Would have if I wasn’t already dead.”

“The fuck you want?”

Cass’ grin just grew. He sat himself on the bench’s armrest, thigh pressed to Tulip’s arm. She grimaced.

“I was wonderin’ what you were doin’ at the whorehouse. Not a worker. Not a client...?”

“No.”

“A hustler then.” Cass held out a hand. “Hi-ya, partner. Did you know vamps can hear when a heart speeds up? Makes spotting lies very easy...”
“What you thinking about?” Tulip asked. She gave Jesse a good whack on the head. “Huh? What’s rustling around in there?”

Jesse slowly licked his lips. “Just... ah fuck it. You’d ever want me to hurt you, Tulip?”

She slowly lowered her cigarette. “S’cuse me?”

“Not like the light stuff in bed sometimes but, you know, daily. Hard. Uh... consistent.”

“... no.”

“Right.” Jesse grimaced.

“Who the fuck...?”

“Donnie. Wife says it’s consensual.”

Tulip closed her eyes. “You believed her?”

“No. Just checking.”

“Right... you realize he and I will be having words, right Jesse?”

He smiled. “Why I told you.”
“How many tattoos you got total?” Jesse asked. He kicked his feet into the pew opposite him, right next to Cass’ legs. Cass, for his part, grinned.

“How many? Have or had?” He spread his arms.

“Waddya mean? Get a bunch removed or something? Guess if you live that long…”

“Nah. Never had the money for it. I mean I get ‘em, right? Nice an' happy... then some fucker blasts me, or skins me, or the sun fuckin’ roasts me,” Cass mimed an explosion. “Goodbye tat.”

“Seriously?”

“Yeah. Sucks, padre, lemme tell ya. So which...?”

Jesse shrugged. “Got time. All of ‘em.”
“Jesus H. Christ,” Tulip muttered. “This was not how I was supposed to spend my Saturday. ‘You’re going anyway,’” she mimicked, trying and failing to echo Jesse’s drawl. “‘Just let him grab somethin’ not outta the donation bin. And buy yourself somethin’ nice.’ Like I wouldn’t do that anyway.”

“Heh heh,” Cass pulled a blue skirt off the rack. “Wha’ about this?”

“You trying to get your ass kicked?

“Think it brings out my eyes.”

“I’mma bring out the third degree when we get back...”

“This?” Cass held a ‘Fuck You, You Fuckin’ Fuck’ shirt.

“...Yeah. Brings out your personality.”
Cass had nightmares sometimes. Not surprising, given everything he’d lived through. Hell, Jesse would have worried for the guy if he’d gone so jaded that he slept like a lamb.

Only problem was, Cass slept during the *day*.

It’s another glorious Sunday with the whole town sharing food after service, too many packed into one tiny church. They all hear the high-pitched, gurgling shriek that comes from the attic. They all watch as their preacher tears upstairs like a bat outta hell.

In the silence that accompanies shock they hear Cass’ hyperventilating. Jesse’s comforting--doesn’t bother being quiet.

Fuck their rumors.
“You can be good, Tulip.”

He wanted that for her. Really. For all the twists and turns of getting here, Jesse well and truly enjoyed the feeling of being good for once. Knowing he was on the right side of the law and morality. Having people look at him with respect... *love* even, thrilled he’d earned that rather than drawing it out of people through fear.

Jesse had always craved power. Fed off it. Making people happy was an unexpected, thrilling bonus.

It was only back at home that he wondered... why wouldn’t he use that power on Tulip too?
Chapter 48

Jesse never wanted the preacher’s life. Nothing wrong with it for some, he was sure, but for a man used to every extreme that life had to offer, preaching was just damn boring.

Cass had that much right at least.

‘Course, then Jesse met the bastard in the best bar fight he’d had in years and whatever the fuck that was slamming into his soul wasn’t nothing to sneeze at either. Yet things hadn’t only really picked up when a group of snot-nosed kids asked him for his opinions. His word.

Preaching wasn’t preaching anymore. Preaching made Jesse a rockstar.
Chapter 49

The title of Saint implied virtue, and there was a time when he embodied just that.

Killing, yes. Killing was easy. Turning your horse away from home took far more strength though, and back then there was still something like honor in his heart. Especially for the young’uns. They needed protecting if they were going to turn out better than him.

That boy though... already far down his father’s path. He wanted to watch, and the Killer turned Saint was left with more lost men, taking their fill.

Back home, he dearly wished there was someone to cover his eyes.
Chapter 50

Perhaps the most foolish (and egotistical) mistake a man can make is assuming that others think as he does. In that moment of triumph Jesse forgot that not everyone saw God as he did. That people had waged their countless wars in His name, and on each side they thought they understood his Word.

Jesse has a plate of spaghetti when hears about the four VPs with shotgun blasts in each and every torso. Suddenly the meatballs don’t look so appetizing.

He doesn’t throw up though until he hears it from Quincannon himself, justification accompanied by a smile:

“I was serving God.”
“You can cook,” Cass said. He snickered at the thought, despite the fact that Jesse was indeed sauteing something that smelled marvelous.

“Yep.” Jesse popped his ‘p.’ “Got two choices in this town: learn, or live off of Johnny’s burgers, and let me tell you, your guts will thank you for the former.”

“My eyes are thankin’ you for that apron.”

“It’s kiss the cook, Cass. Not smack his ass with the spatula.”

“Why not both, eh?” Cass grinned. “Who taught you then? Tulip?”

A startled laugh from their living room: “Those mushrooms he’s cookin’? I’d’ve picked the poisoned kind...”
He told her he didn’t crave human blood, just needed it to heal up after a busting, and damn if that wasn’t one hell of a lie.

Because Cass did crave it, longed for it—he’d be *drowning* in it if he hadn’t spent decades getting his body addicted to everything else on earth. Booze and opiates were wonderfully acceptable alternatives to some poor bloke’s neck.

Cass didn’t want to tell this girl that though. Pretty and kind enough to give him a bed... sultry and badass enough to kick his ass.

Yeah. Really didn’t feel like fucking this one up.
Cass had a habit of attracting weird mates, though none weirder than himself of course—until now. He could honestly say that ‘gay, cowboy angels’ beat out ‘Irish vampire’ by a small, but significant margin. It was sort of great.

Led to one hell of a friendship.

“No, no, no, no, no, you gotta put cheese on it, you fool. Give him cheese,” Cass told the waitress, speaking over Fiore. “An’ you,” he pointed the ketchup bottle at DeBlanc. “Jesse called me what?”

“Skinny,” DeBlanc said, perusing the menu. “Pale.”

“Sickly,” Fiore added, smiling slightly.

“...Right. No burgers for that bastard.”
“You kill people?”
“Only if they deserve it.”

Tulip had honestly forgotten that part of the conversation, what with the rest of the revelations and said vampire commenting on everything from her linoleum to their supposed love life (ha). She’d only seen a strange, overly eager man when everything about Carlos came spilling out. What he’d done. What he deserved. Nothing like a skinny frame and crappy clothes to lure you into a false sense of safety.

Tulip forgot that Cass still bit without fangs. Didn’t even ask about his strength.

She spoke, and Cass determined that Carlos absolutely deserved it.
“A feast!” Cass cried.

“A feast,” Jesse agreed. He pulled out three more cartons and slapped Tulip’s hand as she tried stealing an eggroll. She smacked him right back with the chopsticks.

“You’d best appreciate this,” she told Cass, throwing him the fortune cookies. “Breaking the bank for you here.”

“It’s Chinese.”

“Good kind though,” Jesse said. “No salmonella.”

“Oh, you two are just spoilin’ me then.”

It did feel great though, what with Jesse remembering that Chinese was his favorite and Tulip pitching in her funds. Cass grinned at them both, cracking open a cookie:

“You’ll find love today.’
Chapter 56

They practiced for three hours total.

Even with the threat of heaven literally looming over their heads, DeBlanc couldn’t regret that time, not when it gave him Fiore again. Ever since they’d taken up this crazy, self-appointed mission he’d been trying too hard, acting like what he thought DeBlanc needed in all this. He didn’t stop Fiore when he pulled out the chainsaw, and by the time the Irish bloke showed up he needed it for defense. Still, DeBlanc wasn’t joking when he reminded him of being the sweet one.

“Hello, this is Fiore...”

DeBlanc smiled. Yep. It finally was.
He hadn’t come out of the attempt unscathed. Not just physically—mentally too. Part of the blast had caved in a bit of Eugene’s skull and it took him a long time to remember things. Longer to re-learn them. Longer still to figure out what stuff was “normal” and what would earn him a slap.

His dad always cut up his food for him, teeny-tiny pieces if he got sick of drinking through a straw. Eugene loved it. The act told him his dad cared.

All he wanted was to give that feeling back.

Its rejection hurt more than his words.
Three quarters through a peanut butter and banana sandwich, Donnie decided to embrace it.

Just like that. All of it. After all, understanding the preacher’s power gave him a kind of power all his own. Donnie was the only one in all of Annville who knew what was really going on. Thirty years of “Fucking brain damaged” and “Must have dropped you on your head” and Donnie was finally, undoubtably the smartest man in this shit town. He knew it all.

Except...Donnie didn’t know about Jesse stopping by. The orders to “Accept” and “Forget” still fresh on his lips.
Cass paused before their table, considered, then shoved in beside Tulip. She moved only with a grunt and got her food far out of his reach.

“You really kill a Komodo dragon, then?” he asked, too eager. Jesse glared at Tulip.

“Great, now everyone in this goddamned town knows.”

She shrugged. “Good.”

“Aren’t they endangered, like?” Cass pressed, practically bouncing in his seat. “What would ya shoot for me, huh? To defend my honor an’ all that.”

Jesse paused only a second. “Why would I kill an endangered animal to protect another fuckin’ animal?”

Tulip howled.

“C’mon that’s just mean--”
“You’re both nuts,” Cass growled, throwing popcorn at the screen. “I don’t look a thing like that bastard.”

“You look exactly like him,” Jesse countered. Tulip nodded, waving her hand at the shitty set they’d ‘borrowed’ from Emily.

“Same build,” she said. “Same ugly mug. Hell, you’ve even got some of the same tats—”

“I don’t!”

“Does that make him Rudy Four?” Jesse asked, grinning. “The Asshole, the Sweetie, the Psycho, and the goddamn vampire?”

“Pretty sure he’s just a spinoff of Rudy Three.”

Cass stood. “Alright, fuck you and fuck this popcorn. I’m getting better snacks.”

“... fancy a Cornetto?”

I’m finishing up Misfits :D
Chapter 61

Tulip was in a damn good mood when Lily found her at the bar—childhood friends who’d bonded over their shared flower names, both chosen and given. Sometimes that was really all it took.

“Best part of having a vampire as a boyfriend?” she opened with, passing Lily a drink.

“Yeah? What’s that?”

“Smells a period before it even starts.” Tulip grinned, ticking off on her fingers, “Chocolate chip pancakes for breakfast—which he burned—a heating pad—that shocked me—and Motrin—three years out of date.”

Lily winced. “He’s trying?”

“Better than Jesse, throwing dish rags at me...the sex is fucking *fantastic* though.”
Strange enough, Cass was pretty normal. Biologically speaking.

Sure, there was the whole drinking blood thing and the never dying detail, but beyond that his physiology was pretty damn boring: still-beating heart, operational organs, he’d bleed with the best if you managed to cut him. Only thing exceptional about Cass was his stunningly gorgeous face.

So sometimes he helped. In his own weird, fucked up way. OD’d or shot himself in front of a hospital, organ donor card with a fake name prominently displayed in his jeans pocket.

Doctors took what they needed, Cass found himself some blood. Everyone’s happy.
Tulip enjoyed flirting. The boys enjoyed watching her flirt.

Thus it was a staple of Friday night’s to drive into the next rundown town, watch Tulip work the closest bar, reeling in every hot-blooded male with the finesse of a true connoisseur--better than the movies, no lie about that--and enjoy the dumbfounded shock as she left with the pasty-ass foreigner and the guy in a preachers collar. Never got old.

Which was why Cass was kinda surprised when Jesse socked the guy leaning in for Tulip’s kiss.

“Ate peanuts,” he explained, huffing. “Dude. Don’t send our girl into anaphylaxis, yeah?”
“Right. You’re not gonna hit anything limp as a noodle. Nah, don’t tense up neither. Just nice and natural—Cass, get your hand off my ass.”

“Sorry,” he said, not sounding sorry at all.

Jesse just rolled his eyes, hefting the gun and pressing back against Cass, bodies aligned so he could line up the shot, beer bottles they’d emptied waiting yards away. “Can’t believe you never learned this.”

“No need when you’ve got these pearly whites.”

“Unless you don’t want people knowing you’re a vamp.”

Cass wiggled, pressing close. “Fair, fair, padre. Thought Tulip was teaching me?”

“...She teaches dodging.”
Chapter 65

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

There was a small theater next to the Annville community center. It played one film at a time for a measly three bucks. The popcorn was always stale and the floor always had something sticky on it. Tulip compensated by kicking her boots up onto the next seat.

She came despite the reruns and the kids in the back, some low-life pulling hard at the girl's hair because he thought that’s how she liked it. Tulip came to hear the film, not their lovemaking.

This was a better way of seeing cowboys and wondering where the fuck hers had gone.

Chapter End Notes

BY THE WAY I'm now running a Preacher Kink Meme blog (http://preacherkinkmeme.tumblr.com/) so you should all go prompt stuff and fill stuff and have fun :D
“You know, you could be a proper superhero and all that,” Cass said, to which Jesse promptly spat out a mouthful of beer.

“All over my shirt...” he muttered. “What are you on about?”

Cass waved his hands. “You! This power! Your—” more vague waving, “—morals. Shouldn’t you be off rescuing cats out of trees or some shite?”

“You mean the cats that don’t speak English and will therefore not come down when I call them? Just me climbing trees?”

“... Yeh. You...climbin’ trunks... if you know what I mean.”

Jesse hit him.

“C’mon! I just wanna be your sidekick!”
Cass paused, then threw another Bible onto the pew.

“Alright,” he groused. “Who got the flatscreen then? The one you were handin' out, don’t think I missed that.”

Jesse chuckled, laying his own Bible down more gently. “Got two answers to that one. You want the truth or the lie?”

“Don’t insult me, padre. *Both.***”

“Well, lie’s that in all the mayhem of Odin deciding to ‘serve god’--” extreme air-quotes from Jesse, “--the auction was forgotten and, in light of the event, we will be donating said TV.”

“An’?”

“And the truth is it’s a great addition to my bedroom.”

Goodbye, friends, I am gone. Tonight’s episode has killed me. We all must come together and write nOTHING BUT FLUFF in order to sooth these wounds, god speed.
Jesse tastes of constant booze and cigarettes--of course he does--but Cass is surprised that he tastes of mint too, cheap Lifesavers he buys in rolls at the local minimart, his attempt, as Tulip says, to mask who he really is.

It’s always heady and refreshing then. Warm too. When Cass kisses him Jesse keeps hands planted on the small of his back, holding Cass steady like he thinks he needs that. Desperate to give it to him.

Maybe he did.

It doesn’t get old though. It’s something like faith.

Jesse tastes like how Cass thinks religion is supposed to feel.
If Jesse thought kissing a vampire would be markedly different from kissing a human... he was fucking right.

Cass’ mouth was always changing, an impossible thing, never static. The first time they came together Jesse found a chipped tooth way in the back, probing it with his tongue and thinking, *This is him.* Except that twenty minutes later the tooth was healed and Jesse pulled back in shock.

His lips could move from split to full in the span of a breath. His tongue tasting like blood one moment, *human* the next...

...then again, maybe all that was just Cass.
When Tulip kissed Jesse it always felt like a fight: both of them struggling for dominance, pulling at their hair, sniping teeth, bodies pounding long before they were ready. She had a habit of being wet and messy with him, violent even, like how she thought he wanted it. All those Toadvine girls in their youth, the street walkers he picked up on their travels. They performed in ways Tulip was still learning about.

Except that one day he takes her and slows them down... kissing her so gently Tulip barely feels it at all...

Not in her lips at least.
Chapter 71

Kissing Tulip was a goddamn mystery. She reminded Jesse of rewards he’d get in the video games of his childhood: the thrill of achievement, supposed instant gratification, but you never knew if you were getting something rare and good... or just another piece of shit.

Sometimes she was tender. Sometimes she bit. All depended on her mood and his expression and how the goddamn stars were aligned, far as Jesse was concerned.

Still, he got a tattoo of her on his shoulder. Something permanent. Tulip grinned when he said that this was the one thing that hurt more than her.
Chapter 72

Kisses 5/7

It felt like such a cliche, but Cass had honestly never kissed a woman like Tulip.

Oh, he’d had his share of the frisky ones, the pawers, the biters, the ones who made five minutes of teenage make-outs feel better than the actual sex, but none of them could compare. Cass spent long hours on the couch with her, semi-public spaces that gave them both a thrill, hands down her shirt and wondering what it was. What did she have that ten decades of other women didn’t?

Cass didn’t find an answer... he supposed he’d just have to keep looking.
Kisses 6/7

As much as she hated herself for it, Tulip always compared Cass to Jesse when they kissed.

Not in a ‘one is better’ kind of way, or even a ‘I need him more than him’ sort of way. Just comparisons. A catalogue of vibrant feelings. How Cass was smooth to Jesse’s five o’clock shadow. Jesse all about the tongue and Cass concerned with her lips. Both of them held her—never tentatively—in a manner she frankly appreciated. Neither of them ever disappointed.

She was happy in their arrangement. Actually happy.

But Cass... Tulip just wanted him to stand on his own.
The three of them together was unholy perfection. A sinful ideal. Like three broken and bent puzzle pieces somehow fitting back together. They no longer made what they were supposed to, but their new shapes made *something*.

By grace of their fucked-up masculinity, Jesse and Cass generally passed Tulip between them, then came for one another, sitting back to let the other have a go. It was always a mess of limbs and laughs as three faces tried to find purchase. They kept the lights off to blur the lines even more.

The three of them kissing was who they were.
“It’s not up to you, Cassidy. It’s up to me.”

And there they had it. Jesse was a contradiction, no doubt about that, the bad boy turned preacher and the hellion with a heart of gold. Here then was another example: the ability to lounge around near naked, beers in hand, true buddy style... and still lay down the law. No questions about who was subordinate here.

Cass grinned. Not that he minded. Worried sick about the man, sure, but he’d follow his word regardless.

‘Cause he was worth it. Difference was, Jesse might say no...

...but he listened first.
Chapter 76

“What’s wrong with you?” Fiore snapped. “He’s just a human!” and he marched back into the motel, wiping blood from his face as he went.

Fair enough. The preacher was just a human... but DeBlanc had always been slightly less emotional than his partner, able to see variables that others would overlook.

Like how this Preacher was the first to survive housing Genesis. How he’d stayed to help them with the Seraphi. Just a mortal... but holding his own against heaven’s strongest while they had died bloody again and again.

Just a human. Just custodians.

This Jesse could be an asset.
Chapter 77

Jesse was more than a little shocked when young Laura suddenly burst into tears and left the church in a hurry, arms wrapped tight around her and whatever she’d been about to confess still living tight between her lips.

“The hell...?” he said.

“She’s pregnant,” and Jesse jumped, Cass coming up behind him. His expression was a mixture of grief and resignation.

Jesse stared. “Laura? No... no she—she just turned fourteen, not even a month back...”

“Said it yourself, padre: bad lot in this here town.”

Red crept into his vision. “You’re sure?”

“Aye... sorry. She’s got two heartbeats now.”
“Do you know what this reminds me of—?”

“Shut up, Cassidy.”

It really was fair, because in truth he didn’t have a specific story to tell—not one without angst or goddamn implications, anyway. If Jesse hadn’t interrupted Cass would have had to choose something other than, “This reminds me of you, padre.” Or worse: “Reminds me of the last time I was happy.” Pulling up the past was worse than pulling teeth, and Cass had too many rotting ones to make a sweet story.

He’d honestly just wanted to start a conversation; talk to Jesse Custer.

Cass smiled. Same result.
Chapter 79

Jesse wasn’t gonna admit it, but he had a damn soft-spot for the people he got into fights with. Didn’t matter what the relationship had been before, the moment you were back-to-back in a brawl was the moment things shifted; where shit like ‘camaraderie’ and ‘debt’ came up. There was real honor in a fight.

That’s what got him Tulip at the tender age of six. Cass years later, taking out only one guy, but hey, that was more than enough.

Getting strangled with DeBlanc before Fiore shot that lady’s head in... Jesse knew he couldn’t hate these boys.

Not anymore.
“Ever think about marriage?” Cass asked, straight out of the blue, his mouth still stuffed with pizza and a glob of sauce on his chin. Jesse took a moment to just appreciate the aesthetic of it all.

He took a long sip of his beer. “Please tell me this isn’t a proposal. Even you can do better.”

“Nah, nah,” Cass waved a hand. “Unless you want it to be. No, just genuinely curious. What with you an’ the church an’ all...”

“I’ve thought about it,” Jesse admitted. “What about you then? Ever been married?”

“... not to anyone that mattered, padre.”
Chapter 81

“It says something about the town, don’t it? Me, findin’ pajama pants with freakin’ dinosaurs on ‘em. Don’t tell me these were yours, padre?” This had been said with raised eyebrows and a grin, nearly two-weeks before.

When Cass wears them again he’s stealing food from the church luncheon, not understanding why Sheriff Root was looking at him like he’d seen some fucked-up ghost. It’s then that he hears about the kid going missing. How the pants were his before he got a little large in the waist.

When Cass learns it was Jesse... he wears the pants every day.
“I’ll fix it.”

Tulip means the weird art thing of course, but there’s a moment where Emily’s face cycles through surprise, careful blankness, and... hope? Except then Tulip ruins it all by opening her mouth again. Who the fuck is surprised? Not her.

Except... things aren’t ruined. Emily let’s her help—huge, though she probably doesn’t realize it—offers Tulip a drink, a seat at her table, so close to her kid... These aren’t small things in Tulip’s eyes.

It’s only later, when Emily’s kindness feels less formal, that Tulip thinks back on that promise.
They were still settled in the kitchen, on their second beer and waiting for the bloodied clothes to dry, when Cass turned to Jesse and said, “What are they gonna do with ‘em then?’”

“Who an’ what?”

“The angels. With all those bodies.”

Jesse paused, pursing his lips. “Don’t know. Had me load the first one into their trunk, but that’s a hell of a lot of graves to dig.”

It was hours later that they heard about the Sundowner motel fire.

Cass nodded. “They’re right fuck ups, aren’t they?”

“... yep.”
Chapter 84

Tulip stopped the scissors just in time, hand tight on Cass’ wrist.

“You sure you know what you’re doing?”

“Look, luv, if you wanna brave your locks with that Shelly down at the so-called ‘salon’...”

Tulip considered. “Yeah. Alright.”

Moments later Cass’ fingers were threading through her damp hair, beginning to methodically even out what had already reached Tulip’s chin. She was actually surprised by his confidence... Cass rolled his eyes.

“If you must know,” he said. “I had a brief stint fixin’ men’s hair back in the seventies. Yours aren’t any trouble.”

Tulip smiled. “Glad part of me isn’t.”
Chapter 85

“Something that was never meant to be...”

“... came to be.” Fiore finished, and it was while DeBlanc was speaking with the preacher that he realized how accurate that was.

Not just with Genesis—they’d had a while to come to terms with its existence—but everything else that had occurred after it too. The two of them taking on the non-existent role of ‘custodians,’ powerful beings possessing insignificant humans, coming down to Earth, negotiating for what was already rightfully theirs—

—encountering a Seraphim on the mortal plain.

Fiore’s blood ran cold with surprise...but that was a feeling he was growing used to.
Chapter 86

Jesse stared at the fire safety poster, making sure their plan was right in his head. It was always the same though. Tulip cut a girl with a piece of broken bottle? Just fell into each other is all. Jesse shattered a boy’s kneecap with a bat? He didn’t realize his own strength. Tulip bit off that asshole’s nipple...?

“`You were just bittin’ his shirt,” Jesse murmured. “Just an accident, yeah?’”

Tulip was as stone-faced as he was. “Right.”

Plan in place. It wasn’t the best, but it would see them through.

Stop, drop, and roll... No. They couldn’t stop. Ever.
“Bound to happen sometime,” Cass said, like he was actually trying to justify this madness. Tulip turned on him in an instant.

“You best not be saying what I think you’re saying.” She pointed viciously at Jesse. “You know how to care for him?”

“...nope.”

“Got money to feed him?”

“Pff.”

“Somewhere for him to live?”

“Tulip.” Cass tugged at his threadbare shirt. “I got this an’ a couple pills—an’ I stole those. But you said it yourself, guy’s hero is fuckin’ John Wayne.”

All fair. Tulip just didn’t know what they were gonna do with Jesse and a goddamn horse.
“It... doesn’t feel like anything.”

Truly. Coming back was a non-event. DeBlanc simply was, was not, and then was again, all in the span of a moment to those on Earth, yet no time passed for him because he didn’t exist to experience it. He supposed he might feel fear—illogical and foolish—at the possibility that he might not come back...but all that had to come in the span of the breath between Being and Not.

The preacher didn’t seem to like this answer. If anything, he looked upon DeBlanc with more wariness.

Funny... he hadn’t thought they were that different.
Cass bit his lip, shook his head, tugged at Jesse’s sleeve. “You gotta explain this to me, padre.”

“Alright.”

“We’ve got ourselves two real, live angels here, yeah?”

Fiore and DeBlanc were hoisting their trunk into the back.

“Yep.”

“An’ I’m more than just a shite-faced Irishman—grade A vampire here, mate!”

“... if you say so.”

“An’ you’ve got a bein’ in you more powerful than the rest of us combined. You’re the fuckin' cream of the crop, padre.”

Jesse smirked. “True.”

Tulip glared fiercely until they climbed in.

“Right...so who put bloody Tulip in charge?”

“You really gotta ask?”
“Here, take this.”

Despite the lore, Cass’ reflexes were shit, vampire or no. Whatever Jesse had thrown at him hit his shoulder, bounced off of scrambling hands, and landed somewhere in the dirt, timed with Cass’ curse. He jogged over and when he found the object...his brain insisted he must have picked up something else by mistake.

Cass stared. “Wha’s this?”

“You’re brilliant,” Jesse drawled. “It’s a key, Cass.”

“To what?”

“To the church.”

“No,” because the church wasn’t just the church, it was Jesse’s home—

Jesse clapped him on the back. “You need a key to the house, man.”
Chapter 91

DeBlanc was more than a little shocked to see that skinny fellow when he opened the motel door. His first thought was that he’d gotten the preacher to reconsider... but then he pushed his way inside, pulling a run-down piece of luggage in behind him.

“Right,” Cass said. “Looks like you’re gonna be here a while, so I got you some human amenities to make things more livable.” He began pulling stuff out of the case. “iPod, beer, movies, some opiates —you’re welcome—bubblebath, kinda busted 3DS, extra socks, porn—”

He paused. Fiore and DeBlanc blinked.

“You two figure out masturbation yet?”
Chapter 92

Tulip wasn’t one for folding. Whether it be the traditional laundry or, yes, pamphlets for the church. Her ‘chores’ were always of the strange variety—parkouring to hunt down stollen pants as opposed to washing them.

So Tulip made these things exciting...and real excitement seemed to follow. She wasn’t folding pamphlets, she was navigating talking with another woman in love with her man. Tulip wasn’t picking church shit up, she was keeping assholes from swindling her new friend. Dropping it off led to the three of them in a closet.

Funny how chores still seemed worth it. Tulip was glad.
“With God, all things are possible.”

It was a favorite of Jesse’s: slipped into his sermons, thrown at the desperate sheep of his flock, even delivered to Cass on occasion—as if he were one to ever believe in God. And yet... if Jesse was right (and what reason had Cass to believe he was wrong?) then anything really was possible, not just the small-minded possibilities found in an equally small town.

Maybe... maybe Cass could actually stay here...and on his roughest nights...

...it made Cass wonder if someone as good as Jesse could love someone as bad as him.
They’re in a pretty bad place—hunted, hiding out in a shitty hotel room—when Tulip stood, told them to stay put, and marched straight out the door. Jesse and Cass exchanged one look before deciding to heed her order.

It took some work, admittedly. They were in the middle of the Boonies just east of Nowhere and Tulip ended up pounding on some poor lady’s door for five minutes straight. Traded a sweater (and a few threats) for what she needed. Grabbed frozen shit from the drugstore and broke into the hotel’s kitchenette.

Wasn’t much, but Tulip thought vanilla hash browns helped.
Chapter 95

Jesse couldn’t say that ‘domesticity’ was something he was familiar with. No soft telly in the background (unless you counted the crap Emily kept on); no hot meal to come home to (Tulip’s attempts didn’t count). So Jesse was more than a little surprised to hear calm music echoing from the second story of the church.

“Cass?” he called.

No answer, but there was a plate of meatloaf and frozen vegetables at the top of the steps. The bathroom door was open with a bubble bath waiting. The music came from the bedroom.

“I’m not a total shite,” Cass smiled.
Chapter 96

The three of them were packed into the truck together, each staring out their own window, watching the scenery pass. Finally Tulip said, “I’d kiss you two bastards in the rain.”

“Good one,” Cass chortled.

Jesse grinned. “Another instance where we get you all wet?”

“Ha. Ha.”

“I’d win you shite at some country fair.” Cass wiggled his fingers until Jesse passed him another soda. “All macho like.” He popped the tab. “What about you, padre? What stupidly romantic gesture would you make?”

Jesse’s grin never wavered. “Why, I’d marry you two assholes, of course.”

He always was the showoff.
They’d killed this woman—this angel—twenty-seven times now. Cass’ appearance made twenty-eight. Lying in another growing pool of her blood, Jesse took a moment to appreciate that he’d overtaken his whole life’s kill count in less than an hour... or did she still only count as one?

Either way, Jesse had seen and done it all. At least he’d thought he had, until the angel swung at him with that ax, nicked his shoulder, and Cass growled.

He tore her throat out and (oh) guzzled her blood. He ate her up, unrepentant.

Jesse sure as hell was learning a lot tonight.
Chapter 98

Cass wasn’t an eavesdropper by nature. Not intentionally. But when the kid with a face like an arse started reaming out the local preacher, who just happened to be Cass’ best (Cass’ only) mate... well, it took a stronger man than him to walk away.

And when he saw what Jesse did, accident or no...that was cowardice. To see the first crack in Jesse’s pedestal and quickly cover it in plaster, a sloppy job that still left the foundation wavering. Cass didn’t know how to fix that, but he wasn’t willing to knock it down either.

Not yet. Not ever.
“You know, there are lots of great things about night,” Jesse threw out randomly, in that awkward way of his, but Cass knew exactly what he was doing. He wasn’t the first.

“You know, it gets cooler, nice moon, stars, constellations—”

“Pretty sure those last two are kinda the same.”

Jesse scowled. Cass shook his head.

“I miss the sun, sure, but it an’t just that. Not the worst of it anyway.”

“Then what is?”

Cass was quiet a moment. “Just... people fear the dark, padre, and I’m one of the things that lives in it.”

“...I’ve never been afraid.”
Chapter 100

Chapter Notes

One hundred drabbles! I feel ridiculously accomplished! And of course, this 100th drabble had to be about my latest obsession...

“This is total an’ utter shite.” Cass shook his phone in Jesse’s face. “Why the fuck are there so many Pidgeys! How the hell are they breeding so fast?”

Jesse rolled his eyes. “How about you stop bitching and help me defend the church from Tulip. Again.”

“Aye. Mystic. Honestly was a bloody traitor she is.”

“Who you using?”

“Charmander.”

“There’s irony in there somewhere.”

“Hehe.”

They were mostly silent as they fought, but ultimately Tulip couldn’t keep up with the both of them at once... until BakerQueenX showed up.

“Who the fuck—?” Cass asked.

Jesse paled. “Oh hell. That’s Emily.”
This was a part of his punishment, self-inflicted and justly deserved. Eugene had little doubt that his new ‘friends’ were anything but, that the hole in the fence and the darkened tunnel couldn’t hold anything but further humiliation. Torment. Perhaps even physical pain. But Eugene went along with whatever these boys might give him because really, how much worse would he be if he didn’t?

Yet the quick *pop! pop! pop!* wasn’t guns they stole from their daddies. The *crack!* wasn’t a baseball bat and the lights weren’t stars behind his eyes.

Fireworks.

An unexpected, undeserved gift was what finally broke Eugene.
Chapter 102

Jesse blinked in shock, staring Cass down. “Seriously?”

“Well yeah,” he waved his arms. “Wasn’t much of a call for it at the time an’ then I got drafted, got bit, hoofed it over here—terrifying boat ride, as you’d imagine—an’ all ‘n all there were more bloody important things to worry about!”

Tulip popped her gum. “You gotta learn how to swim, Cass.”

“Why?” he whined.

“Because one of these days Tulip is gonna shove you into some goddamn body of water and you best be prepared.”

Tulip smirked. “What he said.”

“Alright, but you lot ain’t teachin’ me, fuckin’ hell...”
Tulip and Jesse wore identical expressions of horror. They stood in tandem.

“Who the fuck gave you a kid?” Tulip said.

Cass was indeed approaching the church with a little girl in his arms, green dress and pink ribbon blowing in the wind. He waved at them with one hand while hefting her expertly with the other.

“That’s a long story,” he said, laughing. “Involvin’ running a stop sign an’ jumpin’ a car, and a frankly strange woman, ‘Why, I bet you’d be a great babysitter too!’ I swear—” Cass clucked, smiling bright.

“Aye, she reminds me of my own kids...”
Chapter 104

“I like having you around.”

Jesse couldn’t know what those words meant to Cass. After hearing every version of the reverse—beast, monster, abomination, why are you here? having someone like Jesse claim to enjoy his company, unprompted no less, was a gift Cass had never expected to receive.

So of course it couldn’t last. He kept his secrets, Jesse kept his. They fought angels and temptations, coming out from a burning and a firefight with a relationship quite unlike what they started out with. Cass didn’t know if it was stronger until he heard,

“I still like having you around.”
“What about this?” Tulip asked, torquing her body to get a look at her ass in the mirror. Cass’ reflection leered.

“Looks damn fine, luv.”

“You’ve said that about all of them.”

“Doesn’t make it any less true.”

Tulip rolled her eyes, unwilling to show that she actually thought the compliment was sweet. Though all the suits did look good on her, didn’t they? Tulip was determined to swim this summer, and Cass made a great shopping companion. Case in point:

“Hey, Tulip.” Cass smiled wide, holding up a two-piece with bright flowers on the side. “How about some tulips?”
Chapter 106

If asked, Cass would say truthfully that his favorite thing about Annville was the people—two in particular—but practically speaking his favorite \textit{thing} by far was the lack of security.

Getting blood morally had never been so easy. No locks, large crowds, or fancy alarm systems. He just hopped through a hospital window and took all the bags he could want. Sure, there was some talk about the thefts (obviously creeping a few people out) and a call for donations, but beyond that it was the perfect solution.

Until the kid in the car crash... who apparently didn’t get blood.

Oh.
Jesse woke up to two sensations: a continuous tickle along his back and the heavy heat of Cass’ morning wood pressed against his ass.

“I nearly threw you,” he mumbled into the pillow. Jesse deliberately loosened all his muscles. “Nice as this is, I’m gonna sock you one of these days.”

“Worth it,” Cass said and Jesse could hear the grin. There was another odd feeling against his skin.

“The fuck you doing?”

“Drawing.”

“Drawing?”

“Aye. Gonna stop me?”

No, because later when Jesse saw his back there was the normal, childish shit... and his tattoo, covered over with a heart.
Chapter 108

“I gotta admit,” Tulip said. “That part I’m jealous of.”

She was pointing at the trashy romance in Cass’ lap—*The Beauty and the Bronco*. He wasn’t ashamed of his reading choices (especially now that the title hit so close to home), but he had to admit to a bit of surprise at Tulip’s reaction.

“Wouldn’t have pegged you for the romance sort,” he drawled, waving the paperback.

Tulip shrugged. “I’m not... but I’m the reading sort, and you’ve got all the time in the world, dontcha?”

“Aye... though we’ve both got now. Gonna join?”

Romances, apparently, were best read aloud.
“Did you know I’m part cat, padre? All the... the reflexes an’... an’... y’know.”

Jesse tried valiantly not to laugh as he stared upwards. He could just make out a swatch of jeans through a patch of leaves. “So what you’re trying to tell me is you’re stuck in the tree?”

There was—what Jesse would term—frustrated rustling. “Not stuck.”

“No?”

“No.”

“Then what?”

“...Waitin’. For you. Obviously.”

So against his better judgement Jesse climbed the tree—and found Cass.

“You realize it’s up to Tulip now? To get us down?”

Cass grinned. “Guess we’ll have to pass the time K-I-S-S-I-N-G.”
Cass rocked on his heels, surveying the house. Nice place by Annville standards. He poked the door and it rocked just a tad... So Cass shrugged, shouldering in. Jesse *had* said the place with the cat-shaped planter out front.

Cass gave said kitty an absent pat as he passed.

“Hello?”

There was only one light on that he’d spotted, up on the second floor. He mounted the steps tentatively, only relaxing when he caught familiar voices coming from the bathroom. Cass was already shaking his head when he found his two favorite people piled in the bath.

“Alright. Was’ this now?”
“What’s it look like?” Jesse shot back.

It certainly looked like something. He was lounging in an oversized tub so full it seemed like any movement would overflow the water. Nestled between Jesse’s legs was Tulip... flat out ignoring Cass in favor of building a tower of bubbles. It sort of resembled a dick.

She finally glanced up, giving him a once over. “You getting in or what?”

“Well...pretty sure vampires need invitations,” Cass said. He grinned.

He wasn’t entirely familiar with the gesture Tulip threw, and didn’t quite catch whatever it was Jesse muttered... but yeah. Seemed close enough.
Cass was right. A third person stepping in was a disaster for the floor. Ah well.

“This is cozy,” he said and was a little surprised to find that he meant it. Tight fit overall, sure, but Tulip put her feet up in his lap and Jesse squeezed Cass’ legs between his hip and the side of the tub. After some grumbling they all finally settled, Cass in particular sighing as he sank into the hot water. He couldn’t remember the last time he’d taken a bath.

Cass scooped up a handful of bubbles. “Well this beats the church shower.”
“Gotta keep it a secret,” Tulip said, like Cass was really going to go blabbing. “We’ve broken into Mrs. Hewitt’s house since we were kids. Says a lot that she was senile then.”

Jesse snorted. “Yeah. Goes out on ‘trips’—gambling—and leaves the house wide open. To be fair, no one really locks up in Annville, but no one had early onset dementia either.”

“We’d watch TV, eat whole chickens outta the fridge...” Tulip smirked. “She never noticed.”

Cass wiggled his toes. “And let me guess: no one else has a big enough tub for two? Or three.”

“Ding, ding, ding.”
All in all, it wasn’t a bad way to spend the night.

Cass was so used to everything being wild with them—hard drinking and fast cars and a need to always be *going*, right up until they were gone. Just sitting with Tulip and Jesse had its own charm though, their naked bodies tangled together, pressed thigh to wrist and foot to shoulder, getting to fucking relax for once.

Jesse had his hands in Tulip’s hair. Tulip had picked up Cass’ hand to play with. Cass ran his leg softly up and down Jesse’s arm.

“Well do this again,” he murmured.
“What kind of preacher are you?”

Cass had passed the words to Tulip later in their relationship, recounting to her how a vampire and a holy man had walked into a bar. It was only when they were on the road that Tulip found an answer: he was a damn good preacher, far as she was concerned.

She’d never seen faith like Jesse’s. It ate at her in a way that was nearly persuasive, for the simple reason that he sought answers. It wasn’t blind.

What other preacher took the time to track down God himself?

None other that she had found.
The five of them stared down at Emily’s youngest. Cass gnawed at his lip.

“Right,” he said. “Let’s see if I understand this an’ all: you,” he pointed to Jesse, “shot your pet Komodo Dragon—”

“That was work,” Tulip said.

“Hush. You break kids’ art things AND leave creepy carriages in the road. These two lugs,” Cass clapped Fiore and DeBlanc on the shoulder, “think that a coffee can is an appropriate ‘domicile’ and sing crap lullabies.”

“They’re not—!”

“Also hush. What I’m getting at is, am I honestly the most qualified person to be carin’ for this kid? ... Jesus.”
Chapter 117

Chapter Notes

Slightly longer fics for the next six chapters or so. Lovely people sending in requests from a prompt meme <3

5. “We’re not just friends and you fucking know it.”

Mrs. Reeven was the straw that broke the old camel’s back, and Cass couldn’t help but hand it to the biddy: tall, thin, pale as paper, and with hair wispy like cotton floss—she damn well looked like straw too.

“Come in, come in, there you go. Out on the road this long... I have leftovers in the fridge, if you’d like?”

They would. This was the lovely invitation that friends got. Or rather, one friend. Leave it to Jesse Custer to pull over at the end of the day, pointing out not the town bar, but the tiny house with a vegetable garden and lace windows. Damn bastard could read houses as well as people. ‘Hello, ma’am. So sorry to disturb your evening, but I’m a just a completely innocent preacher in the midst of travel, surely you wouldn’t deny me one glass of water on my way? Why, dinner? Really? How kind of you, of course we accept. Oh yes, and this here is my girlfriend Tulip.

‘And my friend Cassidy.’

At least they could still read him too. Jesse and Tulip were passing each other exasperated looks as Cass violently dismantled Mrs. Reeven’s meatloaf. With a fake grin he rudely dumped the entire bottle of ketchup on top, wondering if it would remind them of another awful dinner.

It did.

“The fuck is your problem?” Tulip hissed. Mrs. Reeven had stood for desert—a peach cobbler, originally mean for her granddaughter and wasn’t that kind?—her slow, shuffling steps ensuring that they had a moment of privacy. Tulip threatened to make use of that privacy by pointing her fork at Cass’ neck.
“You need blood?” Jesse asked, casual, and it was so much like a parent asking if the damn kid needed feeding that Cass slammed down his own fork, startling them.

“No.” he growled, voice barely pitched low. “What I need is to know how come she’s always the ‘girlfriend’? Every bloody house, Jesse... I’m never the ‘boyfriend,’ am I? Jesus... we’re not just friends and you fuckin’ know it.”

To his surprise Jesse’s face cleared in actual shock. He exchanged another look with Tulip, though this time it actually felt like Cass was part of the conversation.

“We’re still in Texas,” he said slowly. It was just the tip of his justification—well-founded at that—and in just four words Cass deflated.

“Aye... I do get that. Fuck, I do. Sorry. Maybe I need some blood in me after all, yeah?” But the joke fell flat.

Tulip fiddled with her knife, whispering out quick before Mrs. Reeven returned, “I get it,” and Cass looked at her skin, remembered her last name… thinking that maybe she did.

Jesse gave his thigh a quick squeeze under the table.

It was enough for Cass to enjoy the cobbler, to apologize for using all the ketchup, and leave the house in slightly better spirits. He put it all from his mind as they hit the road, until the next Texan house with an accommodating owner.

“These are my… friends, Tulip and Cassidy.”

He saw Tulip’s brief look of surprise before it settled into a smile. Cass outright grinned.

Fine then. At least in this they were all equal.
4. Kiss me, please

“Kiss me, please.”

Cass nearly dropped him then and there, Jesse’s words recalling a time years ago when he’d said the exact same thing to Tulip, sprawled in the back of some broad’s car whose name he’d now long forgotten. With a rush of horror Cass realized they were also in the same position, Jesse’s head cradled carefully in his lap.

There was even a wound in Jesse’s neck.

“Jesus, jesus fuck, Jesse, you’re—you’re gonna be fine, yeah? Stop—oh god—stop kickin’, love, you’re makin’ it worse—TULIP! Where the fuck are ya?”

He knew where she was though, less than a street down at the payphone, shrieking and hollering something fierce for an ambulance. Cass could see her from here, could just barely make out the swing of her leg in the darkness, colliding violently with the booth as she kicked it again and again, still yelling. Blubbering. The way her body doubled over told Cass she’d probably broken some toes and hail Mary and Joseph, that was the least of their troubles right now…

“Hold still, Jesse.”

Cass growled it this time, though he felt himself sobbing. He pressed his hands down hard on Jesse’s shoulders because the damn stupid man was bucking like a bronco and yeah, sure, wound like that had to hurt, but every movement was pumping more blood out faster than his body could take. Cass could hear it rushing from his veins onto the asphalt and he had to just STOP—

“K-kis m—”

It was too garbled, Jesse’s mouth filling and overflowing. Black rivets snaked down his chin and Cass swallowed the nausea rising up within him. He’d never wanted Jesse’s blood less then he did right now. Not like this.
When Jesse tried to say it a third time his failed, his voice leaving him abruptly. Cass felt him finally beginning to still…

No.

He surged forward.

Except he didn’t kiss him. Not on the lips at least. Cass sealed his mouth over the rip in his neck and did something he promised himself he’d never do.

But this was Jesse.

By the time Tulip came back—stumbling and tripping over her own feet, hardly breathing at the thought of what she might find—Cass had already torn open his own wrist, pumping as much of his blood into Jesse as he could. His eyes were hollow and resigned as he turned to Tulip.

“He’ll need some a’ the human kind, luv.”

Cass’ voice might have cracked, but Tulip’s hands were steadier than they’d ever been. Frenzied and starving in a way she couldn’t comprehend, Jesse latched onto her next and she just lay down, right there in the road. She took his full weight as Cass steadied his back, hands stroking through his hair.

Between the two of them it was enough. Hell, the two of them were all Jesse would ever need.

When the ambulance arrived they were just three strangers covered in blood.

All the wounds that mattered had healed.
Chapter 119

7. "You can't--you can't--"

It was amazing how well sound carried in a church. Tulip was two steps through the doors when her ears caught all manner of strange things: the clink of metal, a whirr like that of a sickly motor, shoes squeaking, grinding, coughing... enough that she turned on her heel with every intent on leaving before something began.

The sixth sound stopped her though. Irish cursing.

Tulip sighed.

She found Cass in the back of the kitchen, a war-zone of parts scattered between the counter and his feet. It look her a long moment to realize what all those things had originally been made up as.

“Are you actually trying to fix the air conditioner?”

Cass jumped like a cartoon character, landing on a bit of the outer casing and yowling loud enough for Tulip to massage her ears. She didn’t know what shoes she’d heard earlier because Cass was barefoot—now hopping.

“I think I cut it,” he moaned.

Tulip snatched his foot right out of the air, nearly upending him. Cass gripped tight to the counter as she sneered.

“It’s so damn filthy we wouldn’t know a cut if it was there. Which it’s not.”

“Kiss it better?”

Tulip squeezed his ankle until he yelled ‘uncle.’
“Alright, alright! Jesus, luv. Do you know how to fix an air conditioner?” Cass gestured helplessly to the mess he’d made. “Google fuckin’ failed me! Never thought I’d see the day...”

“No.”

“Do you know how to fix an air conditioner for Jesse?”

Despite herself Tulip smiled, because yeah, she got the distinction. Still,

“Nope.”

“Well fuckin’ hell. That’s just bloody perfect now, ain’t it.”

He really was useless, wasn’t he? All those years and not a skill to his name. Except entertainment. Tulip poured herself some lemonade and settled in to watch Cass insult every nut and bolt that had the misfortune of falling in his line of sight, a particular rant at the fan itself actually drawing a laugh from her. She knew he was doing it mostly on purpose—sneaking peeks to see that smile—but it didn’t change the fact that within an hour the air conditioner was still very much not fixed.

Tulip watched him stabbing at the control panel’s buttons, weary in a way she couldn’t explain. A good way.

“You can’t—you can’t just—Cass it’s not even connected.”

He bounced a coil off the far wall. “Shit. Fine. So now Jesse’s got a dismantled, not-working air conditioner. Fuckin’ fantastic. Any suggestions?”

Tulip snickered. “Honestly? I’d buy yourself a manual fan and be prepared to play servant next Sunday.”

It was a joke of course, the broken air conditioner was sort of their thing now, but Tulip should have known better than to underestimate Cass’ ability to take things literally, especially when it would
earn him her laugh. Sure enough, that Sunday Cass was poised between Emily at the organ and Jesse at the pulpit, waving a fan back and forth between them, comically serious. There were many confused faces among the crowd that day, Jesse’s included.

Only one of them was giggling though.
The bar they stopped at had a real-life water barrel out front, just the kind of thing you’d hitch a horse to and let ‘em drink their fill. Except there weren’t any horses around here, obviously—they weren’t that far west. There was a dog though, sleeping up against the wood. Those John Wayne fantasies always got the best of him and Jesse pointed both the dog and the barrel out, announcing, “I like this place.”

Although...he didn’t like it quite as much three hours later, when the dog was howling and Jesse’s head was shoved three feet down the barrel.

Water that had previously looked so refreshing now felt hot against his skin, scalding even, cooked too long under the Texan sun. Jesse could feel it lapping down the back of his shirt as the larger man pushed his head down farther. Jesse kicked out, got a blow for his trouble, and the sweeping pain in his side made him gasp, pulling a mouthful of that water straight down his throat. His eyes popped open and Jesse could just make out the barrel’s bottom, close enough to feel claustrophobic and too far away to do any good. He swallowed more water, choking... Jesse began thrashing in earnest and thought only: I can’t breathe.

And right on the heels of that was: Do I need to?

Because Jesse had been under too long and he’d swallowed too much to still be conscious. He knew how to drown—he’d done it before—and despite the impossibility, it seemed like his body had forgotten how things were done. Jesse focused his gaze onto a single plank, trying to cut through the rest of his panic. He knew this feeling at least. Sort of. The only comparable moment was as a child, exploring Grandma’s fields at twilight, the tall grass up near his shoulder...the cloud of insects that rose when Jesse took one step too far. He’d seen their black bodies and wings and thought ‘Wasps,’ throwing himself to the ground in terror. He’d been thrashing and rolling long enough to ruin his clothes before he realized that nothing was hurting him. Jesse opened his eyes and found fireflies.

This was certainly fireflies of another sort. Jesse took in a deliberate breath and found that he didn’t breathe.

The man holding him was clearly just as confused, wondering why the hell this guy wasn’t dead yet.
Confusion breeds lenience, so when his grip slacked Jesse took advantage, knocking the barrel off balance and pulling up for a swing.

Dripping wet and gasping (why did air suddenly burn?) Jesse locked eyes with Cass across the porch, right as his fist took a tooth out of his killer’s jaw.

Would-be killer.

“Left!” Jesse yelled and Cass had just enough time to pull off, tripping another bastard. Shock still painted his face though. He’d seen then.

When Jesse fully acknowledged the discovery (which was right about the time he put a broken table leg through a guy’s arm) he also had to acknowledge that he wasn’t surprised. Not really. Genesis... from the moment they’d entered Jesse’s body he’d been able to taste the power, thrumming through his veins and singing songs in his ears. It wasn’t just the ability to give commands. Genesis was an embodied feeling, of being alive.

Why the hell shouldn’t that be literal?

Jesse and Cass were ankle deep in bodies by the time they were done, all of them bruised and broken. Not dead though. That was the difference between them. Still, Jesse’s hands were shaking as he stole a packet of cigarettes.

Cass wasn’t much better. He gestured erratically to the shotgun he’d pulled off one of the goons.

“So if I took that there,” he said, breathing heavy, “an’ made you make love to the damn thing,” Cass mimed shooting Jesse in the head. “You’d what? Go zombie on my ass? Full on resurrection?”

Jesse took a long drag, shutting his eyes. “Not saying I want you to give it a shot... but yeah. I think so.” He paused. “Genesis...well, I’m not much good to it dead, am I?”

“Shit, padre.”

“Yeah.”
What else was there to say? They left the men to their moans and shattered dignities, only taking some bottles off them for their trouble—perhaps a few more than they’d need on a regular night. They piled back into the truck and Jesse drove until his eyes blurred over. He parked them under a tree large enough to shelter Cass from the coming sun and even then Jesse could feel the tingle in his chest, remnants of water that should have done far more damage.

He breathed in, he breathed out.

What else was there?

Nothing except what Cass gave him, two bottles in and the sun just peeking over the mountains:

“Never had anyone who could stay,” he whispered. “Y’know... always.”

Always then, Jesse decided. There were worse things in life.
Chapter 121

7. "You can't--you can't--"

Dragging Jesse to the fireworks show was harder than Cass would have imagined.

“You’re a right contradiction, you are.” Cass used the side of his chair to pop the top off his drink, then threw it at Jesse for extra emphasis. He batted it away like an errant fly.

“I’m really not.”

“You are. What full-blooded, full-fightin’, wanna-be cowboy American doesn’t want to watch the famous light show in action?” Cass took a long pull of beer to compose himself. “Draggin’ you out by your goddamn balls, I swear... You know, if you’d have found me back when I was in New York I would have shown you all the sights. Every last goddamn attraction, you tourist, but here I am in the middle of Nowhere, Texas an’ you can’t be even assed to show me anything decent. Not once. No good restaurants, the theater’s busted, not a blasted vap-cafe in sight—”

“Oh, alright.” Jesse rolled his eyes. He tilted his chair back and gazed up at the still empty sky. “I heard you the first twenty times. Jesus, Cass. It’s just nothing spectacular is all.”

“Bullshit.” Cass avoided Jesse’s hand as he turned suddenly to hit him. “Aw, c’mon! I’m not stupid here, padre. I’ve been around long enough to see how you do actually care for this here shite town, despite attempts to hide it.” Cass made a sweeping gesture with his drink, the plains in front of the church allowing him to encompass all of Annville in one exaggerated movement. “You know every loser’s name—”

“It’s a small town.”

“—an’ always ask how they’re doin’—”

“That’s kind of my job.”

“—an’ you grinned reeeeeeal big when that kiddie gave you that pic she drew in school. You can’t
fool me, Jesse Custer. Not these old eyes."

Jesse did smile then, soft in the fading light. “Karen. Sweet kid. Says she wants to be a preacher when she’s older.”

Cass let out a strangled laugh. “Dream big.”

“Oh shut it.”

“Make me. You can’t—you can’t—aw, Jesus, you can’t go bein’ complicated like this it drives me up the fuckin’ wall. Look, all I’m sayin’ is I don’t get why you wouldn’t support the shite town’s fireworks too.”

They lapsed into silence then, Jesse ditching his collar as a muggy night rolled in, Cass kicking off his boots. It wasn’t a bad sort of silence, not awkward by any means. Though Cass did have the distinct impression he was still missing something. Like maybe this little night out of his was having unforeseen consequences.

Jesse was kind enough not to make him ask again.

“Told you about Tulip,” he said, so soft and sudden that Cass nearly missed it. “Not... us. You know about us already. But before that, when we were kids.”

Cass nodded. “Yeah. You did, padre.” He’d heard enough anyway to get the gist of things. All he needed was a swipe of ‘childhood friend,’ a splash of ‘social workers’ and Cass had the whole damn painting revealed for him to gaze at.

He shifted slightly, drawing Jesse out of whatever memory he’d fallen into. “What about it?”

Jesse shrugged. “Nothing much. Just that we were supposed to see the fireworks together, before they came. Took her. Dad was going to sit with us an’ all. Right here.” Jesse patted the church’s grass and downed half his beer.

“Oh.”
Cass fiddled with the loose bits in his chair. “That… don’t sound like nothin’.”

“Just leave it.”

Cass couldn’t though. When did the dog leave the bone? Or the starved mutt the scraps, in his case? So he took in the deepest breath of his life and blurted, “I wanted this to be a date.”

Beside him Jesse stilled.

“You know, all proper an’ shite. Decades on this fuckin’ dustball and I’ve never dated, can you believe it? Not really anyway. Flings and the like—what you’d expect—but I thought, maybe just once…” Cass trailed off, wondering when the hell he’d gotten quite this pathetic. He stopped breathing entirely because hey, in for a penny, in for a pound: “Maybe this’ll make for better memories, yeah?”

Arrogant of him, but when had Cass been anything less. Coward too. He only got up the courage to look back at Jesse when the first firework shot into the sky.

Lights of red and blue colored his smile.

“Yeah, Cass. Maybe.”
Chapter 122

5. “We’re not just friends and you fucking know it.”

Cass couldn’t remember the last time he’d had a friend.

Oh sure, there were buds and mates and pals scattered all over the U.S., though these were the titles that Cass had given them—it was never the other way around. They were his mates because he’d do anything for the bastards, loyalty drawn up through an impulsively kind smile or a loaned $20 bill. That was more than enough for the likes of him. Didn’t matter if when he called again they never had more to give him, be it in words or money or hell, certainly not their time. Didn’t matter one whit. They were all he had and Cass clung to that desperately.

Until Jesse.

A kind smile and a twenty, thrown onto the bar as they were both getting arrested. Cass’ eyes widened at the fact that Jesse not only noticed but gave half a damn that he obviously couldn’t pay for the drink he’d chugged. The man had then put up with Cass’ pessimistic philosophy while stuck in a cell with him, and had somehow come out of that wanting to shake his hand. Cass moved into the church and claimed fixing the air conditioner as his ‘rent,’ despite the fact that both he and Jesse knew damn well that the thing would never sputter to life again. He was given clothes and food and more company than he’d shared in ages. Cass had taken it all, greedy and ravenous, wondering when Jesse’s do-gooder preacher routine would run it’s course. Because that’s all this could be, surely. Charity. Cass had labeled himself Jesse’s friend from nearly the moment they’d met. Didn’t mean Jesse considered him his.

Until...

Until “I like having you around, Cass,” accompanied by a sunny smile like it was the most natural thing in the world. To want him. In any capacity. Despite the ease of the words it took Cass a long moment to realize that Jesse actually meant them. It wasn’t just some ploy to get... who the fuck knew what out of him. He had nothing to give after all. That was sort of the point. Sitting there and watching Jesse Fucking’ Custer saunter off like this was just an everyday occurrence for him. Taking in strays. Cass was even luckier than he knew. If he’d had been any more prideful he’d have tossed it all away. Lucky for Cass, he was more greedy than he was anything else.

For the first time being a shit abomination was getting him something in life and... what the hell was he to make of that? He continued mooching off Jesse and the man let him, going so far as to ask
about meals or bedding or, “Shouldn’t we buy you some actual clothes, Cass?” When the time came Jesse trusted him with Genesis, with his mistakes, with an apology and Jesus fucking Christ, Cass didn’t need to know the whole family line to realize what it must take to drag an apology out of a Custer.

They grew closer, to Cass’ everlasting shock. They grew so close that he somehow missed the extra touches Jesse gave him, the looks he bestowed, all manner of small, intimate moments. They got tangled up in the simple “Hey, there”s and “How are you”s because let’s face it, to Cass those things weren’t simple at all.

Maybe Jesse noticed. That he didn’t know what to do with it all. That he needed not a nudge but a fucking shove into the deep end. Because the day the guy accosted them at the bar Jesse held nothing back.

He stared down the asshat in the wife-beater and faded jeans. The one sneering at two ‘friends’ just having a beer. Cass felt his world turn upside down when Jesse grinned, downed the rest of his drink, and goaded the man with, “We’re not just friends and you fucking know it. What you gonna do about it?”

When the guy threw the first punch Cass was there to receive it. He got in front of Jesse just in time and as his head torqued he saw his face: pure honesty painted there. Jesse thought of him as a friend. More than a friend.

What had he done to deserve that?

Nothing, but Cass was still a greedy bastard. He took that punch to the face like God himself handing out a miracle, sprawling back into Jesse’s arms—falling into paradise.

Which apparently included bloody brawls and a broken leg by the end of the night. Fine then. Beggars couldn’t be choosers.

But really? Cass wouldn’t have it any other way.
Chapter 123

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

22. “We’re not buying a dog.”

Tulip couldn’t get over how normal everything was here. They’d parked the truck in a standard lot, just a stone’s throw from an honest to god park, full of all sorts from businessmen scarfing down lunches to families taking a breather together. Jesse had camped out on one of the picnic benches, looking mighty out of place with his preacher garb and shifty eyes. Everyone seemed to have an opinion on him, if those stares were anything to go by, but Tulip walked through it all with her head held high.

“Hey,” he said, taking his feet off the bench to make room. Tulip sat with a sigh and dolled out chicken salad sandwiches, chips, and soda—all in threes. Jesse was already tearing into his when she nudged him.

“Where the hell is Cass?”

“Walk.”

“Walk?”

“Walk,” and this time Jesse said it with enough emphasis that Tulip rolled her eyes. Right. They’d had plenty of ‘walks’ since leaving Annville. They consisted of Cass wandering about—generally looking to score—but justifying it by asking a lot of questions. Like, ‘Hey, you haven’t seen two guys in cowboys hats and a sinister trunk around, have you? No? What about a man in a white suite and fedora? 19th century dude with ancient as hell revolvers? Still no? Excellent. Now if you’d be so kind as to point me in the general direction of your shadiest dealer...’

Tulip scoffed, shaking her head. Alright, so one time Cass’ weird descriptions had landed them a ‘Yeah! Creepy guy with the guns was back that way,’ and they’d been able to get the hell outta dodge, but more often than not it was a self-indulged crapshoot. Tulip poked his sandwich and shook his soda. Let the thing get warm before it exploded in his face.

“Where to next?” she asked, or at least meant to ask it. Tulip’s words died at the look on Jesse’s face, slack-jawed as he stared at something just beyond her shoulder. She turned, hand pressed to the gun
hidden under her shirt, but there was only a shitty hot-dog stand, girls sunbathing... and Cass.

Cass and a furry friend, apparently.

“We’re not buying a dog,” Jesse blurted, the second Cass was within earshot. All the declaration did was earn him a grin.

“No buyin’ involved, padre. Does this furry face look like the kind a’ merchandise you’d find in a shiny ol’ window?”

Tulip snorted. “You’re right about that much at least.”

The mutt—for that was certainly what it was—looked as good as they had the last time they’d been without money for food or hotel showers. Matted brown hair had all sorts of things sticking out of it, mud caked its paws and half of its legs, poor thing had a rip in its left ear, and gunk surrounded both eyes. For all that though it followed Cass happily like, well, like a dog following its master. No sooner had the mutt realized they were stopping than it bounded halfway up onto the picnic table, snifffing their lunch.

Jesse pulled his away protectively.

“Aw yeah, sure luv, just give him mine, don’t mind at all.” Cass said it sarcastically as Tulip unwrapped his sandwich, but he looked fondly at the dog as it gobbled it up. “Found him wanderin’ down by that there underpass. Poor lil’ thing shakin’ in the bushes. Thought he was gonna bite me or somethin’, but no, gentle as a lamb, this one. All he needs is a good cleanin’, bit a lovin’—”

“No,” Jesse said. Tulip smothered a laugh. Cass looked horribly offended.

“No,” Jesse said. Tulip smothered a laugh. Cass looked horribly offended.

“C’mon! Don’t tell me you’re not a dog person, padre. There is no way I’ve been travelin’ all around this goddamn country with a freakin’ dog-hater—”

“He loves dogs,” Tulip interrupted, still snickering. “That’s just it. Don’t give him one because he will cater to the stupid thing. More love than we’ll ever get.” Tulip raised her eyebrows as Jesse tried to defend himself. “You know it’s true. What about Molly? Sasha? Them girls got more attention than you ever gave me, I swear. And soon enough,” she turned back to Cass. “Soon enough one gets sick or hurt and he’s an absolute wreck of a human being. Jesse can’t deal with that... or everyone
knowing what a softie he is.”

Jesse’s mouth worked, pointing forcefully at Tulip. “They’re family.”

She finally laughed.

“That’s somethin’ else entirely then,” Cass said, looking relieved. He took the mutt’s head in his hands, turning it this way and that. “How can you say no to that face?”

“He can’t.” Tulip assured.

“I can. We barely have enough for the three of us. We’re living in motels and the truck, for christ’s sake.” Jesse firmly turned away... though he peeked back at the dog just a bit. “Just... just give him a bit more than the sandwich, alright?”

Tulip choked as Cass shook his head.

“You fuckin’ softie, you. Nah, he’s fine. Gave him my chocolate bar to coax him outta the bushes.”

Jesse and Tulip turned on Cass with identical expressions of horror.

“What?”

With a curse Jesse surged to his feet, knocking over his soda as he scooped the dog into his arms. He was sprinting towards the truck before Cass could do more than blink. Tulip was right on his heels.

“What!” he said again.

“Chocolate is fucking toxic to dogs, Cass!” Jesse yelled.

“Oh mother fu—”
Cass raced to catch up, already looking up the nearest vet on his phone.

***

Few hours later Jesse had used up his creativity for coming up with false stories. They were officially out of cash. He jeans were stiff from the spilled soda and he really needed that meal he’d never gotten to finish.

He also had a tired pup curled across his lap. A Tulip and a Cass on either side.

“... suppose we can’t really get rid of him now, can we?” Cass whispered.

Jesse ran his hand over the dirty fur. No. He supposed not.

Chapter End Notes

*whispers* these are getting longer oh no XD
Ch. 124. "You taste like heaven"

“You cook now, do you?”

Cass said it with such skepticism that Jesse pursed his lips, wondering if it would be too much to throw his knife at the rude vampire. It was fine when he was immortal, right? Though all he really did was turn with arms crossed, gesturing to the mess on the counter.

“I’m good at cutting things up,” he said ominously, drawing a snicker out of Cass. Jesse just shook his head, turning back to slice up more watermelon. “Emily put me on snack duty for the church committee meeting today.”

“You’ve got a church committee?”

“...getting real tired of your cynicism, Cass.”

“Can you blame me?” He hopped up onto the counter, snagging a slice before Jesse could say otherwise. Cass stuffed half of it into his mouth at once, juice and bits spraying out as he said, “Just figured I’d seen it all in this town.”

Jesse shrugged. “Well you have. Technically. Emily is hoping that the free food will draw enough people for there to be a committee.”

“I knew it,” Cass grinned, spitting black seeds into the sink.

“If you ask me, it’s a goddamn waste of our time, but she—*shut.*”

Cass caught the smell before he saw it, the fruit and dust of the church’s kitchen suddenly overtaken by the metallic scent of blood. He knew it was Jesse’s—would know that smell anywhere in the world—but Cass still whipped his head around because a smell didn’t tell him how bad it might be.
He visibly sighed in relief. Just a nick along Jesse’s index.

“Think you’ll survive?” Cass asked, mostly teasing. He did know much those little buggers could sting.

Jesse didn’t answer. He was cursing up a storm as he looked this way and that for a rag, paper towel, something to keep him from making a mess everywhere. Cass very nearly rolled his eyes, but settled for grabbing Jesse’s wrist and popping the digit into his mouth like candy.

“Oh,” Jesse said.

Cass hummed. It wasn’t the first time he’d gotten a taste of Jesse’s blood, but it was one of the few times he’d gotten it fresh—not poured into a glass or dropped in a thermos for later—and it was definitely the first time calm, when neither of them were worried about the whatever new hole had been blasted into Cass’ chest. He got to take his time, sweeping his tongue around Jesse’s finger and thoroughly enjoying the taste he picked up along the way. Cass sent up a wave of gratitude for Jesse’s god, that he was already planted firmly on the counter. His knees had gone weak and his legs might as well have been jelly.

Cass pulled back just enough to run his teeth along the cut, making Jesse hiss. “You taste like heaven, padre.”

Jesse had frozen through it, heat rising up behind his eyes. It was with slow, deliberate movements that he removed his finger from Cass’ lips, watching as he frowned, before he smoothed it all over by picking up a slice of watermelon. Cass was forced to hold back a whine as Jesse broke off the tip, squeezing a few drops of his blood on top. It soaked in: red mixing with pink.

Oh yes. This was heaven all right.

...and apparently heaven, like hell, was a lil’ bit crowded.

“Ahem.”

Emily walked in just as Jesse was popping the slice between Cass’ lips, hips pressed together and Cass’ hands plastered to Jesse’s ass.
He didn’t miss a beat: “Plenty here for you too, luv.”

They eventually got their committee. Even though—odd by Annville standards—there weren’t any snacks left to serve.
26. "I can't breathe"

“I can’t believe this is my life now,” Tulip muttered. There wasn’t anything for it but to roll down her window, stick her face out into the breeze, and hope some passing car did her the favor of taking her head off her shoulders.

In the driver’s seat Jesse didn’t look much better. At least he battled between grimacing and laughing at Tulip.

And Cas...

“I wanna pick up my phone,” he sang, raising an imaginary microphone up to his lips. “But I speak—” he paused. “I can’t breathe—!”

Tulip slammed her arm against the side of the car, looking like she was trying to escape. “You’re not gonna breathe because I’m gonna strangle you, Cass!”

Jesse pressed his hand hard against his mouth. He tried valiantly to stay on his side of the road.

“Cause you’re not here, with me, you’re my everything...” The last words were sung directly into Tulip’s ear as Cass leaned into the front of the car, trying to thread his fingers through her hair. She made to bite him and Cass just barely escaped.

“Aw c’mon now, luv,” he said, leaning back. “You’re no fun. What have you two got against the Biebs anyway?”

Jesse choked on air. “You did not just call him that.”

“I did. I will again. You dragged this secret outta me, padre, now you’re sufferin’ the consequences.”
“And yet...” Tulip raised her hand, like a lawyer about to win her case. “I had nothing to do with that.”

“You’re just along for the ride, ain’tcha. Lucky you.”

“Please just throw me out of this car.”

Cass tried to put his feet between them and this time Jesse slapped him good. “Look. If you’d just play some decent tunes I wouldn’t need to be entertainin’ myself, now would I?”

“We’re not playing Bieber,” Jesse growled. He stared forcefully out at the road.

“Alright then. Ahem...I gotta let you go, you were mine~”

Apparently, the way to create a Belieber was to pit it against bored, Irish caterwauling.

The true lesser of two evils.
17. "You're not getting rid of me that easy"

It took Jesse three times to notice and when he did he could have kicked himself. Not that the self-criticism was entirely deserved. Cass was slick, and he’d had a damn long time to perfect his lies. They slipped out just as easily as he did.

Like out through the church door, after the first time they’d gotten together, while drunk and fumbling for one another on top of a pew. Or rather, Jesse had tried to fumble, and Cass’ hands were as assured as the rest of his cocky nature. Jesse had pointed that out, Cass had made a joke (‘Heh. Cocky, padre?’), and before he could figure out a decent comeback—with none of his blood residing in Jesse’s head—Cass had used the moment to slide back, pulling Jesse’s pants down with a ferocity that ripped the seams. The blowjob hadn’t been any gentler. When he finished (hand digging into the back of Cass’ neck, legs spread wide enough to pull a damn muscle) Cass had stood, wiping his mouth with a predatory grin. Jesse had been too spent to immediately reciprocate, and frankly he didn’t know if that was shitty or the best kind of compliment he could give. He didn’t get the chance to find out. Cass had left quick, saying something about hearing someone loitering outside and you don’t want to ruin your rep, now do you, padre?

Jesse was pretty sure he knew what he wanted.

So he’d gone back for more, finding Cass at the local watering hole and trailing his hand over his hips when it got dark. Cass had let him play with the string holding his ratty pants up, press his palm into the fabric’s warmth, all the tiny, intimate precursors that sent Cass leaning hard against his stool, practically whimpering. They’d downed their beers and escaped to the men’s room where Jesse made the mistake of threading his hands through Cass’ hair, finally touching skin. The smaller man pinned him, rutting for the both of them before focusing solely on a handjob. It was one of the best experiences Jesse’ had ever had... and he’d hardly touched Cass at all.

The third time was a quickie in Emily’s living room and... well. It should be obvious why Jesse was a little preoccupied at the time. For a number of reasons. It was only two days and a packet of beers later that he thought back and noticed.

Which was why when their fourth encounter occurred—the true charm—Jesse discreetly locked the door to his bedroom behind Cass, pocketing the key.

“Moving up then, are we, padre?”
“Meaning we should have sex somewhere clean? Somewhere we’re allowed to be?”

“Don’t know if I’m ever really allowed to be in a church, per se, but no worries. This suits me just fine.”

Cass’ gaze said the same. He’d never been in Jesse’s room before and his eyes caressed everything from the bed to the empty bottles with a care that had Jesse looking away. Instead he honed in on the loose shirt hanging from Cass’ jeans, tugging it sharply.

“C’mere.”

Cass came... though he froze when Jesse snagged his hand as it rose, guiding it behind Cass’ back instead. He pinned his other arm and pressed hard against him. Jesse nuzzled his neck before placing a sloppy kiss there, slowing it down.

“What do you have against me touching you?” he whispered.

It was a theory, though one given heavy weight when Cass sucked in a sharp breath. It wouldn’t have been noticeable if Jesse hadn’t already been mapping out his jaw.


“No? That why you run every time it’s your turn?”

“My—? This ain’t fuckin’ kindergarten, sicko.”

“But this is you deflecting.”

“Learned that big word all on your own, did you?”

Jesse just kept working Cass, easy and gentle as he dared. Stopping him once was the linchpin, Cass’
hands fluttering like he thought he should push but didn’t have the strength, his whole both shaking at the slightest touch. Jesse stared, planting a firm kiss on his temple and watched as Cass’ eyes fluttered shut.

“You don’t think you deserve this?”

It wasn’t really a question.

“Aw fuck you.” Cass ground out, an admittance all its own.

“Irish bastard. It’s gonna be the other way around this time.”

Cass eyes flew open, hard and strangely vulnerable. Jesse thought of all the times Cass had tried so desperately to give. The few nights he’d paid for sex, walking back from the whorehouse with his head held too high to be real. The moments when Jesse slapped him on the back and that simple gesture seemed to seep into his very pores.

Jesse pushed Cass onto the bed, showing him the key before tossing it aside. Cass turned his head and Jesse forced it back.

“You’re not getting rid of me that easy.”

“…That a promise, padre?”

Jesse wasn’t stupid enough to think that Cass would believe his words.

He’d just have to use his body instead.
Chapter 127

25. "You're so small."

Cass remembered the exact moment it started: thinking he was alone in the church kitchen, up on the counter, trying valiantly to reach the top shelf where Emily had hidden his last bottle of liquor—like trying to keep cookies from a kiddie, honestly. Only problem was, Cass’ fingers were just an inch or so shy from that nob.

Until firm hands took hold of his waist, hefting Cass expertly. He only squawked and flailed briefly before turning to find Jesse.

“The fuck, padre?”

Jesse had the Look though. That godforsaken, ‘I never realized how cute you were’ Look. The, ‘We’re going to be best buds forever, just so I can tease you mercilessly’ Look. Cass firmly turned his face away and snatched the bottle off the shelf. He grabbed a tin of mints for good measure.

“You’re so small.” Jesse said it like a revelation.

Cass dropped the mints on his head.

It became a habit after that.

Thing was, Cass wasn’t short. A least, not short enough to be noticeable on a day-to-day basis. And sure, he was a little on the thin side—getting turned as a hungry teen would do that to you—but he liked to think he pulled it off in a rakish sort of way. Point was he was a fucking 119 year-old vampire who in no way could be considered cute.

Tell that to Jesse Custer though.

“Need help?” he’d ask, grin too knowing as Cass tried to take his turn at pool. The whole ‘keep one foot on the ground’ rule really wasn’t working for him.
“Alright then,” Jesse would say, turning away when Cass fell into the driver’s seat. Literally—the seat too far back and the petals at least a mile off.

“That’s a look,” he’d laugh, whenever Cass found jeans that were too long in the charity bin. He’d roll or tear them with as much dignity as he could muster.

Jesse Custer was a devil, that’s all there was for it. He had all the subtly of an asshat fourth grader: How’s the weather down there? Need a boost? Oh sorry, Cass, didn’t see you there. You’re so easy to miss... he’d had it up to here (ha) with the handsome fucker... until the day Jesse stumbled out of his church, looking like that single day had done more to him than the entire year.

“Okay?” Cass asked. He already had thoughts of finding more drink, maybe even sharing some of his drugs if his padre really needed it. All Jesse did though was stop before him, swaying, finally falling into Cass so that his chin rested on top of his head.

Cass wanted to duck his head, but that would have ruined their balance, wouldn’t it? He settled for scoffing instead.

“Guess my height is good for something, eh?”

“Yeah,” Jesse said. Cass could hear the smile in his voice. “Something.”
4. "Kiss me, please."

“Don’t look at me like that.”

Tulip waved the gun a little bit, but the bartender didn’t back down. She was a tough one, no doubt, cut from the same cloth as Tulip herself. Didn’t waver an inch when that gun got erratic and Tulip had to let a grin loose in response. Girl deserved it.

“You’re a bundle of laughs, aren’t you?” she said.

“You are robbing me.”

She had long hair, real long, the sort of locks Tulip had only seen on religious girls, thick and brown and all the way down to her calves. With Jesse cleaning out the register and Cass picking out a choice number of bottles, Tulip was free to fantasize about the woman kneeling before her. Not necessarily anything sexual. Just vague thoughts about how she could grab hold of that hair, use it to her advantage if it came down to a fight. How the girl might actually counter that, if the weight she kept planted on her toes was anything to go by. This wasn’t her first rodeo. Not at all.

Tulip tried for a softer smile. “What’s your name then?”

Brown eyes narrowed. “What’s that to you?”

“Small talk.”

“You don’t seem the type.”

“And right you are.” Tulip waved her gun again, noticing that this time the woman didn’t so much as twitch. “Maybe learning your name isn’t real small talk to me though. Maybe that knowledge will keep me up at night, haunting me, reminding me of this awful, terrible deed.” Tulip exaggerated her sad expression.
“Again,” the woman sat back on her heels, smirking. “You don’t seem the type.”

“We’re not total monsters.”

She laughed, gesturing with her arms at the wreckage around her. “Really? That’s your line? You come in here, wreck up my place, scare off my customers, take all my cash—” She gestured, seething, at Jesse. “You’re fucking assholes.”

“You can insult better than that,” and Tulip laughed when the woman did just that. “We’re on a road trip. Needed supplies. Can you blame us?”

“Yes.”

“Then go ahead.”

“Tulip!”

Jesse was waving her back to the truck, so much like the old days that Tulip felt a pang. Cass carting whole crates of alcohol behind him was certainly a new addition, but not a bad one. Not at all.

“C’mere,” Tulip murmured and Jesse came running like a good boy, though casting uncertain glances at the bartender. Stupid man had always been paranoid about being seen, even with the damn Word of God on his side. Tulip ran a hand over his chest to settle him, well aware that she was putting on a show. Tulip turned back to the woman.

“We’re liars, thieves, all that,” she admitted. “But at least we’re polite.” Tulip nuzzled Jesse’s neck. Kiss me, please.”

He did, tilting her back like some old-fashioned gentleman, the gun slung over his shoulder. Hot and messy, just how she liked it. Tulip even lifted a foot when Cass let out a whistle.

They broke apart, but Jesse still tugged her closer, leading them back outside. Tulip turned to find the
woman rather relaxed now, eyeing them both.

“So what’s your name?” Tulip insisted, nearly out the door.

“...come back sometime and maybe you’ll learn it.”
Starting a drabble bingo challenge from this awesome website. The card I got includes: Pride and Prejudice, Relaxation, Trick or Treat, Exhibitionism, Wabi/Sabi, Rescue Me: Damsels (and Others) in Distress, Heart on Sleeve, Workers/Labour, Hypothermia, Secret Admirers, Autumn is a Red Fox, The Curious Trio, Tornados, Curry Night, Warrior, After Dark, Character Transformed Into An Animal, It Is the Small Things That Are Important, Fundamental Particles, Minorities/Characters of Color, Summertime (and the Livin' is Easy), Ski Jumping, a Moment of Understanding/Clarity, Sufficiently Advanced Technology, and of course the Wild Card.

“It’s a truth universally fuckin’ acknowledged, that a single Irish man in possession of no fortune, must be in want of a patron. Or a padre.”

Jesse lowered his book. He’d thought that reading Pride and Prejudice in front of Cass might be a mistake, though this wasn’t the sort of teasing he’d expected.

“That your subtle way of asking for dinner?” he said.

“Aye.” Cass spread his arms. “An’ some new clothes would be lovely, Mr. Darcy.”

“Shall I get you a gown, Lizzie?”

“Fuck yeah! They got anything decent ‘round here?”

Jesse chuckled. “Maybe. Let’s start with the food.”
Rescue Me: Damsels (and Others) in Distress

They found Jesse in the industrial complex’s tallest tower, bound and gagged by members of the Grail, looking to do who knew what with Genesis. Lucky for them both, most of the bastards were dead now.

Tulip reloaded her gun as Cass cupped bloody hands over his mouth. “Custer, Custer—let down your hair!”

“Should’a seen him in the good old days,” Tulip said. “His hair was a lot longer then.”

“Jesus H. Christ and you let him cut it? Tragedy. Oh! Looks like he’s throwin’ us the finger.”

Jesse was definitely doing something: a black, crude pinprick that glowered from above.

Cass shook his head. “Suppose we should find a way up there, eh?”

“Or we could find a camera first. Pretty sure I spotted one in that office.”

“You’re a witch, you are. Righty then, you go grab the blackmail material and I’ll keep our little damsel entertained. Oy, padre!” Cass cupped his hands again and grinned. “How ’bout a fairy tale while we wait?”
Chapter Notes

Quite honestly I don't know what some of these tropes are... so I'm just taking them literally lol

Autumn is a Red Fox

Jesse was mighty surprised when Cass came back an hour later, still looking sickly by his standards and shuffling his feet all guilty-like. He paused with his body wrapped around the church doors, peeking in.

“Didn’t you eat?” Jesse asked. He set down his beer. Every week or so Cass went out to find some unfortunate bit of wildlife to nibble on, keeping his strength up and—more importantly—keeping Jesse’s metaphorical flock safe, no matter how much some of them might deserve a good bite taken out of their neck. Everything from rabbits to dogs had gone missing in these parts since Cass’ arrival. Root had even commented on the lack of coyotes nowadays. An unexpected plus.

Cass didn’t look fed now though. He kept glancing behind him too, like he was watching something.

Jesse’s eyes narrowed. “Cassidy.”

“Now it ain’t my fault, padre.” Cass said, nearly contrite. “I took the mum before I realized there were kits and—”

Just then a little black ball of fluff tumbled into view, nearly knocking itself out by plowing into Cass’ boots. Another mass of fluff followed. Then a third. Jesse felt despair settling in at their familiar, high-pitched yips.

“You... Jesus Mary and Joseph, Cass. You got them imprinting on you or something?”

“Not intentionally! Maybe it’s a vampire thing? Fuckin’ hell, man, they should be runnin’ scared not—oh fuck you, you lil’ twerp, ruin these and I swear I’ll skin ya.”
Jesse watched in resignation as the smallest of the three attacked Cass’ laces with gusto. As Cass ‘kicked’ him off just a little too gently.

He resigned himself to googling ‘foxes’ later. They’d be red by autumn and, no doubt, a permanent part of Annville’s church.

Jesse stared at Cass, smirking. Alright then. He’d taken in stranger animals before.
“Like this,” Tulip insisted. She grabbed hold of Cass’ hand and smacked it hard against hers. “You gotta keep your wrist straight and tight.”

“I know how to throw a punch, luv.”

“Sure. I’m just trying to teach you how break shit on the other person.”

Jesse snickered. He had his own ‘training’ outfit on: loose jeans and a random tee he’d found in the back of a motel closet. The sun was a scorcher today, bringing forth the sweat and parched throats. They should have brought more water.

“We’re all familiar with what we’re packing?” he asked, hefting the glock at the beer bottles far in the distance. Honestly, target practice was as good a justification as any for the drinking. “Tulip?”

“Don’t insult me.”

“Cass?”

“Prefer my teeth if it’s all the same to you, but yep. Know my way around a bit a’ artillery.”

“Good,” and Jesse knocked off bottle number one. “Hey, Tulip. Show Cass the thing with the headbutt.”

Tulip pursed her lips. “Which thing?”

“The one that chipped my tooth.”
“Oooh.”

“Now hold on,” Cass wagged a finger. “When do I get to show you lugs how to make my chemical bombs, eh? They’re right perfect in a pinch.”

“Soon as we find a shop to hit up. You know, with chemicals to use.”

“...alright fine, I hear ya.”

Jesse smiled. Another aim, line of sight, shot. There were people coming for them—foolish people who thought they had the upper-hand—but each of them was deadly in their own right, even without Genesis.

Difference was, they passed on their knowledge. Friendship made them unstoppable.
Jesse had suggested once that Tulip get her uncle into rehab. They’d get the money for it—somehow—but all it had earned him was a slap, fast and hard across the back of his head. It was the one and only time that Tulip treated a serious suggestion from him unkindly.

Her uncle was better off drunk.

After all, dead to the world he couldn’t hear the jeers, slashing at him from all sides, the impressionable kids all the way up to the mayor himself. Wasted he couldn’t see the crude gestures, the easy laughter, what they liked to spray-paint on the side of his house. Pissed to hell he couldn’t smell his own piss, an unwashed body trapped in a rotting house—its.elf tethered to the evilest town in all America.

It wasn’t easy being an O’Hare in Annville, less so a black O’Hare. Tulip knew that even if she did wake her uncle up, he wouldn’t be able to deal with all this. Bastard was one liver and a couple decades too late for real change.

Best to let him snore through it all. Hell, sometimes Tulip considered joining him.

Didn’t have to deal with shit while on the drink.

Uncle Walter taught her that.
Relaxation

Emily found peace in the small things nowadays: a lack of back spasms, unspoiled milk in the fridge, the miracle of all three toddlers sleeping through the night. The movies she didn’t have time to watch told her that relaxation came in the form of spa treatments and aesthetic bubble baths. The other mothers of Annville confirmed that it was finding clean underwear in your drawer when everything else had gone to shit.

When Jesse came back into her life, peace briefly meant a hand on her shoulder—an unintentional smile slipping her way. It turned painful soon enough, but Emily accepted it as peace nonetheless. The masochistic kind.

If asked, Emily would have said that this was rock bottom; finding joy in days that she wasn’t kicked in the shin by a shrieking Tommy, or she didn’t have to listen to Jesse curving Tulip’s name around his lips. She’d have admitted that happiness now came from a lack of the bad, rather than an excess of the good.

Of course, she couldn’t have known that months down the road, peace would transform into lack of an entirely different sort. It would become times when she wasn’t pointing a gun, or feeding a goddamn vampire.

Relaxation came in the nights where she didn’t see Miles’ face, staring at her accusingly from the shadows.

Funny. With a knife in her purse and blood in her thoughts, Emily wondered what the PTA moms would think of that.

Maybe she’d tell them one day.
Chapter 135

Chapter Notes

Uh... warning for gore? :D

Heart on Sleeve

They always knew they were collectors of the ironic, the unbelievable and the miraculous. How the hell were they to expect anything else when their group consisted of a freaking force of nature, an all-powerful entity, and a goddamn vampire stuffed together in a car?

The vampire especially.

Lots of interesting things came with that designation. Cass could jump 40,000 feet, or submerge himself just as far, or even float around in space—if life every gave him the chance to try it. Sadly though, here on Earth, his body’s limits were explored in pretty generic ways. Boring all around. Like dismemberment.

They had a Dr. Mengele on their hands, and when Tulip finally tore through their hideout, into the room where they’d been keeping Cass...

...first and only time he saw the poor girl hurl.

Jesse’s stomach was only marginally stronger, though he was the one closer to fainting. Cass saw the blood seep out of Jesse’s face, his neck, even the backs of his hands. He couldn’t move to try and catch his mate though. Cass didn’t have limbs right then. Made walking just a wee bit difficult.

He still had his mouth though.

“Heart on my sleeve for you, padre,” he hissed, vocal cords tattered, tongue barely functioning. Jesse just barely caught the words, eyes skittering to Cass’ heart that, yes, was set carefully in a tray beside his left arm. The ruins of his shirt were drenched in fluids from his pulmonic valve. Cass grinned without lips.
“Jesus,” Jesse managed. He didn’t faint though. Tulip was able to pull herself up from her knees.

That was all Cass wanted, really.
Chapter 136

Le Trio de L'étrange (The Curious Trio)

Larry chewed on the end of his pen, mangling the cap before spitting it into the dirt. Beside him, Mike and Alex looked up.

“They’re back,” he said.

They were indeed. Across the street from them were those three outsiders: the two pretty boys and the even prettier girl. They’d been prowling around their town for days now, sniffing here and there like overeager bloodhounds. That hadn’t bothered Larry much in the beginning. The three walked confidently, with power, like they had money… or they knew how to get it if they didn’t. So who was he to keep them from spending it here? But that was before Mike had challenged the skinny guy to pool and gotten a glass smashed in his side. Before Alex had propositioned the girl and walked back home with a broken nose.

Only one allowed to touch his buds like that was Larry.

“Wait ’till they come back out,” he cautioned, lowering the hand Alex had near his hip. The one with the knife. “Johnny and his boys might loosen them up for us first.”

Their three strangers had entered the good ol’ town watering hole, only this time they were less likely to encounter friendly toasts. Larry wasn’t the only one getting sick of these posers.

So he grinned, wide and wild when the ruckus started up inside. There were cries that set Alex’s eyes alight. Mike let out a whoop when they heard the sound of a shattering chair. The three men pushed themselves to their feet and left the bus bench behind, weapons drawn and ready to join the fray.

Except that halfway across the street someone finally tumbled out the bar door—and it wasn’t Johnny.

“Hey there,” the man said. He had blood on his clerical collar, a fresh cigarette in his hand… more blood around the rod. Behind him his two lackeys fell on either side, lithe and limber. Neither sported anything more than a bruise.
The guy took a slow drag, waiting for their response. When Larry’s mouth continued to betray him, he shrugged.

“No worries, friend.” He said ‘friend’ like it was something else entirely. “We get it. It’s all there in your expression.”

The women snickered. Larry, meanwhile, could feel the blood leaving his cheeks.

Guy took another drag. “Just answer me this, alright? You seen God around these parts?”

All of them would have had trouble answering this creature—with his torn preacher’s garb and split knuckles—even if the question hadn’t been straight up crazy. Knowing he’d see the same from Mike and Alex, Larry settled for a scrunched look of confusion, which the guy read as easily as he did everything else.

“I see you haven’t. Pity. Name’s Jesse, by the way. This here is Tulip and Cass. If you do see God, after we’re done with you… tell him we say ‘hi.’”

He finally found his voice. “Wha—?”

Except there were no more words. Larry didn’t see the punch coming.

Just the flare of light as it hit.
“Morning,” Jesse said, voice dry.

“Morning,” Cass echoed, equally dry.

The irony was that it was pitch black outside the church, inky and dense except for the stars. Jesse buttered toast while Cass pulled on his jeans. They were out the door soon after.

Unexpected side-effects of being possessed by a being of pure, celestial power included, but was sure as hell not limited to: changes in voice and eye color, a lessened need for sleep, and the ability to make the asshole down the street eat his own gun—among other notable, fun things. Door Number 2 was the least flashy of the bunch, but honestly the one that Cass was coming to appreciate the most. Whatever Genesis was, it charged Jesse like a well-worn battery. He hadn’t needed to sleep in weeks.

He’d chosen to spend that extra time with Cass.

“Something over there.”

“Don’t think ya spotted that before me, padre.”

It was novel. Not just having someone on his schedule, but having someone know. Jesse pointed out the rabbit in the bush so casually, then watched Cass guzzle it with the blandest of expressions. He passed the toast over afterwards. Like that was some sort of natural combination.

Mmm, blood and butter.

They walked to feed Cass, stretch their legs, pass the time, sometimes just to move from here to there. The only constant was that they stayed together… and Jesse was back at the church in time for morning Mass.
“C’mere.”

Oh, and also the kiss.

That nightly moment when Jesse would mold himself to Cass, the two of them poised somewhere beneath the stars. They brought the dust of the desert up to each others’ throats, then took their time in licking it away. Jesse had his hands stuffed into the back pockets of Cass’ jeans, leaving toast crumbs there for him to find. Cass simply devoured his mouth.

Hours stretched ahead. The time after dark was for them.
Chapter 138

Summertime (and the Livin’ is Easy)

“You assholes need to loosen up a bit.”

Jesse said it as he snapped out a towel on the grass, feeling oddly domestic between the cooler of beer Tulip had brought and the small mountain of cigarette butts Cass was accumulating. Standing before him were the only two things out of place: an angel and a demon, both of whom were wearing frowns and far too many clothes.

Tulip tipped her sunglasses, eyeing them both. “Haven’t you boys ever heard of shorts?”

“I have,” Fiore said, like he was answering a question in class. Cass snorted.

Jesse shook his head. “Just sit down already. You’re making everyone stare.”

The rest of the town was staring, all of them parked around the church, casting the outsiders suspicious glances. It was one thing to come waltzing through their town, quite another to join in the festivities. Summer Sundays were for beer drinking, sun bathing, squirrel shooting, and all manner of other leisurely acts. Annville may not have been sophisticated by some people’s standards, but it had its ways and it was damn well set in them. You wanted to join in? Join in right.

Cass leaned back, shielding his eyes. “At least take off your jackets, mates,” he grumbled. “Gettin’ hot just lookin’ at you...”

DeBlanc took the lead, carefully shrugging off his jacket and laying it on the ground (given that the trio was now hogging the blanket). Fiore copied him and soon they were seated—awkwardly—all stuck up knees and earnest expressions.

Jess grinned. “Ditch the ties too.”

And so it went, three stripping down two until they didn’t look quite so out of place. Cass had them posing like cheap magazine models. Tulip taught them to pop the beers and snickered at their

...
reactions to the taste. Before long Jesse was giving most of the orders (a safer kind of power) and the people of Annville turned away, confident that even if these two couldn’t fit in, at least they were learning how to fake it. That, in its way, was the most important of the lot.

“What’s the point of all this?” DeBlanc asked, finally lounging—even if he was a little stiff. He wiggled bare toes into the dirt.

Tulip stretched. “What’s the point of anything, hmm?”

Fiore looked ready to start something. Jesse quickly added, “Right. Plus, if your God worked so hard making all this, shouldn’t we enjoy it once in a while?”

Fiore snapped his mouth shut.

“Speaking of enjoyments, I think Harry’s firing up the grill. Who’s up for burgers?”

What a reaction that caused. And how could the trio forget? Summer Sundays were for beer drinking, sun bathing, squirrel shooting... and food, food above all else.

Oh, and maybe the company too.
Chapter 139

Trick or Treat

Donnie had his candy bowl at the ready, listening for the cry of “Trick or treat!” that should have followed the doorbell. It didn’t. Donnie realized why as soon as he opened the door.

“Preacher,” he said.

Jesse tipped his cowboy hat in a mock greeting, spurs clanking as he finished stomping up the porch. Beside him was the cowgirl—Tulip—and on her left was that vagabond Cassidy, dressed up as a stereotypical vampire. At the back of the group were those government fellas, cheap dollar store angel wings taped to their coats. Donnie felt the bowl slipping in his hands and just barely managed to catch it in time. Full-sized Hershey bars sloshed.

“Aren’t you a little old for trick or treating?” he asked, when what Donnie really wanted to say was, ‘Shouldn’t you have dressed like the devil?’ He felt the cold press of a gun barrel under his chin again as Jesse threw a thumb over his shoulder.

“It’s their first time,” he said, causing Angel 1 and 2 to shift. “Cass is nearly a hundred years too old—so go big or go home, right?—Tulip and I were deprived as children... but you already knew that, didn’t you, Donnie.” Jesse gave a funny little smile. “We do actually have a kid with us, though he’s a chaotic ball of unholy energy, a little hard to see. Still deserves candy though. He’s dressed like a preacher.”

Jesse’s smile remained sinister in the shadows and Donnie hadn’t a clue what he was talking about. He wondered where Betsy was on her route with Chris, whether they might actually get back in time, if Donnie needed them. He also wondered if Chris’s baseball bat was still stuffed in the hall closet.

Donnie didn’t dive for it though. What came out was, “You didn’t say ‘trick or treat.’”

He regretted it the moment it slipped out.

But maybe something like Halloween luck was on his side because rather than answering Tulip reached out (should have dressed as Medusa, freezing him in place) and snatched up two of the
candy bars. The first she passed back to the agents. The taller of the two unwrapped with urgency, snapped it in hall, and forced the larger piece into the hands of his partner—who took it with a tender look. While they ate Tulip opened and stuck the bar end first into her mouth. She sucked a moment, melting the chocolate around her lips, then leaned forward so that Jesse could bite off a taste for himself, the two nearly kissing. Jesse then repeated the action with Cassidy. The bar was small enough now that they did kiss, lips leaving a wet, sticky trail. Donnie gripped the doorway.

He tried to formulate some kind of outcry—There are kids out tonight. You’re the preacher!—but Tulip was already licking chocolate from her fingers.

“It’s the ‘or’ we don’t like, Donnie,” she said. “You, lucky boy, get both: the trick and the treat.”

Impossibly, Donnie recognized the look they were giving him, a once-over that assessed and sized up. Even the short agent eyed him appreciatively. Considering.

Was this the trick? The treat?

Both?

“Happy Halloween, Donnie,” Jesse said and his tone implied that they’d be back later, much later. What for, Donnie couldn’t say, but one thing was certain...

...the night wasn’t over yet.
Chapter Notes

A fill for the anon who wanted a drabble based on this post

Jesse and Cass were buds now, the tight kind where all secrets were spilled and they had an identical sense that they’d be joined for years—if not decades—to come. Working in the Texan heat, it was the most natural thing in the world for Jesse to gesture impatiently, demanding Cass’ water bottle. Digging graves was hard work. Don’t be a greedy asshole about it.

So Cass passed the bottle over... and Jesse spewed blood down the front of his shirt.

“*What the fuck*—!?” he cut off with a gag. One hand flew to his mouth while the other clutched his spasming stomach.

Cass just planted his spade and leaned into it, chortling. “Well, what did you think I was drinkin’, eh?

***

“Morning.”

“Mornin’—ah. You don’t want to be... shite.”

Too late. Sleep addled and vaguely hung over, Jesse had wandered blindly into the kitchen, making a beeline for the last of the coffee, which just happened to be in Cass’ hand. He took a swing and, after the lurch, actually managed to keep the contents in his mouth, though his pallor lost a few shades it couldn’t afford.


“I hate you,” Jesse seethed, lips white and trembling.

“Yeah. Expect ya do.”

***

Emily tapped her pen against the clipboard. “Now for the fundraiser, you’ll...?”

“Provide the drinks,” Cass offered, grinning maniacally.

Jesse’s glare was swift. “You won’t.”

“Fuckin’ stop me.”

***

When Jesse found brown splatters in the church microwave he didn’t think much of it. All sorts were cooked to death in that old thing. When he found the splatters fresh and a much brighter red than he was expecting though...
An hour later Cass was back, whistling, popping his mug inside and slamming the door. Jesse watched hypnotized as it spun, round and round.

“There’s blood in my microwave,” he stated.

“Yep.” Cass did a little side-step dance to a beat only he could hear. “I’ll clean it later an’ all that. Don’t get your holy knickers in a twist.”

Jesse shook his head slowly. “You heat it?”

“Ain’t natural to be drinkin’ blood cold, padre. Get’s all...” Cass waved a hand. “Viscous,” and he peered at Jesse like he was the crazy one.

“Right. How could I have been so stupid.”

“Hell if I know.”

***

“Just tell me where you got it.”

“Now c’mon, don’t go forcin’ us down that road...”

“Cass.”

“I don’t know, okay! You think I keep a bloody list of every wanker I store up from? ... heh. ‘Bloody.’”

“Cass.”

“... Right. Okay. I see what’s goin’ on here. You’re just pissed ‘cause I finished the last of the whiskey and used the bottle for my O Negative—”

“I could have drunk that!”

“Yeah, well, maybe it would have done you some good...”

“Get—goddamit, Cassidy, get back here—”

***

They sat down to dinner together—plates, cutlery, glasses. Jesse was careful to keep their cups separate and made a show of choosing his cautiously, each and every time.

Cass finally sighed around his pasta. He stuffed another forkful into his mouth. “I appreciate the attempt at revenge, padre,” he mumbled. “I really do, but you realize the whole garlic thing is just a myth, yeah?” and Cass bit into a whole clove, deliberately.

Jesse shrugged and took a resolute sip of his drink. His water.

“Worth a shot,” he muttered.
“You can stir slower than that. No need to get violent about it.”

Tulip pursed her lips before she recognized the joke. Or, at least she recognized Emily’s small, impish smile. No one had ever teased her but Jesse. The rest of the world had always been too scared to try. But Emily...

So Tulip slowed the wooden spoon down.

“I’m always violent.”

“No. You’re not.”

Self-preservation warned her not to continue that conversation. Instead Tulip looked around at all the work they had left to finish. Stupid work. Emily had offered to make fresh apple butter for the upcoming farmer’s market, and somehow she’d roped Tulip into it before she even knew what the fuck it was or whether there was actually butter involved (there wasn’t). Standing outside on the hottest day of June, stirring a cauldron of fall-smelling spice, ten jars left on the sidewalk for them to fill.

At least the company was interesting. All one hundred of them.

Tulip’s eyes roamed over the small army of yellow jackets that had gathered: alighting on the sweet rim, their table, Tulip’s jacket—a few had even found Emily’s hair, nesting there curiously. It had been more than a little disconcerting when they’d begun arriving, and she might have stiffened up a bit, remembering aching stings from her childhood. Emily had placed a soft hand on her arm though, saying that if she didn’t scare them they wouldn’t hurt her.

Just don’t be violent about it.
Tulip slowed her stirring even more.

She watched as a yellow jacket bumbled into Emily’s cheek, startling a laugh out of her. One landed on the end of Tulip’s spoon... and she didn’t brush it away.

Chapter End Notes

My high school used to make apple butter outside in the spring and yeah, it would attract a MASSIVE number of yellow jackets. Took some getting used to, but the food was well worth it <3
Chapter 142

Character Transformed Into an Animal

There were indeed seven stages of grief, according to the Jesse Custer handbook of life: anger, drinking, what-the-fuckery, drinking, vaguely hysterical amusement, drinking, and acceptance. That last part was generally only found at the bottom of a bottle, so don’t skip steps two, four, and six, kids.

…fuck he needed whiskey.

“You think we’d be immune to this,” Jesse muttered. He scrubbed hands in his hair until it felt like his skull was coming off in strips. “I’m serious, Tulip. I’m possessed, we’re off to find God... you’d really think nothing could throw us for a loop anymore.”

“He used to be a vampire.”

Cass nipped Tulip’s thumb, letting her know exactly what he thought of her sarcasm. Jesse watched, vaguely panicked, as she fell backwards onto the hotel bed, an irate bat swooping down towards her hair. Cass managed to get a wing stuck there. There it was. Jesse’s girlfriend, with his boyfriend-turned-bat’s wing lodged in her curls. Honestly, this wasn’t even the weirdest part of the evening.

“How did you manage to piss off a witch,” Jesse said at the same moment Tulip shrieked, “You’d best not have rabies!”

It would wear off, wouldn’t it? Surely this kind of shit would wear off. By morning or... or by a week at least. Yes... then Cass would be back to normal and they could hoof it out of this town. Leave the witches and their goddamn spells behind.

Jesse continued to stare. Cass had finally finished dive-bombing Tulip and was now hanging grumpily from her forearm, little claws digging deep into her sweater. They’d need to find a way to tote him around, wouldn’t they? Without drawing too much attention. Service bat maybe. Like instead of a dog. And the fuck was Cass going to eat now, insects? Fruit? Did he still need blood?

“Course he does,” Jesse said faintly. “He’s a vampire bat.” He nodded to himself, glad that Tulip and Cass were still too involved in sniping at each other—or sniping and squeaking anyway—to pay
him any mind. “Least he’s already used to staying up all night. Got that part down good...”

“Are you okay?” Tulip was now staring at him strangely. Which was just all kinds of wrong.


Cass and Tulip exchanged a look. Jesse didn’t need to understand bat to read it.

“I think we’d better sleep on this.”
Ski Jumping

“This is your stupidest idea yet. I say this with complete sincerity, Cass. No bullshit.”

“Aww, you’re always full of bullshit. If by ‘stupid’ you mean ‘genius’...”

Jesse stared uncomfortably down from the roof of the O’Hare household, trying to convince himself that he had never, ever, been afraid of heights. Tulip stood below in the sad backyard, a tiny speck away.

“You two are going to break your necks,” she called, then gave them a thumbs up. “Do I inherit the church if you do?”

“Why do you want it?” Jesse shifted very carefully, tucking one hand onto his hip.

“Gonna burn the thing.”

“... pretty sure that’s sacrilege.”

“I’m pretty sure that’s the point, Padre.” Cass chuckled and Tulip gave another thumbs up.

They really were going to die though. Jesse thought it loud and clear, like a fucking logic-based prophecy. He watched with dread as Cass slammed home the final piece of his monster.

He’d built a ramp, an honest-to-god slide with a curve at the end, ready to launch them into oblivion. Their landing pad was a pile of fall leaves, old mattresses, and some pretty forceful prayers on Jesse’s part. Tulip stood by, ready and waiting to film their glorious deaths.

The reason for all this lethal nonsense?
Cass: “I saw it once on Youtube.”

“Ready?” he asked now, rubbing his hands together. Jesse gestured—immortal vampires first.

A good call. The ramp broke halfway down (what a surprise. Who knew rotten planks and cardboard wouldn’t up together?) and Cass crashed through Tulip’s roof, shrieking his fool head off. Later, it took a whole cow to put him back together, but the video was kind of worth it—a hilarious mess of violence and panic, made all the better when Tulip shot inside and found her uncle still asleep on the couch, a broken Cass just feet away. Jesse had never heard her laugh so hard or so long.

#YOLO? Maybe. Just a normal Friday in Annville, Texas.
Chapter 144

Exhibitionism

Ten acts characterized their time on the road so far... and they’d all been done by Cassidy. Jesse was keeping a list:

1. Sliding between Jesse and Tulip that first night with a curt, “Well where else am I gonna sleep?!”
2. The sampling of Bob’s Big Burritos and the resulting gas that nearly knocked them all unconscious.
4. The fight for control over the front passenger seat and the ass-kicking Jesse laid down.
5. The fight for control over the driver’s seat and the ass-kicking Tulip laid down.
   (For the record these occurred, to the second, three minutes apart).
6. Naming all of their guns after cartoon girls (Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup were his favorites).
7. “Didn’t you buy the toilet paper?” “... I thought you were buyin’ that.”
8. Getting run out of town for trying to drink up some poor lady’s chihuahua.
9. A hellish four hour performance of his favorite Bieber songs (which—spoiler—was all of them).
10. Making a sign for the back of their sedan, decked out like a marriage announcement and reading “We’ve (Almost) Found God!”

It’s the ‘Me’ parade, Jesse thought, overly fond as Cass pelted out of the gas station minimart, chugging the soda he hadn’t paid for while the store owner cursed up a blue streak.

Amazing that it was only their first week.

Chapter End Notes

In which I continue to insist that this show is a straight-up comedy lol
Chapter 145

Curry Night

“It’s not Chinese, or burgers, or even your awful tofu, Tulip, but you guys are just gonna have to deal tonight.” Jesse hefted the takeout bags, shaking them. “You eat or you get out.”

“Then what is it?” DeBlanc asked, standing slightly to sniff at the food.

“Only the hottest thing since God created fire and brimstone: Annville’s curry,” and white containers began appearing all over the table, stamped with blurred, red print.

Cass gave a hoot. “Curry straight outta Texas. This is gonna be a bloody fuckin’ disaster, yep.” He probably shouldn’t have sounded so pleased about it.

“Clear your schedules,” Tulip agreed, selecting a box. She smirked at DeBlanc’s confusion. “You’ll be manning the toilet all night.”

“I don’t...?”

Fiore poked at the food in front of him, equally unsure. He lifted the finger to his mouth though, tasted it... and then dived for the rest, barely managing to grab hold of utensils along the way.

Cass pointed. “He’s got the right idea,” he said around a mouthful of curry. A bit sprayed into his lap.

“Don’t listen to him.” Jesse nudged white rice across the table. “Start out light and work your way up. If you try a samosa I’ll go down to the corner store and grab ice cream for dessert.”

Tulip snorted into her food. “It’s like suddenly getting landed with two picky toddlers.”

“You were the one who wanted kids,” Jesse said solemnly, and for the first time in a long time they
were able to joke about it.

DeBlanc just let his gaze roam around the table, from the shared smiles of the couple to the complicated movement of the vampire’s hands... to Fiore’s own demolition of his dinner. He really didn’t understand this world yet, but perhaps the preacher was right. He should start out light.

DeBlanc smirked. Light. It was what he’d strived for... what he’d risen out of hell for. Was this it then?

“There’s what we want,” Jesse drawled, waving his fork at DeBlanc’s smile. “Keep at it,” and he passed more cartons over.

Yes. Not what he’d imagined, certainly, but this could be it.
Prompt: 17. "I didn't know you could sing"

“I didn’t know you could sing,” Jesse muttered, head bent between his knees. He was literally holding himself together, keeping his body still lest it lash out to scratch that itch, that need to give out another command. Cass was still wiping blood off his chin after all, courtesy of flinging himself head-first into the wall.

“Wouldn’t have made it through Easter Rising otherwise,” Cass said, chuckling. “Shit all else we had to do out there. Now my brother though… oh, Padre. That man would charm the devil himself with his voice. Boxers off of God and the panties off a nun too.”

_Could use him now then_, Jesse wanted to say, but instead what came out was the must softer, “You have a brother?”

“Had. Now got another,” and Cass bumped his shoulder along Jesse’s. It took him an embarrassingly long time to get it (though in his defense, what they had didn’t feel quite like _brotherly_ love to him… no siree), and when Jesse did, he was a bit distracted by the _other_ realization.

His head finally jerked up. “Easter Rising? Wasn’t that… freaking 1900 or something?”

“1916. I told you, Padre, I’m a walkin’, talkin’, blood drinkin’ vampire—”

“Oh would you shove it with that already. I ain’t got the patience.” Jesse went back to gripping his hair.

“Suit yourself…”

A moment though and Cass sighed, annoyed fingers plucking at Jesse’s sleeve. “Alright, jeez. This whole power bullshit is really gettin’ to you, huh? Look, no need to go Spider-Man on the town. If you don’t wanna use it no one is freaking makin’ you—!” Cass stopped, feeling Jesse stiffen beneath his hand. “Or… it’s that you _do_? Wanna use it. Is what I’m askin’…?”
“Just get the hell out, Cass.”

The silence was stubborn this time. Jesse couldn’t see him, but he could damn well picture the expression.

“No need to be throwin’ me into any more walls,” Cass growled. “But how ‘bout you use that big brain a’ yours and lessen the need with something a lil’ more innocent, hmm?”

Jesse was truly slow today. What…?

Oh.

“Sing for me.”

And Cass sang out, right and clear, the words squeezing in beneath Jesse’s arms and darting behind closed eyes:

“Right proudly high over Dublin Town they
hung out the flag of war
‘Twas better to die ‘neath an Irish sky than at
Sulva or Sud El Bar…”
Prompt: 9. "You know, it's okay to cry"

It wasn’t how Jesse had expected the night to go. Over forty miles West and they’d rolled into the only motel on the stretch, their excitement about hitting the road already waning. After a day like theirs they needed booze, food, and sleep. Maybe TV. A murky-water bath if their room had a tub.

So when they piled onto the bed and Jesse turned on the news, they found reports of a blown up town. ‘Fuckin’ awful,’ Cass had said, scratching and ducking his head. ‘Gas leaks,’ Tulip had agreed. It was Jesse who’d been the first to realize, catching sight of a distinctive tree behind the newscaster.

Two seconds later they showed his church. What it used to be, anyway.

Maybe Jesse should have stumbled to the toilet like Tulip did, or gone completely numb like Cass. Instead he moved on shaking legs out into the night, lines of doors on either side of him, the moon overhead. Jesse chain smoked all his cigarettes and then punched the wall for every butt that littered the ground. Cass found him like that maybe five minutes in, his hand a bloody, mangled mess.

“Jesus,” Cass drew out, grabbing hold of Jesse’s wrist and elbow with a surprisingly gentle grip. “Aw fuck, Padre. You don’t heal like me, remember?”

Of course he did. Jesse wondered if he could get a punch in for every person he’d known who died today.

Cass wouldn’t let him though. Not without a fight. He planted his feet and slung his arms up under Jesse’s, the two of them pressed chest to back. It was far closer to a hug than a restraining hold, but it produced the effect of the latter. Jesse didn’t realize how heavily he was breathing until he could feel the stillness of Cass behind him. How much he was shaking until there was someone marginally calmer to compare himself to.

“You know, it’s okay to cry,” Cass whispered, sounding scared to even voice it. He hesitated. “Tulip is.”

That should have been enough, knowing she was with him in this. But when Jesse squeezed his eyes
nothing came out. They were dry and gritty. Not at all different from what Annville had become.

“Can’t,” he managed and Cass nodded, rocking him slightly, side to side.

“Not a problem, Padre. It'll come. An’ I’ll be here when it does.”
Prompt: 5. "Are you drunk?"

“Are you… drunk?”

“You’re drunk,” Emily retorted and Jesse blinked, honing in on the “pffff” sound Tulip made as she came up behind him, trying desperately to hold in a laugh. A twelve-pack lowered in front of Jesse, briefly blocking his view of Emily slumped comically across her kitchen table.

“Don’t know if we’ll be needing these after all,” Tulip whispered. It caused Emily to jerk her head—then immediately cradle it in her hands.

“Oh. Oh god. I am drunk. Miles you bastard.”

Tulip came up to rub her shoulders, sporting an exaggerated look of sympathy. “Did he try to ply you with wine again?”

“Yes.”

“And you kicked him out?”

“Yes.”

“And had the wine all to yourself?”

“Yes,” Emily moaned. She slumped back into her original position. Barely audible was a murmured: “You’re so nice and cool, Mr. Linoleum.”

Jesse still stood in the middle of the kitchen. He pointed dumbly between the two of them. “This has happened before?”
“This happens every Friday,” Tulip countered. “Miles goes in for ‘date night,’ gets rejected, our gal here reaps the spoils, and your ass is damn lucky she’s back on her feet for Sunday’s service.” She hefted the beers. “Doesn’t normally start this early though.”

“I can hear you,” Emily growled. Her hand flopped in Tulip’s general direction. That might have been an attempt at the finger.

“Good. You wanna sober up or help me guzzle this shit?”

No contest. Emily was already reaching for a beer, suddenly much more coordinated. Jesse had the horrifying realization that Emily was one of those drunks: absolutely plastered until she didn’t want to be. Who me, officer? Oh no, I only had one glass. Swear on my poor gran’s grave…

Jesse sat heavily.

The tabs were popped and the women were now navigating a nonsensical conversation, the kind that could only exist when half the party had indulged far more than the other. Neither offered him a beer of his own. Jesse was kind of glad.

Let them have all twelve. He was taking notes tonight.
Prompt: 14. "I'm sorry. I didn't know."

“I’m sorry. I didn’t know.”

Jesse didn’t need Cass to clarify. His hands were guiltily worrying the edge of his shirt; his eyes, trained on Jesse’s shoulder where the tattoo lay hidden. I didn’t know Tulip was yours, was what he meant to say. I’m sorry I tried to take her from you.

The words—the blanks Jesse filled in—were setting his teeth on edge. He needed to explain that Tulip hadn’t been his for years, had never been his because Tulip was a fucking firecracker of a woman who always chose and was never chosen. In his idiocy, Cass seemed to think that the tattoo was Jesse’s trophy, and not what it truly was: a brand.

More pressing though…

Jesse hissed back Cass’ own words. “You’re sorry?” he said, laughing. “Really?”

Are you really?

Cass’ body language give Jesse all the answer he needed. There was the shiftiness of his gaze, the subtle step back, the new flush to his cheeks that suggested a memory of pleasure… whatever guilt Cass carried stemmed from what he thought he was losing with Jesse, not from what he’d found with Tulip.

“I’m sorry,” he echoed once more, voice strained. “I didn’t—”

“Yeah,” Jesse interrupted. His smile was astoundingly sharp. “I get it. You didn’t know.”

Not that it mattered.
“Frankly? You don’t know shit, Cass.”
Chapter 150

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

**Hypothermia**

Did you know that an ancient and beat-up sedan, carrying a load of two people, a vampire, a holy child of unknowable weight, one body, and a small army reserve of guns... might actually stall every once in a while?

Or that, at five below zero with a blizzard halfway complete, it might not want to start back up again?

Jesse knew. Now.

“Yep. We’re gonna die,” Cass announced, peering from the back as Jesse desperately tried to get the car to turn over. “Gonna bloody fuckin’ freeze because it’s colder than a witch’s tit out here!”

“Nice one, Cass.” Tulip had already scrunched her arms inside her coat and had her legs tucked up against her chest. “But really. Jesse? Just know that I’m panicking and if my face weren’t frozen solid you’d see that.” Tulip shoved said face into her arms, giving a violent shudder.

With a curse Jesse nodded, relinquishing the key with some relief—now at least he could tuck his hands up under his legs. Not that it did much good. Tulip and Cass weren’t quite exaggerating this time. Though they’d had light snow the last few days this blizzard had come out of nowhere—at least by their outsiders’ perspective—and had basically hauled them off onto the side of the road, stranding them without another vehicle or building in sight. They couldn’t risk wandering around in that. Couldn’t just sit here either. Jesse didn’t quite want to say that they’d freeze to death... but he wasn’t willing to do away with the idea either.

Basically, fuck North Dakota.

“Bright ideas?” he asked. Jesse gave up on sitting on his hands because it hurt like hell. Chaffing them together hurt more.
Cass puffed out frigid breaths as he leaned over him. “We could carve up Dave. Crawl into his body. You know, let his organs keep us warm an’ stuff. I saw it in a movie once.”

Dave was the hitchhiker they’d picked up miles back, stupidly feeling sorry for the vagabond out in the snow. He’d stupidly thought that a lithe woman, a preacher, and their skinny-ass friend would be easy pickings for a robbery. His mistake.

Tulip glared. “Even if that wasn’t the stupidest most disgusting things I’ve ever heard... you’re really gonna go outside to get him outta the trunk?”

“Oh ye. Hmm. No.” Cass shook his head and stamped his feet, making a loud ‘brrrr!’ sound. It shook Jesse into action.

“Okay,” he announced. “Move over,” and before Cass could complain Jesse had crawled into the back, pulling Cass on top of him with a small ‘oof!’ Tulip arrived seconds later. The two of them huddled together on the seats while Cass draped himself over them.

“Why do I gotta be on top?” he whined. “This is the coldest spot!”

Tulip glared out from beneath Jesse’s arm. “Because you’re the only one here who can’t die from hypothermia.”

“... ah. Right again. Good point, that.”

It was marginally better like this. Enough that Jesse was able to let out a breath, convinced they’d at least make it through the night. They’d deal with tomorrow when tomorrow came.

“Hey God,” he said, voice rough. “If you’re willing to be found, now would be a freaking great time to come forward.”

No answer of course. That’d be too easy. All that was left then was to huddle close together.
*throws confetti* 150 drabbles! Try for 200? Why not :D
Secret Admirers

Jesse snorted hard when he found the paper tucked into the windshield of his truck. A tiny folded square, bearing “Do you like me? Check ‘Yes,’ ‘No,’ ‘Unsure’ below” in a furiously messy scrawl. Cass ambled up, soda in hand, and Jesse waved the paper in his face.

“What are you, twelve?” He asked. “No wait. Sorry. That was an insult to twelve-year-olds everywhere.”

Cass took a noisy slurp of the drink, eyeing the paper critically. “Ain’t mine, Padre,” he said. Then he laughed. “Don’t tell me you’ve got yourself an admirer.”

“No,” Jesse dismissed, though now he stared at the paper in confusion. He looked to Cass, back at the paper… Jesse might have thought Cass was pulling his leg, except he never could keep a straight face during pranks. Idiot would have broken the second they made eye contact.

“Tulip?” he asked, face scrunched and already knowing the answer.

“Not unless she took a blow to the head. Emily?”

“Emily’s kids?”

Cass snapped his fingers. “Gotta be. Always knew lil’ Elliot had a crush on you.”

“Because he gave me a popsicle?”

“Because he split a popsicle with you. That’s freakin’ third base by kiddie standards.”

Jesse pulled a horrible expression and snagged the soda. He took a contemplative sip. “Lucy down at the school always liked me...”
“She got the handwriting of a dog with palsy?”

“Actually I think she practices calligraphy.”

Cass choked, stealing back the drink. “Then I think you’re destined to remain in the dark, mate.” He slapped Jesse on the shoulder, snatching and tossing the note in the road. “Or hell, maybe it’s from fuckin’ god, eh?”

Jesse rolled his eyes, steering them home. “Uh huh. Sure.”

Close enough. Off to their left, hidden in the shadow of a building, Fiore watched them leave in great confusion. Armed with knowledge taken purely from the cartoons he’d been watching, he’d set out to determine what the Preacher now presumed their relationship to be. If Jesse Custer ‘liked’ him and DeBlanc—considered them acquaintances, even friends by human standards—it would go a long way towards re-securing Genesis.

Though perhaps he’d overestimated the Preacher’s deductive abilities.

Fiore walked to the street and took back his note, frowning down at it. He’d try again tomorrow.

For now, he checked ‘Unsure.’
Chapter 152

Tornados

“Knock, knock, friends!”

Lisa looked to Larry, the two of them then turning back to look up at the door. They’d run down into the cellar just as soon as the commotion had started: sirens in the distance that had quickly increased in volume—then the sudden, horrible crunch of car-on-car violence; shouts and screams; what sounded vaguely like animal noises; a wind that picked up and brought with it all sorts of smells... burnt rubber and something with a tang. Lisa sure as hell didn’t think that was a tornado, but she dragged her brother so safety nonetheless.

Sure enough, the light they could see peeking through the wooden boards was light and airy, the perfect Sunday afternoon. Lisa thought they might have imagined it all, even the voice, until those light beams were suddenly cut off, a dark shadow blocking their way.

Larry shook his head violently, but Lisa moved forward without him. What were they going to do, hide in here forever? Hiding was for cowards. And boys.

Lisa had made it up the first three steps when the doors were suddenly yanked open, the light blinding her, causing her to gasp and stumble back. When she was able to look again Lisa gasped for an entirely different reason.

“Tulip!” she said and felt Larry slamming excitedly into her back.

“Hey there.” It was definitely Tulip, though her clothes were different and she was flanked by two mean looking men. She raised a hand in a salute—which Lisa clumsily tried to copy.

“I told these fools it was worth making a pit-stop here. You remember how to make a bazooka, don’t ya? We’ve got maybe twenty minutes before the rest catch up, and I’ve got a feeling we’re gonna need one...”
Chapter 153

It's the small things that are important

Every morning DeBlanc stood and bustled to the window, throwing the curtains open and letting light pour into the dingy hotel room. It wasn’t much, but the walls looked a little whiter and their personal effects had a gold, almost holy hue to them. It might seem familiar—if one was willing to overlook the dust particles disrupting the view.

On their third night in, Fiore walked firmly to the manager’s office and demanded that he give him access to this heating system they had set up. No, he didn’t care that they were in Texas. He didn’t care that it was summer. Payment? Very well. That was easy enough for them, and within hours Fiore had cranked up the temperature in their room, watching in satisfaction as DeBlanc let out an involuntary sigh.

Sometimes DeBlanc found feathers, littered and muddied along the side of the road. He’d pocket them and later draped them gently over Fiore’s back as he slept, knowing it was a poor substitute.

Sometimes, Fiore dragged DeBlanc out to the steakhouse down the street, the one with the outdoor seating and open grill. He claimed it was because he wanted another burger... which was true, but also because DeBlanc would tip his head back, indulging in the scent of coals, fire, and sulfur.

They where small gestures, but each did what they could to make this place feel a little more like their homes.
A moment of understanding/clarity

Jesse had met preachers other than his dad; men who walked through their town with noses held high, too willing to turn their back on it just as soon as they were able. Each one had the same story to share: how their holy work had been a calling. Personal. They’d heard God’s voice clear as the bell, as the holy water, as the gorgeous night sky—whatever stupid metaphor they’d churned up for this performance. The details changed, but the moral always remained the same. God had a purpose for them and they were destined to fulfill it.

Despite his insistence that God had plans for him too, Jesse didn’t hear him—not truly—until he was unsteady at a dinner table, with glares surrounding him and a damn forkful of peas halfway to his lips. Then the fire alarm went off.

Emily made for the tray, Cass grabbed the extinguisher, Tulip tried her hardest to get the smoke to disperse... all of them moved while Jesse remained still, eyes locked on the burning mass of food. All of them reacted while Jesse just froze.

This was a sign... right? How could it be anything else? He’d sent a kid off to hell and then God was throwing literal flames in Jesse’s face, a sudden and unexpected ‘accident’ that clearly wasn’t an accident at all. Genesis had been a tool pressed into his palm, but this felt like language—a one-sided conversation that Jesse was forced to hear, but not respond to. Like a reprimand. A dressing down.

Emily set the tray on the stove and in the moment before Cass sprayed it with foam, Jesse felt the heat of the charred remains lighting up his features. It wasn’t the comforting warmth of a campfire... it was the branding fury of an inferno.

Jesse stared, swallowing hard at the chaos around him. God had finally spoken...

...and he was pissed beyond belief.
Chapter 155

Wabi/Sabi

“It’s perfect.”

“It’s a fucking disaster, Cass.”

“Exactly. I love it.”

“Burn it.”

“Don’t insult my new son!”

Cass got down in the dirt to try and hug the front bumper of the Ford Focus, his smallest touch causing blue paint to fleck off and disappear on the breeze. The sedan they’d been using since Annville was too well known now—their faces too well known for a car dealer—and the desert too deserted for their purposes, not at all ripe for stealing. This was the only vehicle they’d come across today and it was about as sad as any car could possibly be: dents so numerous they looked like polka-dots, thin spider web cracks along the windshield, a coating of dust that only hid a rusting paint job... Tulip was convinced that Cass only liked it because she despised it.

Jesse thought it might be the “END IS NIGH” spray-painted on the side.

Whatever it was, Cass had locked himself onto one (miraculously intact) wheel and wasn’t letting go.

“We’ve found our chariot,” he whispered.

Jesse rolled his eyes. He had to admit, there was something enticing about searching for a bastard god in an equally bastard vehicle, but... “If it’s abandoned here, no way is it gonna jumpstart.”

Five minutes Jesse was pursing his lips and eating his words.
Cass crawled into his new backseat, laying across the split leather and sliding shades onto his face. “This is fate, Padre.”

“We’re gonna look like poor soccer moms,” Tulip muttered.

“Dangerous soccer moms.”

Dangerous soccer moms... alright then. Jesse shrugged and laid his foot hard on the gas.

They’d already claimed stranger titles.
Chapter 156

Fundamental Particles

Every human was unique—and each was essentially the same. They had the power to change without enacting anything truly permanent, the desire to ask questions without wanting to know the answers. They were miniature paradoxes, crafted that way so that God could both observe something greater than him... yet remain, himself, the Greatest.

Humans were—to use a colloquial phrase of their own devising—hamsters spinning in their wheels. They might feel like they were moving, but they’d always remain trapped within their cage.

...except for three.

Oh, many had noticed the glass before. To continue the metaphor these hamsters had discovered the cage itself, tested its boundaries, even claimed to have spotted the Scientist bending over them, studiously taking notes. This alone wasn’t special. But those hamsters were still just rodents, holding no true power and, thus, nothing with which to find proof. Or barter. Or threaten. They had no tools capable of pressing to the Scientist’s throat, drawing nicks with blood and saying, “Let us out or else.”

A human, so much like the simple hamster, never should have gained the strength and hunger of an abomination.

A would-be mother never should have turned her anger at the loss into pure, horrifying will.

A preacher (one of his) never should have gained the power of a being that shouldn’t have existed in the first place.

There were so many microscopic ‘shouldn’t’s and ‘never’s that suddenly did, they happened, existed, subtly shifting the balance here and there. And when these impossibilities slammed together, a feat not just unlikely but wholly unnatural...?

The glass of the cage began to splinter...then crack. Three hamsters escaped and began to wreak havoc on the lab.
God watched from an air-tight, steel-lined door and wondered, for the very first time, if such tiny building blocks could really dismantle his structure.
Chapter 157

Sufficiently Advanced Technology

It became a habit: every time something weird happened Cass had that kind of explanation, ready to go.

“You’re Jason Bourne,” he’d said simply, a minute after Jesse had used unfathomable power to send him flying into the wall. “Got a government chip in your brain an’ all that. Somethin’ that’s funelin’ subliminal messages through your words—”

“Cass.” Jesse rubbed at the bridge of his nose. “That was literally the opposite of ‘subliminal.’”

Cass just shrugged.

“Government clones,” he said later, two more words and Jesse side-eyed him, understanding all at once that Cass had a thing for conspiracy theories. There were bodies littered everywhere, all of them identical to one another, and Cass acted like he’d just pronounced something as simple as, oh, it’s going to rain later today. Or, we should grab another beer, eh?

“Should get a drink,” Cass proclaimed and Jesse had to shut his eyes.

“You’ve got a lot of faith in what our government is capable of, don’t you?”

Cass just shrugged again, though that time he grinned.

It was expected then, so much so that Jesse began to wonder if Cass wasn’t just fucking with them for the fun of it. Everything from lights in the sky (“UFO, mates.” “That’s a plane, Cass”) to why the toaster stopped working were evidence of nefarious deeds enacted by men in suits. Or better yet, aliens.
It drove Tulip up the freaking wall.

“You’re a vampire!” She’d shriek, this close to tossing the nearest projectile at his head. “You are literally a fucking mythological creature who has killed angels and we are hunting God, so how in the hell can you possibly—”

“Practice,” Jesse heard Cass murmur, barely audible, right before he launched into a straight-faced, passionate argument for the existence of angels and clones. Vindicated, Jesse sat back to watch the fun.

 Definitely fucking with them.

Chapter End Notes

Finished the prompt bingo card! Except for the "free space"--any suggestions? Gotta figure out where to go from here with the drabbles...
“Well now, if this isn’t a ‘holy hell’ moment, I’m not sure what is...”

Jesse straightened from where he’d been leaning against the pillar, the party in full swing behind him and making the house’s very foundation shake. Not that he paid it any mind. Only thing catching his attention was Tulip, sauntering up the path in knee-high red boots, cutesy bows, and the shortest little blue skirt this world had ever seen. She smiled like the cat with its canary, striking a pose for him in the moonlight: one hand on her slim hip, the other displaying a peace sign up around her eye.

“Language,” she chastised. “Otherwise I’ll have to punish you.”

“In the name of the moon?”

It startled a laugh out of Tulip and Jesse grinned, unwilling to admit outright that he loved Sailor Moon nearly as much as she did. He stepped forward, the long cape trailing elegantly behind him, and honestly the only thing wrong with outfit was that the mask blocked some of his view. So he raised it up, pulling Tulip close and trailing one gloved finger tantalizingly down her back.

“Tuxedo Mask.” Tulip’s eyes were alight with mischief.

“Usagi,” Jesse countered. “You said something about punishment?” and he bent to kiss her before Tulip spluttered into another laugh. Her lips were cool from the night air and sticky from the lip-gloss. Which was fine. Good even. Jesse let it get messy, knowing that the moon was the only one to see.

Except...

“I fuckin’ get why we gotta go to the bloody party,” a voice said behind him, all grump and growl.
“Gotta find Mr. Chaney, gotta get his book, blah-de-blah-blah I even get why the fuckin’ hell you’d want to dress up like them loons, but c’mon!”

Cass glared at the grinning couple—though it was somewhat diminished by his outfit.

“Why do I gotta be Chibiusa??”

Chapter End Notes

"Imagine your OT+ dress up as the Sailor Scouts for Halloween... which OTP are Tuxedo Mask and Sailor Moon?... Bonus: Tux and Moon OTP dress up their child as Mini Moon."

And in case anyone is unfamiliar with Chibiusa:
Chapter 159

Chapter Notes

Fill for a tumblr prompt I got today: using a jacksepticeye video and "cassidy trying to teach irish slurs to jesse&tulip and getting more and more Irish to the point where you can barely understand what he’s saying"

Tulip and Jesse were in the process of losing their minds.

“…wha’ a cute, wee lil’ thing he is,” Jesse said, adopting the worst Irish accent they’d ever heard and laughing, so hard, that he very nearly drove them off the road. Tulip wasn’t fairing much better. Pressed helplessly against the passenger-side window she tried to respond, though only managed a few wheezing gasps before collapsing fully.

Cass simmered in the backseat between them.

“I don’t fuckin’ sound like that!” he said, which of course just made them laugh harder. It was a damn awful situation, needing to defend yourself and realizing that your very voice was setting things off. Cass had to settle for half crawling over the seat, swatting at the two children who were being rude as fuck.

“You wouldn’t know an Irish accept if it came up an’ bit you on the ass, Padre,” Cass sniped, not at all caring if the tweak he gave Jesse’s ear almost ended them up in a ditch. Again. “An’ you’re bein’ totally stupid about it! Why the fuck are you puttin’ ‘wee’ an’ ‘lil’ together they mean the same thing, for fuck’s sake.”

Cass sat back, drumming his fingers on his thigh. “An’ you didn’t curse nearly enough.”

“Oh, is that it?” Jesse finally got enough breath back to peer through the rearview at Cass. “My sincere apologies.”

Tulip snickered into her fist. “Jesse Custer… no one’s ever accused you of not cursing enough before…”

“Then you let me be the first,” Cass said, warming to the subject. “Butcher our lovely accent if you must,” (‘Lovely,’ Tulip mouthed), “but you’re not doin’ any Irishman proud unless you’ve got all mothers in a ten-block radius comin’ at you with soap. Now, repeat after me.” Cass cleared his throat. “Fuckin’ gobshite.”

“You’re taking this real serious,” Tulip said, at the same time Jesse slammed his hand on the steering wheel and let out a loud, “Fucking gobshite!”

Cass nodded. “Better, but you gotta mean it, c’mon now. I first gave those holy words to—ha—arsehole angels tryin’ to carve you up with a chainsaw. Imagine you’re sayin’ it to Donnie.”

“Fucking gobshite.”

“Yeeeeeew.”
Tulip turned in her seat, expression earnest. “You’re a fucking gobshite, Cass.”

He wiped away an imaginary tear. “You do me proud, Tulip. You two ain’t graduatin’ yet though. You need ‘gas’ in your vocabulary too.”

“Gas?” Jesse said, scoffing. “Like what you fill this car with after every meal?”

“Ha ha real funny, preacher man. But no really, it’s somethin’ funny, literal like—aw, Tulip, you’re a real gas, you are.”

“Same,” she drawled and the two fist-bumped over the headrest.

“Lame,” Jesse countered. “You gotta know better shit than that, Cass.”

“Better—? You’re insult me an’ my wise words, Padre. Fine, you want better? Dog’s bollocks.”

Jesse hit a pothole with a very American curse. “Dog’s what?”

“You heard me.” Cass threw his finger up at Jesse and just sort of peered at him threw it. “Dog’s bollocks. It’s like your ‘bee’s knees’ only it actually makes some fuckin’ sense.”

“How does that make any more sense?”

“It would be awesome, that’s how!”

“Don’t think any of it was supposed to make sense,” Tulip said, head titled back and her eyes closed. “Lots of animal-with-attribute expressions from the 20’s. Like the cat’s miaow. Or the tiger’s spots, you know?”

Jesse shook his head, both fond and disturbed. “Ms. Well-Read over here. Still not saying that shit, Cass.”

“You gotta, or you’ll never live up to your true, asshole potential. Then, then you gotta string it all together, throw in an’ extra curse here an’ there, and—” what came out was, from Jesse and Tulip’s perspective, a string of pure, exceptional gibberish.

They both turned in shock, Jesse going so far as to stop the car.

“Wow,” he said, which was right about when they heard the siren starting up.

It took a good five minutes for the cop to catch up to them, bumble out of his car, strictly ask in that stupidly rhetorical manner only available to cops and teachers if “you knew how fast you were going, son?” and in that time Cass and Tulip both had convinced Jesse to try out his newfound knowledge.

So Jesse smiled, opened his mouth, and promptly landed them with a second ticket.
Tulip had shit to do the night before Halloween—notably shit with Emily that she didn’t feel like laying out for Jesse and Cass’ teasing ammunition. If it got out that she was spending a Friday night with a bunch of toddlers, helping to stitch costumes together, carve pumpkins, and plan candy routes around Annville… damn good chance she wouldn’t live it down. So she kept her mouth shut, making non-committal noises when Jesse asked why she wouldn’t be joining their movie marathon.

Didn’t mean she wouldn’t show up late though. Tulip enjoyed a slasher film as much as the next gal.

So she ambled up the church’s path at well past midnight, hands casually stuffed in her pockets against the chill…but in reality her left hand gripped a wicked pocketknife. Tulip wasn’t ashamed to admit that Annville was creepy as fuck this time of year. The land surrounding the church was barren—except for a damn graveyard—and though Tulip tried to console herself by saying that she’d see anyone coming a mile away, in reality all the space did was make her feel small. The wind picked up, in the distance a coyote let out a scream, and Tulip shivered.

She also jogged the last few yards to the door.

“Boys probably scared themselves silly,” Tulip muttered, wrenching the door quick and trying to get inside. Though perhaps she should have taken her time. The attack, when it came, was as unexpected as it was chilling.

“Fu—” Tulip cut off her own curse, her breath stolen in fear. The sudden feeling of ice coating her stomach forced her to double down; a good thing too because it allowed the weapon to sail right over her head. She couldn’t breathe yet. Couldn’t feel her limbs either, tingling and rigid. Tulip relied entirely on muscle memory to catch her assailant around the waist, pushing them backwards with a satisfying ‘oof.’ This wasn’t a ghost or some shit then, rather a flesh and blood person that Tulip could shred. She threw them down onto the wooden floor, feeling them skid into a patch of moonlight, drew back her teeth, raised her knife—

And felt an entirely different kind of cold washing over her.

“Jesse fucking Custer!” she shrieked, smacking him hard on the chest with the hilt of her knife. This
time the ‘oof’ was recognizable.

Jesse groaned and rocked his head, laughing just a little. “Cass,” he muttered, and Tulip whirled to find Cassidy just a foot behind her, rolling pin held high and expression self-conscious.

“Heeeey, Tulip,” he said.

Her mind was working overtime, trying to make sense of this foolishness. Tulip settled fully on Jesse’s stomach. He finally dropped the frying pan he’d nearly decapitated her with. Cass rubbed the back of his neck, uncomfortable.

Tulip pursed her lips. “The movie did scare you two, didn’t it?”

“Yeah.”

“Yep.”

“… god dammit.”

Chapter End Notes

"Imagine your OTP are getting ready to watch a scary new slasher movie. Person A hopes that the experience will be romantic, thinking Person B will get scared and cuddle up with them. However, the film is too scary for both of them... Person C comes home to find that they have armed themselves with cooking pots for helmets and are wielding golf clubs/frying pans."
Shopping with the Preacher (and worse, the Preacher’s friend) was like corralling a pack of two-year-olds. Except Emily decided that was an insult to her own children who were far better behaved. The was like something she decided, though she’d settle on the exact simile when her head wasn’t pounding so bad.

“We do not need more candy.” Emily said it before Cass had even finished running down the aisle. He skidded to a halt, hand pressed dramatically to his chest.

“It’s Halloween!” he cried indignantly and tried to toss another five-pound bag of candy corn into their cart. Emily’s arm blocked his way.

She stared hard at the colored triangles. “That stuff tastes like feet, Cass.”

“You mom tastes like feet... alright, not my best comeback, but c’mon. Waddaya got against candy corn, eh?”

Emily was about to point out that she’d literally just told him when Jesse appeared, seemingly out of thin air, dangling some sort of cheap decoration from his hands and grinning like a loon.

“Found it,” he announced. The fake bat swung before him, more cute than terrifying as it bounced on its string. Jesse made it flutter towards Emily’s hair. “We still need something for the church’s entryway, right?”

“Well we’re sure as fuck not usin’ that.”

Jesse blinked, honestly startled by Cass’ tone. “... why?”

“Why?” Cass pointed accusingly. “It’s a mess, that’s why! Did they ever even see a bat before? My fictional mates are rollin’ in their literary graves, Padre, ‘cause that there’s an insult. To bats an’ vamps alike.”
“It’s rubber, Cass.” Jesse tweaked a wing in demonstration.

“That ain’t no excuse! Look at its fingers. Does that look fuckin’ natural to you?”

“Its fingers?”

Emily wasn’t about to educate Jesse on bat wing terminology, but she wasn’t about side with Cass on this either. She was...

“Boys?” Emily asked and of course neither answered her. They didn’t pay her any mind at all, what with being busy arguing their fool heads off.

Alright then.

She hummed a little tune and tossed the candy corn onto the nearest shelf. Then Emily slipped away, unnoticed.

Let them find their own way home.

Chapter End Notes

Imagine your OTP+ getting angry about anatomically-incorrect Halloween decorations.
“And I honestly thought this holiday couldn’t get any worse,” Tulip said, stuffing more popcorn into her mouth.

Except that something got in her way. A stupid, skinny-assed bastard of a something with stubble and a damn cold nose. Tulip jumped near straight off the couch when Cass nuzzled her neck again, though she was learning quick that shoving him just seemed to invite more trouble.

“I want to suck your blood,” Cass said, not for the first time. His ‘scary’ voice was pathetic and Tulip rolled her eyes at the feeling of plastic fangs biting down on her neck. She squirmed a bit, trying to get the cape-wearing dead weight off her for five goddamn minutes.

Tulip smashed a hand in his face. “Are you watching the movie or not?”

“Bloooood,” Cass gurgled. “I want to suck—”

“You realize he never actually says that, right?”

Blessed peace. Cass pulled back, the shock momentarily breaking through his ‘method acting.’

“Say fuckin’ what?”

“Mmm, hmm.” Wow, popcorn tasted good after destroying someone’s happiness. “Kirk never said ‘Beam me up, Scotty’ either.”

“You lie!”

“I don’t.”
Tulip smirked. She kept her eyes on the TV, but she could feel Cass leaning into the cushion beside her. He kicked his legs petulantly up on the table and wrapped his cloak tighter around him. Tulip almost felt sorry for him.

...if, you know, he wasn’t an idiot vampire pretending to be a vampire. That always put things back into perspective.

There was thus a full minute of wonderful silence, broken only by animated Jack losing his shit over Christmas decorations. It was nice for just that moment. Normal even. So Tulip could be forgiven if she jumped when Cass pressed his face back against her neck.

“You know,” he drawled, slipping a hand down between her thighs. “I could figure out how to suck something else instead.”

Tulip choked on a piece of popcorn and Cass howled, bending to kiss her and draw the kernel back out of her throat.

Chapter End Notes

"Imagine person A is dressed up like Dracula for Halloween. They keep saying 'I want to suck your blood' to person B. Person B (very annoyed) keeps reminding person A that Dracula never said that line."
“It’s a passible likeness,” Fiore declared and DeBlanc smiled, recognizing it for the praise it was, even if the Preacher and his friends were still laughing.

They’d made plans with Ms. Woodrow and she had, according to the vampire, told them to, “Bring along those two government boys. It’s got to be hard being alone during the holidays,” to which they’ve been much uproar about how Halloween wasn’t a real holiday, not like Christmas or Thanksgiving. Frankly DeBlanc wasn’t sure he understood what all the fuss was about, only that Jesse had complained to him while he’d pulled them out of their motel, drove them to Emily’s, and every moment in between. Tulip said the complaints were really just teasing and he should let it slide... which just confused DeBlanc further.

Being given a weapon, a gourd native to this country, and told to carve a face... that was confusion of another type entirely. What utterly strange directions. What purpose did it serve? And when forced into the activity, why wouldn’t he carve Fiore’s likeness?

Why were they all laughing so much?

“Honestly,” Tulip said, wiping at her eyes. “I’m just impressed with that skill.” She shook her head. “Looks just like him, DeBlanc. Well done.”

Fiore nodded. “As I said, a remarkable resemblance,” and DeBlanc beamed because no, that’s not what he’d said, and ‘remarkable resemblance’ was even better than ‘passible likeness.’

Cass was snickering into his arm. Emily smiled uncertainly. Jesse wore a befuddled expression that DeBlanc felt quite the kinship for.

“You’re a bit out of touch with humanity—” he started to say only to cut off, mouth snapping shut as Fiore turned his own pumpkin around.

There was a ‘passible likeness’ of DeBlanc there and it set the whole party off again.
DeBlanc still wasn’t sure he understood… but this time he joined in the laughter.

Chapter End Notes

"Imagine your OTP carving pumpkins with each other."
There was something to be said for creativity in gifts. You could only receive ties and bottles of wine so many times in your life.

Not that anyone had given Jesse a tie before.

This though... this was something else. Jesse honestly hadn’t know what to expect when Fiore had pulled him aside, revealing his hotline to heaven that had been sitting in the back of the car trunk for nearly a year now. He’d dialed—angel hands grown strong and calloused from their war—and handed Jesse the receiver, looking faintly embarrassed. No matter how close they’d gotten, Fiore still didn’t quite know how to act human.

Of course, neither did Jesse.

So he just sank onto the mattress of another sleazy hotel, having no idea why an angel was dialing heaven for him...

...until, on his 38th birthday, Jesse heard his dad’s voice once more.

Prompt: "Phone call from the dead"
Tulip bit her lip so hard it bled, trying not to let out another howl of laughter. It was futile though and she fell against the side of the building, nearly asphyxiating from humor.

Cass nodded, lips pursed. “It’s like one of those fuckin’ ‘get along’ shirts,” he said. “The kind that daft moms stuff their kids into so they can post the pic online.”

Cass wiggled the fingers that held Jesse’s hand... which was about all he was able to do. They could move a bit, even separate their palms, but anything more than that and they were slammed back together. Apparently the witch they’d encountered had thought that being tied to a vampire for eternity was an appropriate punishment for Jesse insulting her dress.

“Gonna go out on a limb here and say she didn’t realize we were dating,” Jesse said dryly.

Tulip just nodded, helpless.

Shrugging, Cass lifted their joined hands in consideration. “Should probably find the freaking woman though, yeah? Make her take the damn curse off? I mean, as exciting as these possibilities are, Padre, it’s gonna make wiping our asses real fuckin’ annoying down the line...”

Chapter End Notes

Prompt: "Cursed by a witch"
“Who are you?” Tulip demanded. “You’re a caterpillar.”

The creature stared down at her from its perch on a giant mushroom, one eyebrow creeping up its green skin. “Well that’s just fuckin’ rude of you,” he said. “Askin’ a fella who he is and then answerin’ yourself. If you had some patience you’d have learned that I’m an Irish caterpillar,” and he took a long draw from a hookah pipe, blowing smoke rings in Tulip’s face.

She waved them away, disgusted. “You did just tell me that.”

“...ah.”

There was a long beat of silence. The caterpillar kept raising and lowering his eyebrows, seeming to enjoy the disturbed looks Tulip shot him.

“Who are you?” he finally purred.

“Ew. Someone you’re not gonna address like that ever again.”

“Alright, fair. Don’t get your cute panties in a twist.”

Tulip glared down at her blue and white dress, wondering how she’d ever let her uncle talk her into wearing it, party or no party. She opened her mouth. Shut it. Gripped tight to the frills and pointed shakily to the garden she’d entered from.

“My name is Tulip,” she seethed, “and I’m seriously thinking about changing it because a bunch of tulips just sang to me.”

“Yeah they do that. Annoying, aren’t they?”
“Very.”

The caterpillar pursed his lips. “How’d you even get here then? Not looking for a god, are you? Lots end up around these parts looking for God...”

“Followed a rabbit, actually. Fucking last time too. I’m a dog person. Officially.”

“Oh I hear you, lass. Rabbits are mighty nice for a quick snack though,” he bit down on his pipe and Tulip got a good look at his teeth.

She hesitated. “Want to help me track him down? You can eat the bastard if you want...”

“Fuck yes.” He scrambled down from the mushroom, a mess of legs and smoke. Tulip stumbled back. “I’m Cassidy by the way. Can call me ‘Cass’ if you want. Follow me now. I’ve got a mate up ahead who’s mad as a fuckin’ hatter, but he’s real good if you’re looking to beat the shit outta someone.”

Tulip grinned. “Sounds like my kinda guy,” and the two of them started down the path.

Chapter End Notes

Prompt: "Alice in Wonderland"
“This could be worse,” Tulip announced. She leaned back in her chair and threw out a smile, strained as it was.

Indeed, a year later—the three of them seated around a new table, in a stranger’s home somewhere miles from where they’d started—things were a little brighter than the day Sheriff Root had barged into their meal, demanding to know if Jesse could tell him where Eugene had ‘run off to.’ That precious cargo was still locked somewhere in Hell... but there were no more secrets between the three of them and that, at least, had to count for something.

There was quiet around the table. Cass poked his McDonald’s burger with a plastic fork. He finally sighed, snatched the small mound of ketchup packets, tore them open with his teeth, and squirted the condiment wildly around his plate. He was the first to take a bite out of their meal.

“I’m thankful we found some kind of fuckin’ food today,” he said, chewing messily. “Told you somethin’ was bound to be open.”

Jesse nodded. He grabbed his own burger. “Thankful this family was out,” he muttered, before taking a bite as well. He only grimaced slightly, though even that faded quick at the sound of the wind outside. The weather had grown real brutal real fast and really, he was thankful they weren’t out in that tonight.

“We finally outran them hunters,” Tulip added.

“The vamp ones too.”

“New car’s holding up pretty well.”

A smirk. Quick bite of her salad. “I love my new skirt.”

“Ha! Ain’t got nothin’ on mine, luv.”
“Plenty of ammo left in the trunk... and yeah. I like the boots. Thanks, Tulip. Shopping trip ain’t the worst, I suppose.”

“Mm hmm.”

“I’m not thankful for The Big Lebowski and you can both fuckin’ fight me about it—”

It set them off, Tulip and Jesse giggling in the manic, overly-loud way of the truly exhausted. When it died down Cass was grinning at Jesse across the table. Tulip looked across too... but there was only an empty seat to greet her.

She sobered. Reaching for her Coke, Tulip lifted it high in a toast, her eyes still locked on the air across from her.

“I’m thankful she went quick,” Tulip whispered, then swallowed harshly. “If we gotta go... and we will... but yeah, I mean.... If we gotta let it be like her. Fast and awesome. A real blaze of glory.”

She lifted her drink even higher. “To Emily.”

After a moment, Cass and Jesse joined her.

“To Emily.”

Chapter End Notes

Tiny, post-Thanksgiving ficlet for you all <3
Chapter 168

Chapter Notes

It's time for Preacher winter/holiday fluff! <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Jesse hadn’t experienced many winters in his life. Proper winters, that is. With snow by the foot and gale winds gearing up to knock even the strongest man off his feet; icicles hanging decoratively from every home and storefront, red berries popping vibrant from an expanse of white... he had it now though. All of it so perfect, it felt like the dreams he’d had as a kid.

Texas didn’t have many hills either.

There were one—two—three initial tries before the front of their sled moved just enough to topple them forward, and when they did Jesse sucked in a breath like he’d been punched in the gut. He let out a yell, hands snaking fast around Cass’ waist to keep his balance and he could feel a similar scrambling going on as Cass seized Tulip’s shoulders. Gloved hands finally found some purchase around sweaters, lumpy coats, and Jesse was able to tip his head back with an appropriately thrilled cry this time. The wind bit as his cheeks and caused tears to stream from his eyes. He could feel his lips cracking, his whole body seizing with the cold. Jesse couldn’t tell where they were heading or, hell, whether they were about to hit something not far up ahead. There was nothing but white, grey, and the startling splash of color that were his two friends before him. Jesse had never felt safer.

Which of course was when the sled began to slow. One moment they were careening faster than all the cars they’d burned through, faster than Cass’ shitty motorcycle stolen back in Brooklyn, faster than the light God claimed to create... and then the next moment the world came back into focus. Trees were distinguishable on either side of them. All at once there was texture to the snow. Jesse was able to let go with one hand now. He slipped off a glove and let his finger fly through the ice as they slowly came to a stop. When it re-emerged, his hand was red and perfect.

"Wow," he breathed.

They must have felt the same. The second they stopped Tulip had turned to draw Cass into a kiss that Jesse could feel through his chest, pressed up against Cass’ back. He leaned forward too, plastering himself so that he had access to Cass’ cheek and neck, the very ends of Tulip’s hair to tug at, pulling their scratchy scarves down and out of the way for his teeth. He was so focused on fitting his cold nose in the junction beneath Cass’ ear that Jesse jumped when he felt a pair of lips searching for his own— he wasn’t sure whose. Though the moan all three of them let out reverberated amongst
the snow, mingling into one.

When he pulled back Jesse was halfway off the sled, Cass piled in his lap and Tulip kneeling between his knees. She looked like some godforsaken angel there, the red in her cheeks reminiscent of smeared blood. She stood, taking the time to run soaked gloves through both their hair. When she bent to whisper, Jesse arched up instinctually to hear her.

“You two can carry the sled back up,” she said.

“Wha—?”

But then Tulip was sprinting away, boots crunching and her laugh echoing over the trees. Jesse turned befuddled eyes on Cass, only to find that he too looked like he’d been smacked over the head with some blunt, betraying object. He stared down at their sled, the massive hill they’d just torn down...back to the sled.

“...fuckin’ broads,” Cass muttered and hauled himself to his feet.

Chapter End Notes

"Imagine your OTP sledding in the winter, person B sitting in the front, person A sitting in the back. Person B turns around and kisses person A, and when they pull away they whisper 'you have to carry the sled back up' and runs away, leaving person A to yell at them."
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The church got a fair number of donations every month, considering how small a town it was. Cass had always assumed that clothing passed from family to family like a plague around these parts: little Susie outgrows her overalls so they’re passed to Mrs. Doven’s littler Emma. Emma spills juice down the front and the stained fabric is given to Dave to re-make. Dave dyes the overalls a much softer yellow before giving them to Mr. Summerset’s Sam. Sam is bullied mercilessly for a few weeks before everyone forgets that supposedly boys aren’t supposed to look cute in pastels. He passes the overalls to his little sister a year later and the whole process begins again.

At least, that was the bubblegum kind of picture Cass had painted, which made the overflowing closet of molding clothes he’d found all the more surprising. Apparently Annville’s thriftiness was only outweighed by its snobbishness.

Figures.

“Are those Ian’s sneakers?” Jesse asked, voice filled with something like wonder. Or maybe it was dread. Cass had a hard time telling the difference anymore.

“Yep!”

Cass shoved the ratty pair deeper into the snow, making sure they actually stayed there this time, little bastards. From his crouch he looked up at the snowman and took a moment to appreciate how the red in Ian’s sneakers clashed with the green cardigan buttoned around the thing’s shoulders. At least it was Christmas-y. With a hum Cass stood, snatched a fraying scarf, and tossed that into the mix too. The snowman’s face was contorted into an expression of horror that, really, made sense given Cass’ forced fashion sense.

When he turned Cass found an identical expression marring Jesse’s face.

“How long have you been at this?” he gasped.

A couple hours. So all morning... or maybe most of the night too. Cass leaned back on his heels, enjoying the crunch of the snow, and surveyed the small army he’d built, each snow-man, woman, and child decked out in the worst that Annville had to offer. They looked like a badly dressed mob of
monster men come to lay seize to God’s house.

Cass wiped an imaginary tear from his eye. “Aren’t they beautiful?”

Only one piece left. There were three snow-people leading the charge, two men and an obvious woman, given the snow titties Cass had plopped on (heh) and the snowman in the middle was missing his hat. Cass grabbed Jesse’s—“Hey!”—and shoved it onto the icy head.

“Perfect,” he murmured.

With a sigh Jesse lay his forehead on Cass’ shoulder. It was a gesture of pure defeat.

“You’ve been reading too much Calvin and Hobbs.”

“Just wait ‘till they start melting, Padre. Merry fuckin’ Christmas from creep city.”

Cass raised a hand to pat Jesse consolingly. He knew those hand-me-downs would be good for something.

Chapter End Notes

"Imagine your OTP building a family of snow people and dressing the snow people in hand-me-downs."
Shit—!” Tulip nearly spilled her hot chocolate, jerking away from the sight of Jesse in all his nude glory, standing in the middle of her kitchen. She thus missed the expression of hurt that crossed his face.

“Consider myself insulted,” he muttered.

“You’re insulted...?" Tulip shook her head, still staring at the grimy, tiled floors. “Fucking hell, Jesse. Not that I don’t appreciate that sight on a normal day, but can you not do that while I’m eating? And while your more interesting bits look like they’re trying to crawl back up into your body? It sort of defeats the purpose.”

Jesse stomped his feet, with more vigor than petulance. “It’s cold!”

“Then put some damn clothes on!”

“I was,” he scoffed, “but those clothes of Walter’s you put out are fucking ice traps. I threw them over the space heater to warm ‘em up a bit. And, if you recall, my clothes are drenched because someone needed to have a no holds barred snowball fight at 1:00am.”

Tulip was staring now. Jesse might have appreciated the change if her expression wasn’t... odd.

“Say that again.”

“What? About how you’re freaking She-Hulk out there—?”

“No,” Tulip said slowly, “the part about how you put old, flammable fabric over our ancient space heater that—I swear—has been trying to kill me since I was twelve.”

Which was, of course, the exact moment that Cass walked in: Tulip perfecting her death glare, Jesse
buck-naked in the kitchen, and a small fire flaring up from the living room, shadowed flames dancing on the wall.

“... Right.” Jesse said.

Cass let him go, turning just in time to avoid colliding with Jesse as he sprinted out of the room (and if that vantage point provided the best view of his frosty ass, all the better). Tulip was left staring at the floor again, this time with her head in her hands.

Cass grinned, slapping his thighs. “So! The hell kind of party did I just walk into?”

Chapter End Notes

This week is Evil and it's only Tuesday, so I'm just going to keep writing ridiculous fluff~

"Imagine person A of your OTP during winter not wanting to change into their pajamas because the fabric feels cold. They then decide to drape their pajamas over the space heater to warm them up. How does person B react?"
“Do it.”

“No.”

“Yes.”

“No.”

“Yes.”

“Fuck you.”

“Don’t do it.”

“No—fuck!”

Cass threw himself to his feet, angrily abandoning his cozy spot on the couch next to Tulip. She was snickering as he grabbed the sad snow shovel leaning by the back door. He pointed it at her forcefully while trying to hop into his boot.

“I hope you know I’m only doing this because us vamps are damn near immune to the cold. I’m saving your skinny, mortal ass.”

“Talk to me about skinny the day you gain a pound.”

“You know I can’t since the turn.”
Tulip looked up from her book, smirking. “Best not talk to me then.”

Always had to have the last word, didn’t she? Cass left with a huff, making sure to slam the door extra hard when he did. Yes. That felt good. Properly child-like.

His good mood didn’t last long though. Vague immunity or no, it was still cold as balls outside and shoveling the driveway was Sisyphus’ idea of a good time: no sooner would Cass clear a section than more would blow through. Or drop from a tree. Or goddamn Ed would kick some up driving past, I know where you live, Ed! Cass was muttering up a storm by the time he was halfway done and even he was cold enough that he barely felt the finger tapping his shoulder.

Except he did, and it startled the ever living fuck out of him.

“Sh—” was all he got out before he was falling, Cass’ legs kicking out from under him when he turned too fast. He got a brief, spectacular look of Tulip going wide-eyed before his elbow connected with the mug she was holding. One human, vampire, and a decent amount of scalding hot chocolate all ended up in a pile on the driveway together. The coco froze instantly.

Tulip was face-first in the snow. Cass was half laying over her back. Despite the muffled quality of her words, he still caught them loud and clear—as well as the simmering anger behind them.

“That’s the last goddamn time I ever do something nice for you.”

“... Yeah, luv. That’s fair.”

Chapter End Notes

"It is/has been snowing outside, and Person A (somewhat fluffily) forces Person B to go out and shovel the driveway. Later, Person A comes out with hot chocolate for Person B. As Person B walks over to take it, they accidentally slip and fall."
Chapter 172

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

“More then? Aye, ‘course you want more…”

Cass poured the whiskey straight onto the ground where it froze; creating a sheet of light brown ice that was nearly indistinguishable from the rest of the darkness. He was the brightest thing around, including the stars that were blocked by thick, stormy clouds overhead. Cass wouldn’t be surprised if someone mistook him for a ghost, lying around in a goddamn graveyard.

“Yeah, yeah, luv. Some for you too.”

A sad ghost, supposedly drinking alone.

“Beth and I broke up. She got some fancy engineer’s job in Boston and wanted me to move with her. That’s just proof she never listened to me anyway, right? Far as I’m concerned. You know I’m not leavin’ you.”

Cass flopped more firmly onto the snow, enjoying how it soaked into his jeans and hoodie, the bumpy feel of the ground beneath him, digging into his back. God it was freezing out. He almost wished he could freeze, properly, to just... fall asleep and leave it at that.

“I could wait for the sun,” Cass said softly. He lifted his bottle to the sky in a toast, taking a long drink that—dammit—actually warmed him somewhat. He came up from the pull with a sigh. “I know you two would kick my ass if I did though. You in hell? Heh. Probably. More fun down there, but I’m not giving you the chance to toss me into some fiery brimstone. Guess I just gotta keep putting up with the Beths of the world.”

The bottle was gone. Normally Cass would have tossed it aside, but not here. That was just damn disrespectful. Instead he hoisted himself to his feet, dripping, numb, too aware that there was no one out looking for him. The only two that would have bothered were already here.

“I’ll be back in another ten years. Maybe then I could come home, yeah?”
And Cass left, dragging his fingertips along the gravestone before his feet pulled him away, his skin dipping into the crevices of the epitaph:

\[ \textit{Jesse & Tulip} \]

\textit{They were together - until the end of the world}

Chapter End Notes

"Many times, after the death of Person A, Person B was found at the dead hour of winter night, sitting beside Person A’s tomb almost frozen in the snow."
Chapter 173

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Jesse barely caught it over the noise of the crowd, but the baby monitor had one hell of a volume setting and the cry, weak as it was, still cut through the drunken uproar. Swaying slightly, Jesse shoved Maggie aside and pushed past Jed, lifting the monitor off his belt and high into the air so everyone knew what he was after. Even wasted the town’s residents knew to step back when it came to Jesse and his kid. Pretty ladies and rowdy men parted like the red sea.

“Two minutes!” someone cried and the inn went wild, everyone lifting their beers so Jesse’s hand wasn’t the only one in the air—so he raised his drink as well. He nodded to himself, chuckling, and stumbled into the wall. Shaking his head, Jesse found his feet again and started upstairs. The crying only got louder as he entered the empty stairwell.

Christina was sequestered in the very first room. ‘Course she’d be as close to them as possible.

“C’mon now...” Jesse was already making sushing noises as he stepped in, switching the monitor off and wincing at the real cries. Christina was swaddled in a small mound of blankets, smack in the middle of the bed the three of them would be sharing later that night. Jesse smirked at the makeshift bedrails Cass had set up before sliding next to the squirming bundle.

“Little loudmouth,” he murmured, tugging Christina into his lap. “You got the worst timing, you know that? Or maybe the best. You wanted to be awake for your first New Year’s, huh?” She shrieked at that and Jesse sighed, trying to rock her. “Sorry, kiddo. Daddy’s not walking you when he’s this unsteady... oh wait. I’ve an idea now...” One quick dip of his finger into the beer did the trick, Christina sucking happily and staring up at Jesse with those big brown eyes.

“Jesus Christ, starting her a little early aren’t we?”

Jesse raised an eyebrow at Tulip, silhouetted in the doorway. “Ain’t so bad when you’re ensuring her first word is gonna be a cuss.”

Even in the dark he caught the smile tugging at Tulip’s lips and oh, was he glad for it. They’d never planned to have a kid on this literal, god-forsaken road trip. Hell, Jesse hadn’t been sure Tulip would want to try at all after Carlos, but here they were, and it had taken a toll that he wasn’t always sure how to smooth over. So yeah, that smile was something. That and the fact that ‘Uncle Cass’ could go days without sleep were some goddamn miracles.
Tulip was suddenly closer. Right on top of Jesse actually, crawling over his legs since she couldn’t get at his lap. She still had a lot of the pregnancy weight and Jesse snaked his free arm around her middle, loving how soft she was now in their hard, crazy-ass world. Tulip hummed and leaned to rest her forehead against Jesse’s. Her breath smelled liked cheap wine and the ranch chips they’d shared.


“You can head back down if you want,” he murmured. “I got this.”

“Sure you do, but I’m not missing this.”

“Hmm?”

Then Jesse caught the countdown, the “3—2—1—” before Tulip’s lips were sealed over his, the two of them only staying marginally apart so as not to crush Christina. It was slow and lazy, the kind of kiss that Jesse had read about and used to think boring: routine-like for those who’d been together for ages. Passion didn’t always mean frenzy though and he’d never known passion quite like having Tulip at his side, reliably.

“Happy New Year,” she whispered, rubbing her cheek against Jesse’s beard. “You too, cowgirl,” and Tulip pressed a reverent kiss to Christina’s forehead.

Jesse followed right after. His lips traced where Tulip’s had been on Christina’s soft skin and between them their little girl laughed.

Chapter End Notes

Papa!Jesse and Mama!Tulip!! I hurt myself a little writing this. I didn't realize how much I wanted them to have a cute kid until I gave them one *flings myself into the sun*

Also, for those not in the know: Christina is the name of Jesse's mom in the comics.

Prompt: "It's New Years Eve, and your OTP has a baby. Friends/family/whoever come over to ring in the New Year. Early in the night, Person A puts the baby to sleep in their nursery, closing the door so the noise of the party doesn't bother them. Close to
midnight, the baby wakes up, and A goes to soothe them. Not wanting to miss getting a New Years kiss with their partner, Person B follows them up. At midnight, they have their New Years kiss with their baby in A's arms, in the quiet of the nursery."
Chapter 174

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

He might have been stuck in a human body, but DeBlanc still had a demon’s reflexes, so when something shifted the weight on his bed he was up in a flash, hand already drawing out the pistol he kept hidden between the headboard and the mattress.

The muzzle pressed hard into Fiore’s temple, tilted curiously.

“You must stop this,” DeBlanc breathed.

It wasn’t with any real heat though and the pistol was immediately tossed aside—a disgusted gesture. Taking that as permission, Fiore slid the rest of the way onto the bed, scooching this way and that until he’d managed to worm under the covers. He was so much taller than DeBlanc. Almost too tall for the hotel beds to accommodate. It was thus with a resigned air that DeBlanc allowed Fiore to pull up his knees and half curl around his head, creating a strange half-moon around his body. They’d adopted this position for nearly two weeks now.

“What was it this time?” DeBlanc whispered. He ran a thumb lightly along the hollow of Fiore’s throat. Sensation was such a complex thing and it was rare that he got to feel skin. “Dreaming about heaven again?”

Both of them knew that was a lie. Neither of them dreamed... but they’d quickly learned the joys of a good excuse.

He didn’t answer immediately. Instead Fiore titled his head so he was looking out the window, bathing them in spotty moonlight. The position shadowed his face though so that DeBlanc couldn’t see the smile, though he could certainly hear it in his voice.

“There’s a snow storm,” he said simply.

Ah. What an excuse then. The first time they’d ever huddled like this had been back in Russia, DeBlanc in a numb kind of shock at feeling true cold for the first time, his body—though not really his body—still somehow used to centuries of supernatural fire. Fiore had spent nearly an hour that night spouting all that he knew about humans, body heat, the benefits of physical connection... and DeBlanc had let him ramble, because even then he’d recognized that as an excuse all its own. He
could easily feel how much Fiore had leaned into him as he leaned back.

“Well then,” DeBlanc said, voice scratchy. “I can’t have you getting cold, now can I?”

They let their eyes slip shut and ducked their heads close together, so as to block out the sound of the creaking heater.

Somewhere outside was a growing expanse of white, no doubt flimsily reminiscent of heaven itself. Yet Fiore had chosen this space, right beside him. DeBlanc didn’t know what excuse he’d come up with tomorrow night, or how long this could possibly continue...

... but for now that hardly mattered. DeBlanc slipped his hand into an angel’s and reminded himself that this was hardly the most miraculous thing they’d ever done together.

Even if it sometimes felt that way.

Chapter End Notes

"Imagine your OTP sheltering and cuddling somewhere in a snowstorm."
Cass leaned against the tub until he heard the churn-churn-churn of water in the pipes finally stop. Fantastic. He gave it another minute before cranking open the tap and—low and behold—the water was kind of lukewarm, hallelujah. By the time Jesse came up there was a marginally hot bath waiting, complete with cheap bubbles from the corner store.

Cass raised an eyebrow. Jesse chucked a pile of wet clothes into the corner.

“Dryer’s busted,” he said, rubbing at his brow. “We gotta hang these up.”

“...It’s freezing outside.”

“In the living room then. They can drip on that god-awful carpet.”

“Hmm. Later.”

“Later.”

They were too tired for such things now. Let the clothes grow mold on the floor. Despite Jesse’s warnings, Cass would have never thought that the holidays could be so damn exhausting, at least not in such a small town. But oh no. There were decorations to set up—able bodied men called to action for all the little old ladies and former handy-men with broken legs—there was setup in the church and school community center for nativity performances, shopping of course, wrapping, keeping kids entertained so that their parents could do the same, and god, there was enough baking that Cass never wanted to see another sugar snowflake cookie for the rest of his life.

In short, they were fucking exhausted.

“Move over,” Jesse groused because Cass had already stripped and slid into the tub, hogging up all the space. It wasn’t very big to begin with and it took some real maneuvering to get Cass seated between Jesse’s legs, back-to-chest and only a little bit of the water sloshing out onto the floor. The warmth was great after the unexpectedly cold weather though and the tangle of limbs was reassuring.
Jesse lazily scooped up water and dribbled it over Cass’ hair. Cass’ bony knees stuck out of the water and he knocked them together, equally lazy.

“Gotta do this more often,” he muttered, sliding further into the water. “Nothin’ exciting and nothin’ strange. Just... this. Normal shite, you know?”

Jesse knew. He pressed a brief, open-mouthed kiss to Cass’ neck before reaching for the shampoo, his movements slow and indulgent. He’d take his time tonight.

Let the clothes dry there and rot.

Chapter End Notes

"Imagine your OTP taking a hot bath on a long, cold winter night, after a long day."
Jesse was ashamed to admit that the first time he thought Cass was just goofing off in the back of the church. Sure, the kids’ caroling group wasn’t much to write home about (Mary had a cold this year and Richie thought he could still hit those high notes through puberty), but they weren’t worth the mocking that was going on in the final pew. Cass kept waving his hands about, gesturing in time with the music in a way Jesse could only associate with behind-your-back ridicule.

Except... sequestered at Emily’s piano, Jesse was surprised to note how serious Cass looked. He had the same sort of intense, concentrated expression that he gave to their no holds barred pool games, like this was something he wanted done, but done right.

Emily let the final note sound and bumped Jesse’s shoulder. “That was nice of him,” she whispered.

“How do you say ‘Merry Christmas’ then?” he asked.

Cass smiled, real slow. “Not saying anything,” and instead he handed Jesse his cigarette to briefly pat at his chest, moving to form a ‘C’ and arching it over his forearm.
Jesse made a noncommittal sound. He’d never been good at using his body for anything other than a fight. “Happy holidays?”

Shit. How many moments was that? Cass side-eyed him, too close to laughing.

“Alright.” Jesse blew out a breath. “Just tell me how to sign ‘I love you.’”

“I don’t think so.” Cass got up on his knees, tugging Jesse closer by his collar. “First lesson, Padre: don’t know the sign? You show it instead...”

And yes, his kiss was the perfect demonstration.

Chapter End Notes

This exists because I wanted to give Cass a different language from what we normally see in fics and I am a humble ASL student who LOVES her classes. Though please yell at me if I screwed something up here...

"Imagine person A of your OTP being bilingual and trying to teach person B Christmas carols in their first language."
“I’m beginning to see why none of us went to school for engineering.,” Jesse observed, watching as one side of their fort sagged almost to the carpet. Tulip and Cass nodded, though Emily’s tykes didn’t seem to mind much. Despite demanding the fort in the first place, they were a little busy chasing each other like wild raccoons to criticize.

Cass’ finger followed Tommy as he tried spraying Alice with a can of whipped cream. “Thought that was for the gingerbread houses...” he said. No one paid him any mind.

“Pillows,” Emily announced. She absently snagged Elliot as he raced by, re-directing him away from the breakable china cabinet. “We need more pillows to support the foundation.”

“Yeah, but then they’ll be no space inside,” Tulip said.

“Not enough for nine anyway,” Jesse agreed.

The three continued to stare at their failed efforts, arms crossed and expressions grave.

“You know I could just...” and from his place at the table DeBlanc made a little motion with his hand, causing everyone else to scowl. He shrugged placatingly and went back to helping Fiore with the sweets.

Cass scoffed. “Like hell we’re usin’ demon voodoo to build a blanket fort. It ain’t done.”

“But maybe a compromise... Emily? Which of your kids is the smartest?”

Her glare could have melted all the snow outside. “Jesse. Custer.”

“C’mon, don’t get your hair in a twist, just answer.”
Emily honestly looked like she could never make such a horrible, un-motherly decision... until she saw Tommy plow headfirst into Fiore’s chair and Elliot follow immediately after. Because whatever Tommy did had to be fun, right?

“Alice,” she sighed.

“No duh,” Tulip smirked.

So Jesse grabbed hold of Alice on her next run around, lifting her firmly onto his hip and whispering in her ear—his eyes briefly flashing red. With a squeal of glee Alice dove into the mess of blankets, pillows, and comforters, building in minutes what was perhaps the most complex and utterly fantastic fort in the good ol’ U.S-of-A. When she was done she blinked fuzzily, a little unsure about what had just occurred, before tottering off to join her brothers once more.

“Child labor,” Cass said. “I fuckin’ love it.”

“Are you sure that’s the proper way to use Genesis?” Fiore snapped.

Jesse just grinned. “Absolutely.”

Chapter End Notes

"Your OTP gets snowed in so they decide to build a blanket fort"
The tiny cries barely sounded over the ruckus from the school next door—kids mad with the thought that winter break was almost here—but Tulip still managed to catch it. She was observant like that. Had to be, with her boys being who they were. This also meant that Tulip was supposed to be the responsible one of the three... except responsibility apparently flew out the window when it came to finding kittens behind three-day old trash.

“Hey there,” Tulip cooed. She bent and set her groceries aside.

It was the right choice. The kitten was malnourished but probably not abused, as it immediately skittered over to her boot and attacked the laces, before abandoning that to peer eagerly into the grocery bag, little claws doing all sorts of damage to the plastic. Its fur was a peachy color that had long matted, poor thing had a tear in its ear, though it was all-in-all a remarkably excitable ball of fluff. Tulip bit back a laugh as the stupid thing tried to make mincemeat of her milk carton.

She quickly scooped him into her hands before he could actually puncture the bottle. “You’re a little menace, aren’t you?” Tulip said. The kitten tried to ravish her thumb. “Uh huh. Boy do you remind me of someone...” and as the kitten let out the cutest of growls Tulip smiled.

A quick mental catalogue of things like food and vet bills ran across her mind. Then Tulip was heading home again, the kitten still tucked safely under her arm.

“Oh yeah. You’re perfect. Cheaper than my other ideas too. C’mon then, let’s find you a litter box and bow...”

***

The dog was easily the saddest looking thing that Cass had ever seen. Oh, it might have been cute once upon a time, but now it was just a straggly creature made up of hunger and spite. He could see it in her eyes. Crouched low behind the pen she was kept in, the mutt didn’t growl, didn’t snap... but it had in a look in her eye that practically dared him to try and fuck with her. A part of Cass—the stupid vampire part—really wanted to take her up on that challenge.

The pound’s owner touched Cass hesitantly on his elbow. “Sir, you really don’t want this dog.
But Cass had already slung his fingers through the chains of the gate, grinning down at the dog who (yes) gave him an indifferent, but not overly hostile stare. Better than her attitude was that she looked identical to a mutt he faintly remembered munching on while recovering from burns.

“I’ll take her,” he announced.

“Sir—”

“And get me a decent leash, would you? This here girl is gonna be a right fuckin’ handful...”

***

Christmas morning. They agreed to meet under their cheap tree after they’d both retrieved their gifts, so Cass came in from the shed outside with his covered in tinsel. Tulip walked downstairs with hers in a shitty bow. The dog and cat stared one another down, tense... yet highly curious.

Cass grinned, bright as the lights. “Great minds, huh? I named her Brewski Jr.”

Brewski pulled at her leash and sniffed the kitten suspiciously... who immediately scratched her nose.

Tulip bit her lip hard. “I named him Dracula.”

“... you fuckin’ didn’t.”

Dracula tried to scratch again, but this time Brewski was ready. She jumped up and knocked the kitten right out of Tulip’s arms. Then the two of them were off, yowling and scratching at the floor as they tore past the Christmas tree.

Cass stared at the door they’d disappeared out of, awe coloring his voice. “I love them both.”
"Same. Good. Merry Christmas."

Chapter End Notes

"Imagine your OTP buying each other a pet for Christmas. Now imagine that A buys a cat or a kitten (whether it's a grumpy cat or a sweetheart kitten is up to you) because it reminds them of Person B. The only problem is, Person B buys a dog that reminds them, for whatever reason, of Person A."
“Wake up, dumb ass. Weren’t you the one bitching about snow?”

The word registered in Jesse’s sleepy mind, encouraging him to stretch until his leg found Tulip’s—until his arm bumped Cass’ face.

“Hey!”

“God, what time is it?” Tulip mumbled. She smashed her face further into the pillow.

“From what we’ve learned about God, luv, I suspect he don’t know any more than you do.”

Jesse sat up with a groan, bleary-eyed and shivering. “Can we not have wise-cracks this early in the morning?”

“Exactly.”

Cass shrugged. He was already sitting up in the motel bed, half his clothes piled on the night table and two lit cigarettes between his fingers. He passed one to Jesse.

“Don’t you get ash on me,” Tulip muttered.

Jesse didn’t answer though. The motel’s beds were surprisingly low and it was only when he was sitting that he was able to see out the grimy window. At least, he thought it was grim until he realized that maybe that white sheen was supposed to be there.

He leaned forward slowly, elbows on his knees and cigarette forgotten. Jesse caught Cass’ grin from the corner of his eye.
“Told you,” he said. “Livin’ in such a goddamn warm state. Devil’s asshole, far as I’m concerned. Don’t know what you’ve been missin’...”

This, apparently. Huge snowdrifts covered the parking lot outside and all Jesse could think was, how the hell did those wispy flakes make up all that? Sturdy yet soft, beautiful and dangerous... a lot like them. Jesse snickered at his own sappy thoughts. Suddenly the cold room felt indescribably worth it.

“Told you,” Cass said.

Jesse just nodded. He rolled until he was half laying over Tulip’s back and yes, he dropped a little ash into her hair. He cut off her shriek with a kiss though, hauling her languid body up.

“You’re gonna want to see this.”

Chapter End Notes

"Imagine your OTP experiencing their first snow together."
Chapter 180

Jesse blinked in shock, watching the stick-thin figure wander up the church’s path. They had pretty severe drops in temperature this time of the night and Cass was a fool if he thought he could get away with just a hoodie and jeans.

Unless...

“Another perk?” he asked when Cass got close. He knew what Jesse meant. Vampirism gave him everything from healing ability to a crazy fast metabolism, so why not immunity to cold too?

Except that when Cass finally got beneath the porch light Jesse could see the pink in his nose and cheeks. He sniffed miserably.

“No,” he grunted.

Jesse’s mouth twitched. “You don’t have a jacket?”

“I came in with the clothes on my back and everything else has come outta that charity bin a’ yours. So does it look like I’ve got a fuckin’ jacket?”

Touché. Cass had a point though. Jesse hadn’t thought much about asking Cass to meet him at the church, but now he thought it might have been better to just send him straight to the bar. Setting off down the path, something like guilt started churning in Jesse’s stomach and thinking about the warm drink he’d buy Cass didn’t dissipate it. He watched three full-body shivers before finally shrugging his own coat off, the movement urgent.

“Go on,” Jesse said, shaking it. “I’m not having you bitch the rest of the night.”

Cass huffed, but he did it. “I’m fine,” he said even as he threw his arms into the sleeves.
It wasn’t quite enough for his small frame though. Or maybe he just wasn’t given enough time to warm up—Jesse was impatient, after all. They hadn’t even passed the Welcome sign (“Spread ‘em for God!”) before Jesse had slung his arm around Cass’ shoulder, pulling him close.

“Body heat,” he explained, like that had ever been an excuse around here for two guys freaking cuddling. Cass stiffened a moment... then pressed closer as they continued their walk.

“’Course it is. Much appreciated, Padre.”

Chapter End Notes

"During winter person B didn't bring their jacket and their nose was turning pink. Person A saw them and handed them their jacket, which person B put on even though it was oversized on them."
Chapter Notes

First drabble of 2017! Woo! Prompt for this one was "Pirate AU"

“Let’s try this one more time. What are you doing on my ship?”

Captain Jesse Custer slowly pressed the pistol up into the rat’s chin, waiting for the telltale tremble to run through his body. It didn’t come though and Jesse felt a similar thrill latching onto his spine when all the skinny scalawag did was give a nasty grin.

“Me? Oh, just hitchin’ a ride, captin’. You wouldn’t throw a poor lad overboard, now would’ya?”

“He would,” Tulip growled, leveling her sword.

He was skinny, bony-thin in a way that told Jesse the guy hadn’t eaten in days. Not properly at least. There was the missing jerky to account for, not to mention more than one bottle of rum. It had been Miss Emily who’d found him beneath deck, curled in the cargo hold like some uncivilized creature, grinning out at her with sharp teeth fit enough to make a lady faint. Which she had. Why Miss Emily had been down there was still a mystery to solve, though Jesse suspected she’d wanted a nip of that rum herself. He’d ferried these ladies to and from shores for years now and they were never as respectable as they made themselves out to be.

The man clucked his tongue like a disappointed mama. “Your mind’s wanderin,’ captain,” he said.

“My mind—” Jesse pressed the pistol harder into his chin. “—is sharp enough for you, boy. Where you from?” His accent was nothing Jesse could place… and he’d been sure he could place them all.

The man waved a dirty hand. “Here, there, everywhere. Tell you what, let me bunk with you the rest of this miserable journey, an’ I’ll tell you all kinds a’ stories in return. Hmm? Whaddya say to that?”

He was glad of the misty afternoon, as it hid Jesse’s burning cheeks. The others might take ‘bunk with’ as simply staying on board… but Jesse had caught the glint that came into the rat’s eye. He took stock of that skinny framw again and was not nearly as repulsed as he should have been.
He felt quite hot beneath the collar.

“Jesse,” Tulip warned.

He did not heed her. Jesse lowered his pistol, offering the man his hand instead.

“Jesse Custer. Captain of this vessel. You may refer to me as such.”

“Oh, with pleasure. Cassidy’s my name to give, no title to speak of though…” he shrugged. “Not really the settlin’ down sort.”

Jesse signaled for everyone to lower their weapons, which they did, even if Tulip sheathed her sword with a scowl.

“You should become that sort then,” he said. “You’re easy pickings, boy, and there’s all sorts out there. Sirens. Hydras. The sea ain’t your friend. Some even say there are blood-sucking creatures that’ll steal your heart and then your soul.”

“Is that what they say?” Another glint came into Cassidy’s eye, this one mischievous in a way Jesse couldn’t explain. “Why, that’s real interestin’. We’ll just have to watch our backs then, you and I…”

And Cassidy led Jesse towards the Captain’s quarters. Alone. One hand on the small of his back, the other one rising up to caress his neck.
“You’re real shit at this, you know that? How many times do I gotta tell you? You press *here* to punch—”

“Dammit, that’s what I’ve been doing!”

Cass could feel Jesse’s frustration through his back—hot and shaking slightly—the larger man wrapped around him with his arms in Cass’ lap. Jesse held the controller to the brats’ X-box in tight hands, frantically pressing all the buttons in the hope of a miracle. Cass could hear Emily out on the porch, sharing lemonade with Tulip.

The screen suddenly lit up with a giant ‘K.O.!’ as Jesse’s avatar fell to the game’s wrath. His mouth dropped open as a symbolic, bloody sword tore down through his nameplate.

“…fuck this shit,” Jesse whispered.

Cass snickered. “Again?”

“Yes. I’m getting better.”

“No you’re not.”

It was fine though. Jesse could play the stupid game as long as he wanted. After all, Cass had the entertainment of Jesse’s thighs pressing into his; a sharp chin and nose nestling into his hair.

This right here was his battle and it was a hell of a lot more fun than fake martial arts.
“Thank you, Jane,” Jesse said. His expression was strained. “You’ve got my promise that I’ll stop by Friday. Wouldn’t miss your pie for the world!”

She rose up on tip-toe to pat briefly at his cheek. “Good boy. You come on time now, hear?”

“Absolutely, ma’am.”

She shuffled away. In the time between when Jane was out of earshot and Ben was still dragging his twins down the aisle, Tulip cackled in the pew beside Jesse. Feet up on the bench, she nudged at Cass in front of her, thoroughly engaged with his Game Boy.

“Liar,” she said to Jesse. “Ain’t that a sin? In church no less?”

His smile was equally strained, trying to keep up appearances for those still waiting to greet him. Ben was having a damn hard time getting little Millie to cooperate. She kept tugging insistently at the hood of her raincoat.

“Her pies taste like shit,” Jesse murmured from the corner of his mouth.

Cass cursed, scowling at his screen. “Huh? Oh. Big Lebowski bad... or The Help bad?”

“Oh god it better be Lebowski.”

Tulip threw back her head and laughed.

It was time for more small talk and broken promises though. Ben had finally succeeded in getting his girls over here, where Lisa immediately latched onto Cass, cooing at his game. Ben let her go, more concerned with Millie and whatever was going on with that coat.
“Apologies, Preacher,” he said, and Jesse merely shook his head. “Great talk today. Like always. Well. Always nowadays, huh? We really—Millie stop it.”

Ben Rogers was a large man, as wide as he was tall... and he had a good two inches on Cass. Jesse found that he didn’t particularly like those meaty hands getting so rough with his tiny girl.

“Millie?” he asked softly.

“I don’t wanna!” she shrieked. With a final pull Millie tore herself from her father’s grip and wrenched the hood off her head. Jesse’s eyebrows rose as her formally blonde curls tumbled out—now dyed a range of blues and greens.

Ben was positively red in the face. “Millie! You cover that crap up this instant—!”

She stomped a booted foot. “No! I like it.”

“I don’t give a damn—”

The rest of Ben’s tirade was lost, everyone still hung up on his previous comment. Slowly, three heads looked his way and offered piercing stares. Lisa glanced between Jesse, Cass, and Tulip, looking both excited and a little bit awed.

“Crap?” Jesse questioned, dangerously quiet. If Ben picked up on the warning, he didn’t acknowledge it.

“I like it too,” Lisa whispered conspiratorially to Cass, who nodded. Tulip had come to stand beside Jesse. She watched Millie’s tantrum with a calm, considering look.

Ben had his hands full after that, but he still took the time to apologize profusely to Jesse, promising that by next Sunday his girl’s ‘offensiveness’ would be gone. Unlike Jesse’s own experiences with pies, he had a sinking feeling that this promise would be kept.

It was only when Ben was gone and the rest of the churchgoers had followed that Cass stood as well, sticking the game in the back pocket of his jeans. He crossed his arms and watched the now
empty doorway.

“You two know anyone around here?” he asked, quite determined.

Tulip rolled her eyes. “You know me.”

Jesse smirked.

They timed it perfectly, making sure no one saw them between dinner Saturday night and church Sunday morning. Tulip’s purple hair and Cass’ yellow tips caused a number of shocked gasps... but they were nothing compared to what Jesse received.

He stood proudly at the pulpit, letting the early light catch all the variations of pink in his hair. Jesse bypassed Ben’s horrified face and instead stared directly at Millie—her smile exuberant.

“Good morning,” he said. “Today we’ll be talking about diversity...”

Chapter End Notes

There’s a girl in my class with the most GORGEOUS blue/green hair (which I am admittedly a tad jealous of) and I wanted an excuse to give the trio some color too ^ ^
“I love it,” Fiore stated, looping the second-hand scarf firmly around his neck. The other three raised eyebrows at the bland, apathetic tone...but of course his tone was dull—all Fiore’s brilliance was contained within. Of course his words sounded cliche—for they’d been popularized for a reason. The scarf’s shabbiness meant nothing compared to its warmth; a clash with his suit inconsequential; and the holes? Who cared. The only thing that did matter was the gesture itself. Not the ‘what,’ but the ‘who’ that had bestowed it.

DeBlanc smiled with all the force of heaven itself.

“I know you do.”

Chapter End Notes

Prompt: Enthusiasm
Chapter 185

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Jesse gave Cass the extra sweatshirt he’d thrown into the trunk of Tulip’s car, completely unaware that it was the first gift he’d received in... oh, six years? Seven? Didn’t matter. Cass pulled the jumper over his head with the reverence it deserved.

So it was more than a tad bit devastating when he left it behind in the corner of a jail cell, thrown there during the hospitable ‘interrogation,’ forgotten in the chaos of his rescue. He thought about it sometimes in the months proceeding. Discourteous maybe, but it sort of felt like one of them lost limbs.

Cass didn’t know that his jailers tossed the grey monstrosity in the trash with the fluids and other bits of himself he’d spewed out; that another lonely soul picked it up despite its stench; she died of the cold weeks later, despite the hoodie’s help; it rolled through the gutters; got caught on a tire wheel; ended up in front of a stoop four block down from a man who brought hand-me-downs to the local church. Nearly everything was reusable if you just gave it a little time and care. At least, that was his thinking.

Jesse had bought Cass another shirt months past, of course—a gift in the more literal sense. He cherished this tacky, store bought flannel even if it didn’t smell like Jesse’s sweat and beer. Cass made him wear the ugly thing just for that reason, though it was never quite the same.

He had it though, and that was something.

Which made the blessing all the more artful when they arrived at that very church—one ex-padre seeking solace from another—and in the offered charity bin Cass found the first of his two gifts in eight years.

He managed to squeeze both over his skinny frame and walked back, glowing with every step.

Chapter End Notes

Prompt: Forgotten
Chapter 186

Chapter Notes

Warning for character death!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Tulip knew it would come to this eventually. Theirs wasn’t a tale that ended with cliché happy endings. No one in this room was going to die asleep in their beds. The most you could hope for was to go out in a manner worthy of the life you’d lived—and to take some of the bastards along with you, of course.

She smirked at that. Not enough to draw suspicion, just something for her own amusement in these final moments. After all, she’d made a goddamn bazooka out of old cans and kiddie toys. The tools in this here warehouse had more than enough fixings for a bomb.

And her boys had given her just enough time to make it. Nicely done.

“Go on,” she whispered. When the woman said nothing Tulip stepped closer, pressing the muzzle of the gun directly into her forehead. It still didn’t earn her a flinch and Tulip had to admit to being impressed.

“I’m waiting.”

The woman lifted her chin this time, a simple acknowledgement. It was now or never.

“Any last words?” she asked and Tulip nodded against the metal.

She didn’t actually have words though; never had been good with them anyhow. Instead Tulip moved slow—so as not to startle her murderer—and reached a hand carefully behind her back.

Another hand slippery with blood gripped hers. Up until that moment she hadn’t been sure which of her boys was still alive, but now she knew. Oh, she’d know that hand anywhere.
“Bring it,” she growled and the digits tightened just as the bullet blew through Tulip’s brain.

Still, her man didn’t let go.

Chapter End Notes

Prompt: Out of time
“You realize we’re basically the Golden Trio, yeah? If they were, like, rusty gold and willing to kill more.” Cass waved his threadbare copy of *The Philosopher’s Stone* as emphasis.

Tulip leaned up from the backseat. “I’m Hermione, aren’t I?”

“Duh.”

She whacked his head through the space in the headrest. “Just because I’m the only woman—!”

“Nah, nah, it’s ‘cause you’re the only one with some brains in this bunch.”

“...alright.”

Jesse chuckled. “You sure know how to flatter her, Cass. So, what? I’m Ron?”

“What!” Cass drew against the window in horror. “No, dunce, *I’m* Ron. You’re the bloody fuckin’ chosen one. I’m just the laughable sidekick.”

Jesse seemed just as flattered for a time, cruising happily down the road until—

“Wait. Doesn’t Ron *marry* Hermione?”

Cass grinned. “Now you’re gettin’ it.”
Chapter 188

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

There is no difference. Meat is meat.

Odin had the intestines scraped clean, stretched and dried, mounted in a shadow box and hung at the foot of his bed, ready and waiting for him every time he opened his eyes. He’d been specific in his instructions regarding labels. There were to be none. His daughter’s meat and the meat of that common cow were entirely indistinguishable.

“Liar,” Odin whispered each morning, briefly touching his fingers to the glass. He dressed and brushed his teeth. Combed his hair and downed his early morning shot. When Odin shaved he pressed trembling fingers to his own skin, palpating the flesh there. He did this with disgust. With reverence too.

Odin did not believe in God, yet the God of Meat clearly existed before him.

He was God.

Beneath the strip of cow or girl’s intestines was a blank bit of board, perfectly sized for one more sample. Odin had a will ready with more specific instructions because someday, that would be his eternity too.

It was the only way he and Lucy Loo would be together again.

Chapter End Notes

Prompt: obsession
Chapter 189

Chapter Notes

Today is a truly awful and heinous day imo... so I come bearing more drabbles. Lots more. Hopefully they'll help cheer you all as it (marginally) has me.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Oh c’mon!” Tulip howled, torn between kicking Cass from the backseat and clamping her hands over her ears. “You’ve played almost nothing but Clarkson for the last hour. Who the fuck put you in charge of the music anyway?”

“That coin,” Jesse muttered, glaring daggers down where it had rolled into the footwell.

Cass just cranked the volume higher, pretending not to hear them. “Take a chance, make a change, and break awaaaaaaay!”

Tulip grabbed hold of Jesse’s ear and twisted. “We’re ditching him at the next gas station.”

“You don’t have to tell me!”

Chapter End Notes

Prompt: Breaking Away
“You certainly make the strangest of friends,” DeBlanc murmured. He carefully slipped the jacket from Jesse’s shoulders and folded it over his arm. His shirt and two rings followed.

“They ain’t exactly ‘friends’...”

Definitely not based on how the beefy guy was eyeing Jesse, just itching to break him in half. Which he could do, easily, if Jesse made the mistake of letting him get his paws on him. Lucky for him though, smaller meant faster.

“I’m taking him out quick,” Jesse whispered, right from the corner of his mouth. “When I do the rest of these bastards are gonna come and they’ll come hard. During the fight to ease back towards the far corner. When things get hairy make a break for the backdoor.”

DeBlanc’s eyes had gone wide, then they narrowed. “I can help you, preacher. I—”

Jesse turned, just enough to bump his shoulder against DeBlanc’s. It was, he realized, a gesture of companionship.

*He* was the friend.

“Cass and Tulip ain’t gonna make it in time, and one of us has got to get Fiore.”

DeBlanc hesitated at that. “But—”

“I’ll be fine.” Jesse smiled and with a last, reassuring look he walked out to face his opponent.

And yes, against all odds he was.
Prompt: Challenged
Nighttime was Cass’ territory. No fucking duh. You’d think his dumbass friends would remember that after all these years.

“The fuck does that have to do with Twister?” Tulip hissed. She had her legs awkwardly wound around Jesse, her arm beneath Cass’ elbow, and her ass pressed up into his face.

Not a bad place to be, in all honesty.

“Because,” he said, straining to spin the wheel. Ha. Green. “You guys know how much goddamn skill it takes to avoid the sun each day? I’m a twisting master.”

“Cheat—” Jesse bit out right before he collapsed on them both.

Prompt: Shadows
Ah. Their obvious choice. The glue that bound them all together, beyond pasts, perceived futures and—hell—even species. Faith was the one constant in all their lives and it never wavered. Which, they supposed, was exactly what faith was meant to do.

Problem was, none of them had it in God anymore.

Jesse, tearing off his collar and burning it with his lighter, grounding the ashes beneath the heel of a well-worn boot. Tulip, literally turning her back on the town that had claimed her, raising middle fingers high to the sky. For the first time in decades Cassidy taught himself restraint in his feedings, reclaiming the humanity that was stolen from him on the bank of a river. Fiore carved his love for DeBlanc out of rebellion and DeBlanc rebelled solely for his love. None of them needed the likes of God anymore.

They’d already found faith in each other.

Prompt: Faith
They’d known each other a week and all Cass could focus on was how damn nice Jesse was. Jesse fucking Custer, who gave him clothes and meals and beer out of his fridge. Who practically shoved him into the (comparatively) five-star accommodations of the church attic and gave him his conversation every day—*every day*—like it wasn’t something rare and precious. Jesse had been a generous constant for seven days now and Cass was poised for the other shoe to drop.

“He couldn’t. Men like Jesse just didn’t exist.

Still.

“…right then,” Cass muttered, accepting one more beer.

Maybe he could pretend. If Cass got to keep waiting for Jesse’s cruelty for another week, a month, a *year*...

…he’d wait forever. If only he was that lucky.

Chapter End Notes

Prompt: Pretense
“Do you ever think he orchestrated it?”

The question caught DeBlanc off guard. He paused in his reading, looking up to find Fiore staring at the bible in his hands. It was another long moment before he was able to put two-and-two together.

“You mean...us?” he asked, voice pitched low.

Fiore gave one, jerky nod.

Taking a deep breath, DeBlanc dropped his gaze and deliberately turned the page, casual. “If that’s true—if our relationship is really a part of his grand plan—then it in no way lessens my love for you. You can plan many wonderful things in this life. Parties. Children. Vacations. Your future. The planning does not take away from the joy of the act itself.”

From the corner of his eye, DeBlanc caught Fiore swallowing.

“And if this is his will then clearly you have his blessing, and... and I am happy for you.”

Silence reigned in the hotel.

“...thank you, DeBlanc.”
“Please stop,” Emily whispered, her kids kicking up more of a racket than usual. It was like they were trying to get in a life’s worth of excitement in under an hour. They were indescribable. Endless.

She loved them—of course she did—but sometimes Emily wondered if this was the only life waiting for her. Three chaotic toddlers who’d turn into sullen teenagers, then adults who wanted little from her but money and material support. It was a horrible thought... but one based in evidence, if the history of this town was anything to go by.

Emily hung her head, rubbing fiercely at her eyes. There must be something. *Something* else to look forward to. A meaning to this life—

No. She thought she’d found that in a preacher.

“Please,” Emily begged, unsure if it was a demand or a prayer. “Give me something—”

And something came. For a brief second it was the hottest wave against the back of her neck. Emily had just enough time to straighten, turn, and catch nothing but white on the horizon.

She indeed found something in death.

Chapter End Notes

Prompt: Future
Another morning, another routine to run through. Jesse took the shower as Cass fetched breakfast. Tulip cleaned up while Jesse ate. Cass gathered there shit until Tulip was ready to go. They had differing needs and preferences at the start of start their day, but they all took a moment to acknowledge the mirror.

Jesse took stock of the new scars on his face. He catalogued them, forcing himself to remember each mistake.

Tulip did the same, though her scars were figurative. You couldn’t see them on her skin, but she knew they were there. Her mouth had never puckered like that. Her eyes didn’t use to be that heavy.

And Cass did what he’d done for decades: watching the slow, seamless change he underwent, year by year. He didn’t get older exactly... he just got different.

They took stock of who they were on that day and what those people needed to do.

Only then did they walk out the door.

Prompt: Reflection
“I’ve got a plan,” Cass hissed, just loud enough for Tulip and Jesse to hear. It was like a breath of fresh air after being stuck in a stuffy room. Unconsciously, both of them relaxed—just a bit.

“Yeah?” Tulip said. She eased back a step and the mass of gang members came even closer. She froze, listening to the sounds of weights shifting, weapons readying, the tipping point before all-out chaos. “Care to share?”

“Remember RWBY?”

If the situation hadn’t been so dire they would have balked. As it was, Jesse barely restrained from kicking him.

No, no. Kick the enemies. The hoard of them.

So Jesse swallowed instead, praying that this was going somewhere. “That shitty anime you had us watch?”

“It’s a web series and yes. C’mon, you noobs. The fuck did Jaune say before they fought the Nevermore?”

Jesse was staring like Cass had lost his mind, but Tulip actually cast her mind back.

“Run and live,” she said.

Cass straightened, grinning. “Yeah, luv. That’s an idea I can get behind.”

Jesse pursed his lips. “Run it is then,” and the three of them kicked up dust as they got the hell out of dodge.
Prompt: Running Away (and yes, I'm still very obsessed with RWBY :D)
“It ain’t that complicated,” Cass drawled. Their bartender seemed to think otherwise.

She pointed at them each in turn, as she’d done twice now throughout the night. The other patrons were starting to get real sick of being ignored, but a few quick looks from Jesse kept them planted in their seats.

The woman bit her lip in concentration. Her pointer finger settled on Tulip. “So you and the preacher had a thing way back,” she said slowly. “Broke up. Then the preacher man started a thing with him...”

“Name’s Jesse,” Jesse muttered, not for the first time.

“And the two of you, you two men...”

“Were together,” Tulip finished for her, voice tight.

“...right.” The bartender nodded just a little too forcefully. “But then the preacher got back together with you, but you didn’t break up with you—”

“We’re all dating,” Cass bit out. “We’re. All. Dating.”

She snapped her mouth shut before smiling awkwardly. “But how does that work?”

“Jesus fuckin’ christ.”

Prompt: Complicated
“Aww, ain’t he cute,” Cass sang, pinching Jesse’s cheek. Rosy coloring and deep, even breathes. He didn’t stir. ‘Dead to the world’ didn’t even begin to cover Jesse’s state. Cass was sort of tempted to take a picture. And then plaster it everywhere.

The stares pulled him out of his daydream though. Cass side-eyed the people lined up on either side of the street, pausing in their daily lives solely to give them the stink-eye.

“Uh...”

Tulip smirked. “Really. You’d think they never saw a black woman carrying a white preacher bridal style before.”
Saturday morning and things were as perfect as they’d ever been. The church goers weren’t due for another hour, giving them plenty of time for a hearty breakfast before things got underway. Tulip had made up a variety of options (well, she’d bought frozen and microwavable things) and she and Cass both were still dressed in nothing but t-shirts—both of which were Jesse’s. It was going to be another hot day, but for now it was just pleasantly warm. Scattered beams of sunlight fell in patterns across the table.

“Hit me with the waffles,” Tulip said, her foot sneaking out play with Jesse’s beneath the table. He grinned and caught her in a quick kiss.

“Now that ain’t fair,” Cass teased, so of course he got one too.

Jesse couldn’t remember the last time he’d been this happy.

And yet... he paused, suddenly the plate of waffles held suspended in the air. The briefest flicker of doubt crossed his face and Jesse acknowledged the shiver that ran down his spine.

“Is... is this a dream?” he murmured.

Cass smiled. “Well of course it’s a fuckin’ dream. You’re never gettin’ the nine-to-five life. But I’ll tell you, Padre, you’ve got another twenty minutes before you gotta wake up.”

Jessie nodded, then finished passing the food. “...Alright then. That’ll do.”

AND THAT’S 200 DRABBLES. WOO. *Gives myself an imaginary medal*
“Never saw much point in these,” Tulip said, kicking a pile of journals that blocked her path. The whole store was trashed, nearly useless, but damn if it didn’t feel good to tread on some stuff. She ground mud into a marbled cover.

“Shouldn’t...” a voice started and Tulip was surprised to look up and find Cass glaring her way, hands stuff deep into his pockets. She bristled.

“Shouldn’t what?” Tulip gave another kick and pages flew. “The hell’s your problem?”

Cass grinned, though there was nothing happy in it. “No problem, luv. Just some of us live pretty damn long and it ain’t always easy to remember things, after a while. Writin’ helps.”

“...yeah? Got stuff you want to remember that badly, huh?”

If there had been tension between them it dissipated now. Cass ambled up, snatched one of the mangled journals off the floor, and pressed against Tulip's side as he traced the outline of a familiar flower on the front page.

“Maybe something,” he murmured.

“Hey,” Jesse popped out from the manager’s office. “Nothing good in here either. Let’s head out.”

“Sure thing,” Tulip said, eyes still locked on Cass.

She was careful to step between the fallen journals on their way out this time.

Cass slipped his into the back pocket of his jeans and grabbed a pen for good measure.
“You’re goddamn kidding me right now.”

From his vantage point behind the counter Jesse could just make out the shadow behind Kroger’s glass doors, peering hesitantly inside. Of course he was hesitant. The lights were half-way dimmed after all, the store deserted except for Jesse, Tulip in the back, and an old mop to keep him company. Their store closed at precisely 10:00pm every weekday.

It was 9:59.

The shadow seemed to make up its mind though, plowing through the automated doors and becoming a scraggly, stumbling asshole with a too-wide grin on his face. “I still got a minute!” he crowed as if reading Jesse’s mind and he jogged past the counter, waving his arms in a ‘just-a-moment’ gesture. “I only need some chips, okay? It’s an emergency, I swear!”

Then he was gone.

Jesse worked his mouth for a moment before wrenching off his apron and stomping after him. No, no, the clock definitely read 10:00 now and this idiot hadn’t even gone down the right aisle. Despite this, marching his way through cleaning supplies and discounted dog food, Jesse still managed to find the guy in front of—you guessed it—the chips.

He was just standing there, hand over his mouth like this was the most important decision of his young life.

“Excuse me,” Jesse growled. “But we are closed—”

“Yeah, yeah, just hold on a hot minute,” and the guy had the nerve to flap a hand in Jesse’s face. “I’ll be out of your hair before you know it. I’ve just got to decide between the Cheese Curls or the extra spicy Doritos. I mean, I’m craving the cheese now, obviously, but which cheese is crucial. No going back from this, my good man.”
Jesse blinked, feeling a migraine coming on. “How the hell is this an emergency again?”

Under the dimmed lights the guy twitched. The hand around his mouth seemed to tighten. “Well... girlfriend of two years just dumped me, friend, so I need the perfect mourning snack, now don’t I?”

Oh.

“I—” Jesse started, but at that second the lights in the store plunged off completely. Both of them startled, Jesse tearing back down the aisle and to the front of the store, just in time to see Tulip’s headlights pulling out of the parking lot. He raised one finger in the parody of calling out, realized how stupid that was, knew the doors would be locked without needing to go over to check.

Which was fine. Completely. So what if she’d assumed he’d already left? No biggie. He’d just use his cell to call her back.

...the dead cell, that is. Without a charger.

“Fucking Pokémon Go,” Jesse whispered. “Fucking battery draining, asshole Pokémon.”

He wandered back to the chip aisle. The guy was sprawled out on the floor now, Cheese Curls, Doritos, and a bag of salt and pepper all open as his feet.

“Are we stuck here for the night?” he asked cheerfully, stuffing a horrifying combination of snacks into his mouth. “Ha! We are. I can tell by that look. Tough luck, friend. Yeah no, I don’t got a cell either.” He slapped his empty jean pockets.

Jesse let out the longest sigh, sliding down next to him. “You still have to pay for those you know.”

“Don’t got no money either.”

“...what the hell is wrong with you?”
“Plenty. Why do you think she left?” He looked a little easier saying it this time. The guy held out a powder-sticky palm. “It’s Cass, by the way. Cassidy if you’re feelin’ real formal.”

“Jesse.”

“Nice, nice. Want a Dorito, Jesse?”

It was a long stretch ‘till morning, but at least there was food. There was a part of Jesse—tired and thoroughly Done—that flat out said, ‘fuck it’ and helped Cass demolish the Doritos with very little guilt. Then the Cheese Curls. Then a pint of caramel waffle cone because really, if they were talking breakups you needed the ice cream.

Six hours later and they had about fifty minutes until opening. Jesse pulled the last soupy remains from his spoon and wondered when the hell he’d ended up pressed against Cass’ side.

In retrospect, it wasn’t the worst first date he’d had.

Chapter End Notes

Prompt: "I work at this grocery store and it's past 10pm but you said that you seriously needed those chips so we went to that section BUT my manager just locked us in and we don't have charger for our phones" AU
Chapter 203

Up and back. Up and back. The third time Cass’ face came into view he was grinning.

“Feel like we should have some Brittney in here, Padre. Work it, bitch.”

Jesse cocked an eyebrow. Up and back. Breathe in, breathe out. “Don’t tell me she’s replacing Bieber in your heart.”

“Don’t even joke about that.”

“Don’t make me laugh—shit.”

“Don’t, don’t, don’t,” Cass parroted and Jesse laughed anyway, grinning at the pain in his abs. He still came up though, completing another crunch and pressing his feet up into Cass’ hands. Cass pressed down in turn.

“Look at you, flabby preacher man. C’mon, move!”

“You could provide me with some incentive,” Jesse shot back and before Cass could react—with a massive grunt of effort—he came up high enough to capture Cass’ lips. Sharp and sweaty, it lasted only a second before Jesse had to drop back down.

“Mmm.” Cass opened his eyes. “Flabby.”

“Like hell I am.”

“Then make the kiss last longer. Prove it.”

Jesse did.
Up, but not back.
People talked of religious experiences, a catch-all term for anything that had a lasting impression; something you’d look back on years down the line and think, “Yes, that was worth remembering.” Normally such reverence didn’t extend to ice cream.

Though if pressed, Jesse might have argued that mint chocolate chip in Annville was a religious experience.

It had something to do with being a preacher—obviously—and the inherent sacrilege of comparing mortal sweets to the Lord’s great work. Something more with how it wasn’t really ice cream at all, but rather soup, the Texas heat decimating it long before they’d gotten halfway through the carton. The act of sharing was holy...Tulip’s lips around the spoon positively divine.

They sat together beneath a dead tree, nothing shielding them from the merciless sun. The bark dug into Jesse’s back and he knew, if he found the energy, that removing his boots would produce a smell powerful enough to kill them both. The fabric of Tulip’s skirt was plastered obscenely against her thighs.

“Mmm,” she winced, pulling the spoon from her mouth; the metal had gotten too hot. Tulip chucked it across the plain where it flashed, then dipped her finger into the messy carton instead, scooping up runny green liquid dotted with chocolate.

“Quick,” she said and Jesse dove forward, catching her finger before it could drip onto her blouse. He closed his eyes in a rare moment of overt tenderness and Tulip melted even further into the tree, sighing at the two of them coming together.

Jesse sucked, tasting more salt than ice cream, but that was okay.

Worship was all about sacrifice.
On Friday we had a nearly 70 degree day, gorgeously bright and sunny, and despite the fact that we got freaking HAIL less than 24 hours later (omfg) I really got in the mood for some summer writing. So I pulled up an appropriate prompt list. This one was, shockingly, "ice cream" ;)

“Fifteen minutes to freedom,” Tulip whispered, right from the corner of her mouth. Mr. Logan didn’t notice. After all, she’d had four years to perfect the art of gabbing in class. It was, in retrospect, one of the few useful skills they’d actually walk away with.

Jesse minutely shook his head. “Fifteen minutes lost, you mean. This is useless.” A quick flick of his wrist indicated the board, where a list of objectives for the “College Bound Student” were drawn up in Mr. Logan’s shaky hand. He’d always been too optimistic for Annville. None of them were going to college. It wasn’t needed to take over Daddy’s church, or rob the foolish men blind. Or hell, even to raise a little ruckus now and then.

“Mister Proinsias,” Logan growled, right on cue as Cass lowered the crudely made slingshot he’d cobbled together with a pencil and Tulip’s blue headband.

“So that’s where that went,” she muttered, glaring.

“That’s where that went,” Cass mimicked, grinning right back. “You’re blind, luv! And how many times have I got to tell you, Teach? Please don’t be callin’ me by that unholy name I’m beggin’ you.”

The whole class snickered, Jesse lowering his face into his hands because really, they were doing this now? With—what? Ten minutes left in the school year? There was no way Cass was that stupid, or Mr. Logan that cruel.

Except he was. And he absolutely was.

Which meant that despite Tulip’s frantic ‘abort, abort’ motions, Jesse’s moan, or—really because of—the rest of the class egging him on, Cass leaned all the way back in his chair, tipping his feet up onto the desk in a move that made Logan’s eye tick. The two stared one another down, Logan crossing his arms with all the solemnity that a checkered-shirt wearing, sunburned, gut sporting teacher could manage. He tapped that stick of chalk against his bicep.

“Tell you what, Mister Proinsias,” he said slowly. “In the spirit of this final class I will call you by your ridiculous nickname and I won’t give you and your friends detention if you, for once in your miserable life, address me with respect. ‘Teach’ does not and has not ever cut it. Well?”
Cass seemed to mule it over, hand comically holding his chin as Tulip raved at the injustice of it all. (“What does he mean ‘and friends’?” she hissed. “You know exactly what he means.”) Jesse too knew exactly what Cass would do a split second before he did it. He looked out the window with a sigh.

Cass, meanwhile, flipped Logan the bird.

“Not on your life, Teach.”

There was chaos as the class erupted in solidarity with that, none of it quite loud enough to drown out Logan’s screams of “DETENTION. DETENTION.” Tulip joined Jesse in staring wistfully out the window.

“Two hours and six minutes to freedom,” she said.

Chapter End Notes

Prompt: Out of School
Jesse propped his arms on the floor of the attic, one leg still balanced on the ladder below while the other dangled free. It was hot as balls up here and not for the first time he wondered if vampires could get heatstroke. Or some sort of heat-induced madness.

He snorted, eyes shifting to follow Cass as he stuffed a whole pillow into his duffle bag, tiny feathers flying every which way. “You sure you’ve got everything?” he drawled.

“Pretty sure.” Cass either wouldn’t or couldn’t pick up on the sarcasm. He sniffed a ratty t-shirt, grimaced, and packed it in anyway. That was followed by soft pants, another shirt, a bio-hazard toothbrush, and one sad stick of deodorant. It was all crammed down hard until the zipper nearly popped and those poor, old seams were on their last threads.

Cass swung the bag over his shoulder. “Let’s go then!”

Sliding back down the ladder, hearing Cass following behind, Jesse could feel that it was nighttime now in Annville. It wasn’t just that the crickets were out or that he caught tiny glimpses of the fireflies through the kitchen window... it was a presence too. It was heavier now. In a good way.

“Think we’ll make it in time?” Jesse asked. This time the sarcasm landed—if Cass’ fist connecting with his arm was any indication.

“Don’t know. We’re real far off from this vacation spot...”

They both chuckled, reaching Jesse’s bedroom where he opened the door with a flourish. Cass waltzed in with equal solemnity... then broke it by jumping onto the bed. Jesse just shook his head at the antics.

“Free weekend, gas in the tank...we could have gone anywhere, and you wanted a goddamn sleepover.”

Cass just shrugged, pulling PJs out of his bag, cursing as the zipper broke. “Vacation ain’t worth
much if you’re happy at home.”

Well. Jesse supposed he couldn’t argue with that.
There was a handsome man sitting next to him. DeBlanc wondered if that’s what his life had been reduced to: watching handsome men and imagining impossible things.

He certainly seemed impossible.

Everyone in the park had a purpose: the business women consuming salads at a rickety picnic table, children peddling by on bikes, suburban moms out with their dogs and yoga mats, a homeless man shaking his cup with too much familiarity. Even DeBlanc knew why he was here. He simply had nowhere else to be.

He presumed that Mr. Handsome knew why he was here too, except you’d never decipher that from looking at him. He’d brought no food or reading material with him. No exercise equipment or laptop. Not even a blanket to lounge around on. He was tall, lanky, and he’d folded all of that tall-lanky-ness onto the grass more than twenty minutes ago, just sitting there. It made DeBlanc feel sort of weird about taking up the bench. Maybe he should sit on the grass too?

“I’m praying.”

“Oh—!” The voice made him jump, hitting his calf on the bench’s edge, wincing and working to hold back a curse. DeBlanc turned and was astounded to see the very man (handsome man) he’d been contemplating actually looking his way. Speaking to him too. With the most unwelcoming scowl plastered over his features.

“I’m praying,” he repeated. “And you’re breaking my concentration.”

DeBlanc blinked. “I am? You are? I haven’t said anything!”

“You’re thinking. It’s annoying.”

He blinked again, grappling with the feeling that he’d heard those sentences before—a TV show maybe? Film? DeBlanc didn’t know, but Mr. Handsome was staring like he expected him to pick up
on the joke. When DeBlanc didn’t he pursed his lips.

“That’s Sherlock. From the BBC. I’m supposed to be praying, not thinking about my DVR. That’s your fault.”

DeBlanc found himself blinking again, overwhelmed by this strange, beautiful man just sprawled on the ground next to him, arguing for no good reason and— apparently—suffering from a fonder love of popular culture than God. DeBlanc couldn’t say he faulted him for that. He’d much rather talk TV than heaven.

Still: “I’m sorry,” he said. “Would it help if I left?”

“Absolutely not. Then I’d feel guilty, which is just something else I’d have to ask forgiveness for. No. You might as well join me. It’s clear you’re not doing anything useful.”

DeBlanc might have been offended if it wasn’t true.

So he sat, feeling beyond awkward as he crossed his legs on the grass...but liking how their knees knocked together.

“Fiore,” the man said and it took DeBlanc a moment to realize that was his name. “Do you know how to pray?”

“Uh, no.”

“No...?” Fiore opened one eye.

“Oh. DeBlanc.”

“DeBlanc.” He rolled the world around his mouth, like he enjoyed the taste of it. “Neither do I, DeBlanc. Maybe the two of us can figure it out together.”
Prompt: At the Park
“God I remember this,” Tulip murmured. She leaned heavily against their car and shoved sunglasses over her eyes.

Jesse frowned. He looked, half expecting her to be contemplating something other than the school, but that was the only thing in their path and now those glasses made following her gaze impossible. Not that he wouldn’t try. Jesse leaned next to her, lightly trailing fingers over Tulip’s arm.

“School?” he asked.

“Summer school.”

“... you never went.” That was the truth, and he’d sure as hell know it. The kid Cass was currently chasing down in the halls (young, lanky, possessing a supposedly cursed object that might prove useful) was the epitome of a Bad Girl, stuck here because she’d flunked every class and Mommy’s money could only provide so much coverage. Tulip though? She’d excelled at school. It wasn’t disinterest or stupidity that had landed her in trouble—it was boredom.

He might not have been able to see her eyes, but that grin was larger than life.

“I was there,” Tulip said, “when you were in Mr. Warren’s god-awful remedial math. Right under the third windowsill with my book and a packet of chips. How do you think I was always on time to meet you?”

Jesse felt something hot rising up in his throat. “You waited.”

“Promised ‘till the end of the world didn’t I? ‘till the end of math is fucking easy in comparison. C’mon. I get the feeling Cass is in need of some help...”

Probably, and Jesse would get his head in that game soon enough, but for now he had thoughts only for Tulip. When she pushed off from the car he mirrored, perfectly.
Tulip waited. Jesse followed behind.

Chapter End Notes

Prompt: Summer School
Chapter 209

Tulip was a tactile sort of person. She used her body as a weapon: to seduce, to coerce, and yes, sometimes to comfort. Cass and Jesse both were used to her shoulder pressing against theirs on long car rides, or the feeling of strong hands gripping hair when they were being particularly stupid. Touch was natural between the three of them, but even they were surprised by the strength with which Tulip suddenly latched onto their arms.

“Time to go shopping,” she chirped and dragged them into the nearest store.

Jesse stumbled; Cass let out an embarrassing yelp. In the sudden chaos that was Tulip O’Hare On a Mission they managed to lock eyes for the briefest moment, and in that time determined that this was Not Normal.

Tulip liked her clothes, sure, but not as much as her guns. Or even ice cream. There was a parlor right down the street—which was where they’d been heading—and the idea that Tulip would put off a Triple Decker Deluxe Sunday for jeans was absurd. Especially when it wasn’t even jeans at all but...

...bathing suits?

“Pardon me if I’m bein’ dense, luv,” Cass said. “But why do you need this when there’s water... exactly nowhere near us?”

“Didn’t say I needed it,” Tulip murmured. She held up a canary yellow two-piece, tilting her head to consider it. “I just said we were shopping. So why don’t you shop?”

Jesse stared. Cass shrugged. When Tulip kicked them in the shins though they went willingly enough, inching deeper into the realm of skimpy, tantalizing nylon. It was all rather beautiful.

“Except that one,” Cass said, reading Jesse’s thoughts and pointing to a horrid piece that looked like a cross between elephant skin and vomit. “Now see this is the sort of thing that should be real fuckin’ entertainin’, right? Tulip modelin’—wouldn’t mind trying on a few things myself—but she’s just actin’ weird about it—”
Which was the exact moment Jesse turned and caught sight of the three men passing by across the street. They’d done a good job of blending in, but the scar on the back of #2’s neck was pretty damn distinguishable. These goons had been hunting them for a goddamn week now.

And Tulip had spotted them first.

She was just a normal shopper though, head bent low as she whistled and admired a suit. Jesse smiled.

“C’mon, Cass.”

“Wha’ now?”

“Back of the store. You said something about modeling, didn’t you?”

Chapter End Notes

Prompt: Shopping for a Bathing Suit
They laid their clothes out the night before: ready and waiting; pressed as neatly as possible given the age of the church’s iron and Jesse’s lack of skill.

It was enough.

Cass displayed a shocking amount of skin—deliberately so. The most miniature of mini-skirts, paired with heels, tank, and a host of intertwined necklaces. The scruff was gone from his legs and his cheeks were made smooth to insure that everyone would recognize him.

Jesse was slightly ‘classier,’ as it were, though that was intentional too. They’d always been good at balancing each other out. He wore a suit bought with stolen money from three weeks before and shoes he’d ‘liberated’ just for the occasion. Jesse was smoothing his lapels as Cass took cologne to his neck.

And then there was Tulip.

She wore the dress. From the sweep at her shoulders all the way down to her toes, the tips of her heels peeking slyly from beneath the fabric. After much thought she’d settled on just a pair of simple hoop earrings to accompany the gown, confident that she could carry the rest of it off.

She certainly did.

They marched side-by-side down the streets of Annville, embracing the dust of the road as it coated them, out for everyone to see. The suspicious looks from behind curtains and shaking heads from doorsteps... they were welcomed.

They marched—and they marched in red. From the deep cheery of Jesse’s suit to the rose around Cass’ neck; the lusty hues of Tulip’s dress and the fire truck polish that covered all their nails. They marched.

Tulip raised a fist with pride.
Happy International Women's Day!!
“Aww for fucks sake. Gonna make an old man weep, you are. God dammit…”

Cass’ massive grin belied his words though, sweeping across his face with such speed that it could be nothing but authentic. Jesse was glad to see it. He caught Tulip’s eye and in a single look acknowledged that this had indeed been a good idea.

Cheesy, but good.

“You’ve got maybe two seconds to blow these out,” Jesse said, “before it melts the whole damn cake.”

“You’ve got maybe two seconds to blow these out,” Jesse said, “before it melts the whole damn cake.”

“Or catches something else on fire,” Tulip added, shooing a small spark away from her skirt.

Cass shook his head. “Or sets off the smoke alarm?”

“Pff. No. I took the batteries out of that fucker.”

He cackled, rushing forward to take his place at the head of the table. The cake did look a little… treacherous, mostly due to the massive number of candles stuffed into the top. Cass didn’t need to count to know there were exactly a 120 there. The melted wax was already spreading like a multi-colored coat of icing.

“Jesus,” Tulip chuckled. “You have any idea how hard this was? I was sure the first couple were gonna finish before we could get them all lit. Speaking of, would you hurry up already!”

Cass was trying, but 120 was a whole lot for his skinny lungs. It didn’t help when Jesse leaned onto his elbows, a too-coy expression gracing his features.

“C’mon, Cass,” he said. “You’re so good at blowing.”

“Fuck you—” and somehow the laughter managed to do the rest of the work.

“Exactly,” Jesse said, spreading his hands. Tulip whacked him with a dishcloth as she stood to grab a knife, carefully cleaning off the top of the cake and cutting a hefty slice. She set it on a chipped china plate and then… sat back down. Cass raised an eyebrow.

“Not that I’m not grateful, luv, ‘cause… uh..” he stopped, glancing briefly at Jesse too. “‘cause… well. ‘cause I am. To you both. Yeah. Aw, jesus, but. But! Aren’t you eatin’ with me?”

Jesse grimaced as Tulip smirked, slow and steady. “Special recipe,” she said, and gestured for him to get on with it.

Cass realized what she meant before he’d even taken a taste—he could smell it now. His cake wasn’t red velvet. Nothing so tame.

“You’re both fuckin’ beautiful,” he moaned and began eating in earnest. Jesse made exaggerated gagging motions.

“Yeah we are,” Tulip said. “You have any idea the scaring I received looking for info on this?
You’re lucky I didn’t use pig’s blood in this little experiment.”

Jesse winced. “Tulip, please.”

“There are menstrual blood cookies.”

“Tulip.”

He lunged to cover her mouth and she planted a bare foot against his chest. The two of them started rough-housing with a still smoking, blood cake between them and a goddamn vampire sitting across, somehow deemed worthy enough for all this madness.

All this. It was more than he’d ever imagined. Everything, to be frank.

Cass smiled around his fork.

*Happy fuckin’ birthday.*

Chapter End Notes

**HAPPY BIRTHDAY, JOE GILGUN!**
Chapter Notes

If I'm diligent about these, I should be able to make 300 drabbles by the season 2 premiere *throws confetti*

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“You seen that vine?” Cass asked, curling his toes in the sand and raising his arms.

Tulip rolled her eyes. “I’ve seen all the vines.”

“All of ‘em?”

“Yep.” She popped the ‘p,’ rocking a bit.

“‘Look at all those chickens’?”

“Of course.”

“I almost dropped my croissant’?”

“Tragic. And don’t insult me.”

Cass hummed. “Even the kid with the toy gun and freaking somethin’ or other stuffed up his shirt to make boobs and—”

Tulip cut him off with a glare. “If you don’t stop underestimating me, Cassidy, then I won’t hesitate, bitch.” She spread her hands in victory. “All the vines.”

“Alright,” Cass chuckled. “Then you know what I’m gettin’ at when I say ‘run.’”
“...yeah.”

It might as well have been a recreation. An adaptation, maybe. Together they watched as Jesse desperately tried to get their umbrella settled, the beach winds continually flipping it up and tearing it away. At one point it broke rank completely and flew at its master. Jesse was forced to dodge the umbrella as one might dodge a spear.

“I should be saving this,” Cass said, taking his phone out of his swim trunks with quiet solemnity.

“Yes. And send me the vid.”

“Of course, luv.”

The cursing of a broken man sounded between them.

“Of course,” Cass repeated and pressed ‘record.’

Chapter End Notes

Prompt: Beach Umbrella
“I swear to fucking god, Cassidy.”

“You can swear all you want. I’m pretty sure he’s not gonna answer you.”

There was a time when that would have rankled Jesse, too-true words poking at the doubt he couldn’t admit to having. Now Jesse just rolled his eyes. They’d been to the deepest parts of Texas, up into New Mexico, Utah, through Colorado, and back into their hometown, all while fighting the Biggest Bads that a supernatural world had to offer. And yeah, God had been the equivalent of a celestial dial tone the whole damn time.

Jesse was over it.

“Then I swear on our mutual goddess Tulip O’Hare,” he said instead. That got a twitch out of Cass. “Absent gods I can deal with. Crawling back to this hell hole, in ninety-five degree heat, with a still busted air conditioner—I can’t.”

Cass bobbed his head side-to-side. “I’m working on it.”

“Like hell you are!” In fact, lounging in the church’s pew with a bottle of bourbon and a collection of expired Tastykake’s was the exact opposite of ‘working on it.’

Jesse leveled his finger. It was very intimidating. “You’d best get to work, vampire. I said I’d kick you out if you didn’t fix the damn thing. You’ve had two years to fix it.”

Cass waved a languid hand. “C’mon. Is it really worth it now, padre? In the grand, cosmic scheme of things?”

“Absolutely.”
“Well.” A teasing, evil glint had entered Cass’ eye. “I would, I really would... but it’s just too hot to be workin’” Which was, of course, exactly the issue.

Jesse narrowed his eyes. “I could make you fix it.”

“But you won’t. That just ain’t satisfyin’.”

“No, it’s not… but this is. Keep me cool, Cassidy.”

It was a rather open-ended command, and as they’d learned over the years, those could get real dangerous, real fast. Not so much in their quiet little town though. Certainly not with Jesse fine and fair, perfectly capable of stopping Cass should his attempts to fulfill the order get... strange. They didn’t though. Just a little embarrassing.

Tearing off the preacher’s clothes, drawing ice down his body, and waving a quickly-made fan like some ancient servant were not exactly on Cass’ ‘to do’ list.

At least, not on any list he’d admit to.

“I hate you,” he muttered, licking a strip along Jesse’s chest and then blowing to cool it down. “Totally fuckin’ hate you.”

Jesse stretched, pulling Cass more firmly on top of him. He was barely keeping from rolling off the pew and Cass’ jeans against his bare legs were sticky with sweat. “Really? See, I’m the one not getting his request filled. I didn’t say to heat me up, now did I?” and Jesse laughed as Cass cursed quite creatively.

It was a long afternoon, filled with all sorts of physical odds and ends. But then again, they always said that the heat did crazy things to one’s mind...

Chapter End Notes

Prompt: Broken Air Conditioning (I laughed at getting this one :D)
“Aw Jesus,” Cass moaned, “this is just a sad thing all around...”

No one could disagree. Earlier that afternoon Jesse had been waylaid by an exuberant Eugene, babbling about how his dad was heading out of town and Jesse was totally invited to the party he was throwing that night. He could, and in fact should, bring Tulip, Cass, and Emily along because it was going to be beyond epic.

This was very much not epic.

To start with, forget the part about how Eugene shouldn’t have been inviting people twice his age, let alone his preacher, let alone Jesse fucking Custer who’d been on Sheriff Root’s hit list since time began. Also ignore the fact that in inviting Emily he’d already branded the gathering as a ‘get together’ rather than a ‘party’—if her arms full of potato salad and Cherry Coke were any indication. Even if one ignored all this there was the simple issue that they’d walked into an immaculate living room, complete with soothing background music, and a single bowl of chips.

“This just took ten years off my life,” Tulip whispered.

“You came!” they heard a second before Eugene came barreling down the steps. He’d changed into a button-up shirt and slacks just for the occasion, which—no. “And you brought potato salad!”

Definitely no.

“Yeah, it was only polite...”

Emily gave a nervous little smile, maybe realizing that Eugene couldn’t actually eat it unless he wanted it pureed, or maybe even she was catching onto the godawful sin that was currently being committed around them. She exchanged a look with Tulip as Eugene took the bowl out of her hands and set it on the entryway table, Tulip looked to Cass as he excitedly told them about the movies he’d rented (“There’s a selection!”), and Cass finally looked to Jesse as Eugene tried to bustle away. Jesse snagged him by the collar.
They were all in agreement: this ended now.

“Hey, Eugene,” Jesse said, keeping his voice light and friendly. He swung his arm around Eugene’s shoulders. “You can’t eat those chips, right?”

Eugene blinked rapidly. “Uh, no?”

“Hmm. Or Emily’s potato salad?”

“No, I can’t, but that’s okay! I—”

“You’re missin’ the point, kid,” Cass said. He snagged a Coke from Emily, dangled it for a second, then tossed it into the nearest trashcan. “You can’t eat much, but you can sure as fuck can drink.”

Eugene’s eyes widened.

“Now he’s getting it.” Jesse clapped him on the back. “C’mon. We’re relocating this mess to the bar.”

“A bar party...” Eugene whispered and if a few of his friends rolled their eyes on the way out, well, that’s kind of what friends did.

Chapter End Notes

Prompt: House Party
Emily finally got up the courage to speak and what came out was:

“You enjoy seeing him like this, don’t you?”

She said it fast and breathless—scared that the man might cut her off. Or worse, enact some retribution for asking such a personal question in the first place. Emily still didn’t know much about the ‘government officials’ that had swept into town two weeks before. She was only sure that they seemed to have allied themselves with Jesse and that, in her book, made them worth knowing.

She’d never expected to find them here though.

Emily still waited nervously for him to respond, though half of her was relentlessly keeping track of Alice, Tommy, and Eliot. The latter had been the one begging to come to the public poo—and yes, it was an alluring way to beat the heat—but she’d never forget the time Alice fell into the deep end, what if she had drowned, and Emily was just opening her mouth to call them to her when the man finally answered with,

“I do.” Just two words, though they had the solemnity of a marriage vow. After a long moment he added, “There isn’t any water where he comes from.”

No water?

Emily stared at this strange, lanky man, looking positively absurd in a suit, hat, and perched on striped lounge chair. His partner at least had a bathing suit on, floating in the pool with his eyes closed and a blissful expression on his face.

Emily saw Tommy swimming towards him... and suddenly that didn’t seem so concerning.

“Oh,” she said, settling back in her own seat. “Is he from the desert?”
The man smiled—a tricky one—but he did pick up the conversation, and by the end of the afternoon, oddness aside, Emily had the distinct impression that she’d made a friend.

Chapter End Notes

Prompt: At the Public Pool

(I enjoy throwing random characters together~)
“Wake up,” Tulip said and poured a pitcher of ice water over Jesse’s head.

“The fuck—!”

He threw himself into a sitting position, narrowly missing hitting the pitcher on its way back into Tulip’s arms, and Jesse blinked, trying both to see and decipher what the hell was going on. He was in bed. Okay. Tulip was here... less okay. The day was sunny, hot, and after a moment of consideration Jesse decided that the ice water actually felt pretty good.

Still.

“My sheets,” he grumbled and plucked at the wet fabric. He’d slept shirtless the night before, but his boxers were a ruined mess. “Are you at all capable of not being an asshole?”

“For someone with that kind of sentence construction? No. Now up.” Tulip threw jeans and a t-shirt at Jesse, completely ignoring the fact that they were getting wet now too. With a curse he stumbled out of the clinging sheets, trying to save the clear pair of boxers. Jesse changed with quick, angry movements.

“It’s Saturday. It’s early. What the hell have you got going on that justifies assaulting me like that?”

Tulip flipped him off, then pointed with the same finger out his window. “That,” she said.

That?

Jesse hurried over, dodging dirty plates and trying valiantly not to trip over his shoes. When he finally looked over Tulip’s shoulder his mouth unhinged.

“No,” he whispered.
“Uh huh.”

“Someone bought it?”

“Not just bought it, they’re moving in. I don’t know what kind of fool—” Tulip cut off, shaking her head.

Damn straight. Jesse was still feeling a little like he was dreaming, rubbing his eyes against the morning sun and peering at the—yep, very real looking—moving trucks surrounding 484 Genesis Drive. The place had lain empty since Jesse was a kid. Since his dad was a kid too. A neighbor was more mythical to their family than a freaking unicorn.

A lot more dangerous too.

Tulip sucked at her bottom lip, then nudged Jesse in the ribs.

“Ow.”

“Look, you big baby. Pool got filled sometime last night. Who the hell does that? But they’ve got chairs, goddamn floaties, I think that’s a chip bowl on the filter—”

“All the fixings for a party.” Jesse tugged lightly at Tulip’s hair. “Wanna go over and introduce ourselves? Get a look at the dead lady or gentleman?”

“Why the hell do you think I woke you up?”

“Point. Let’s go.”

They beat it out of Jesse’s house, like change was hot on their heels.

Chapter End Notes
Prompt: Pool Party

Paranormal neighbors! AU anyone? :D
Will be continued in the next drabble
“Excuse me. Pardon us. Oh please, let me help you with that...”

Jesse side-eyed Tulip, thinking she was laying it on a little thick, but all the delivery people just stuttered and swooned, first resisting her assistance and then gaping as she easily hefted boxes that equaled her weight. She swooped in to take the end of a couch coming out of the truck, the fluttered over to help a man peeling bubble-wrap off of a lamp. All the while it was with a smile and a need for conversation. As Tulip pumped the oblivious visitors for info Jesse eyed the godawful house.

It was, objectively, not godawful at all. Really rather nice, if he was feeling charitable. A two story with stonework, like most of the houses in these parts. Not cheap by any means, but not historical or unique enough to warrant a true fortune. Jesse had inherited his place straight from his father, wouldn’t have been able to afford it otherwise, so he figured either the guy moving in had his fair share of dough... or they’d finally dropped the price an obscene amount.

Probably the latter, based on the stuffing popping out of the couch.

The rest of the stuff appeared the same: in decent shape, if a little on the rough side. Jesse shook his head, sure as shit that whoever it was didn’t know what they were getting into.

Tulip came back over. Her dimpled little smile fell away.

“Good gossip?” Jesse asked.

“ Damn straight. It’s one guy. Weirdo by the sounds of it. Lisa over there—the one with the star tattoo—she says he wanted his stuff delivered last night, same time as the pool water. They don’t do that, of course, he got a little testy over the phone...” Tulip shrugged.
Jesse watched the parade of home-stuff passing them by. He saw a whole lot of dude bro things—gaming consoles, futon, mini fridge—and not a lot in the way of sophistication. Whoever this person was, they might not look like they fit into the neighborhood, but they’d probably fit in well with them.

Jesse pointed at a passing box. The unmistakable sound of bottles clanked inside. “My kinda guy.”

“Meh,” Tulip said.

“Sneak around back?”

“Obviously.”

They’d been able to see the pool from Jesse’s bedroom window, though one or two things had changed in ten minutes since then. For one, the chip bowl previously balanced on the filtration system was now under the deck’s canopy.

And there was a skinny white dude next to the chips.

“Told you,” Jesse muttered, already liking his laid-back style. Frayed jean shorts and a hole-ridden tank top, coupled with cheap necklaces and some big-ass sunglasses. He looked like the epitome of a Miami frat boy getting his tan on... except for the fact that he wasn’t in the sun.

“Gotta let the chemicals mix or somethin’” he called out, startling them both. They could be pretty damn quiet when they wanted to be and, Jesse was sure, the guy shouldn’t have heard their approach. “Give it another hour, yeah?”

“Uh...excuse me?” Tulip said.

The guy arched his back to get a look at them. He was spread out on a towel under the canopy, sequestered entirely in the shade. He lowered his glasses just enough to see. “Aren’t you here to crash my party?”

Jesse raised his eyebrows. “This is a party?”

Tulip stared. Jesse shrugged. This was strange, yeah, but they’d never been ones to pass up free food. Or gossip.

“Then budge over,” Tulip said and the two of them sat.

Chapter End Notes

Prompt: Beach Towel
“Name’s Cassidy,” he said, giving a languid wave in lieu of a handshake. “Most call me ‘Cass’ though and yep, got myself a first name too, but you’ll never hear it from my lips. What do they call you lovelies then? ‘Hot’ and ‘Hotter’?” Cass arched his back again, grinning at Jesse sitting at his head and Tulip at his side. “Wouldn’t be surprised if they do.”

Tulip remained cool as the proverbial cucumber. Jesse, on the other hand, felt like he’d developed an instantaneous sunburn. He wondered a little wildly which of them was ‘Hotter.’

“You’re subtle,” Tulip muttered.

“I got the time to be.”

To Cass’ credit though she didn’t immediately sock him or walk away. Tulip just grabbed the chip bowl and snagged two beers from the cooler, tossing one to Jesse. Bud Light. Well that seemed fitting. He popped the tab and took a long draw, trying to get himself to cool down.

Cass just happened to have really great legs. Abs too, if that shirt riding up could be trusted.

“Tulip,” he eventually said. “Jesse. I’ll let you figure out which of us is which.”

“Alright, Tulip,” Cass said to him, all cheek. He rolled slowly onto his stomach. “You my neighbors?”

“Yep.”
“Lucky me.” Cass stole a handful of chips out of Tulip’s lap and started building a teepee. “Not that I don’t appreciate the welcome wagon an’ all, but aren’t you goin’ about it all wrong? Where’s the polite knock on my front door? The casserole I’m never gonna eat? Your wedding ring, luv?”

“We’re not married,” Tulip drawled. “You?”

Cass waved his hands, bare except for a couple tattoos. Jesse could see others along his shoulders and thigh. “Not really the marryin’ sort. Got a dog?”

“I wish. Family?”

“Dead and buried. You?”

“Same. Jesse’s side at least. I’ve got an uncle down the road who’s never sober enough to chat with.”

“Nice, nice. Sounds like I’ve come to the right kind of uppity place then. Unless you’re here to tell me that ‘my kind’ ain’t wanted, hmm?”

“Sort of, actually.” Jesse shrugged at Cass’ surprised look. “It’s less that you’re not wanted and more that anyone isn’t. In here at least.” He nodded towards the sliding doors where an empty living room was just visible. “I take it you got this place cheap?”

Cass pursed his lips. “Yeah. Like dirt, if I’m bein’ honest. I’ve got my fair share of savings, believe it or not, but the lady I called up practically shoved this place into my hands. What then? Leaky roof? Rodent trouble? Because this ain’t exactly a shit-show by my experience and lemme tell you, I can deal.”

“Nah,” Jesse said. “Ghosts.” He crunched down on a chip.

Cass blinked. “Ghosts?”

Tulip shrugged. “You’re better off just believing us—”
“—swear we’re not pulling your chain—”

“—because no one—”

“—we mean no one—”

“—has made it out of that house alive.”

Cass kept looking between the two of them. Jesse expected him to laugh at their ‘joke,’ maybe even get mad if he was the type with a temper. He sure as hell didn’t expect bravado though.

“Alright,” Cass said, and shrugged.

“Alright?” Tulip repeated. “You’re not hearing me, twerp. You stay in that house more than a week and you’re dead—”

“But I’m already dead, luv.” Cass finally adopted something other than faked indifference and it turned out to be a shit-eating grin that lit up his whole face. “Immunity from ghosts. That’s a new perk, I gotta say.”

Jesse made a strangled noise. “Of being dead?”

“Of being a vampire,” and before either of them could challenge that Cass reached his hand out into the sunlight, just a fingertip. It instantly lit up like a well-oiled match and started burning the skin around his nail black. Cass lit the top of his chip teepee and blew his finger out like a gun.

He still hadn’t lost his grin. “There we are. Still wanna say, ‘welcome to the neighborhood’?”

Chapter End Notes

Prompt: Barbecue
Chapter 219

Chapter Notes

Part 1 of neighbors!AU begins in Chapter 216

Honestly, Jesse thought they both handled it pretty well.

“ARE YOU FUCKING KIDDING ME?” Tulip hissed, trying desperately to keep from shrieking her lungs out. She flailed a moment and, with nothing else to do, ended up pounding her hand into a nearby flowerpot.

Yep. Pretty damn good.

“This feels like karma,” Jesse muttered, rubbing briefly at his eyes. “I mean, we want him to believe in ghosts, yeah? Need him to for his own safety, and then he turns around and asks us to believe in vampires...?” he shook his head. “What the fuck kind of Saturday is this?”

“The awesome kind.” Tulip jabbed a finger at Jesse and he danced back, determined not to get soil all over his one clean shirt. “You saw, Jesse. You saw. His hand went up in smoke the second it hit the sunlight. The burn’s still there!”

“Could have been a trick.”

But Tulip was already shaking her head. “Don’t be stupid. Not now.”

Fair enough. One could say that he and Tulip had always been the open-minded sort. After all, they’d both grown up with religious parents, stuffing the impossible down their throats from an early age. If one could believe in water turned to wine and devious serpents, why not this? He’d always found it a little odd that so much of America’s population claimed to believe in the miraculous, yet shunned it the moment it actually arrived. Besides, Jesse was a simple man. He believed in what he saw.

And he’d seen some freaky-ass blue flames spouting from Cass’ hand.
“Alright,” he said and Tulip raised arms like a five-year old granted permission to stay up late.

“You think he’ll die if we behead him?” she whispered.

Jesse grimaced. “Okay one, how about we not casually mention killing our new neighbor? And two, this isn’t goddamn *Supernatural*.”

“It kind of is.” Tulip paused, rubbing soil between her fingers. “Hmm.”

“What?”

“I’m Sam.”

“How do you figure?”

“Gorgeous, bookworm genius constantly saving the day. You’re Dean. You punch things and drink a lot.”

“...fair enough.” Jesse wasn’t sure he could argue with that logic.

“Hey!” They turned out of their little huddle, looking back at Cass across the pool. “You two done freaking out yet?”

“Yes!” Tulip called and *skipped* back to him. Cass looked about as flabbergasted as Jesse felt.

He pulled off his sunglasses. “Really? Because there’s generally more...” Cass made an undecipherable gesture. “Freakin’ out that happens.”

Jesse shrugged. “What can I say? We’re strange.”
“Oh well, no argument from yours truly. You two are goddamn Monopoly champs, aren’t you? Just bypass ‘fear’ and ‘disgust,’ land straight on ‘acceptance’! I swear you—uh.” Cass stopped and pulled back, suddenly finding Tulip two inches from his face. “Hey there, luv.”

“Hey there,” she echoed. “So.”

“...so?”

“Oh boy,” Jesse muttered.

The questions began.
“Well that’s a messed up sight if I ever saw one.”

Jesse frowned, turning to find Cass standing in the doorway of the Saunders’ barn. He was decked out in his usual, absurd collection of clothing to help protect him from the sun, but he shucked it all pretty fast, just dumping it here and there in the dirt. When he was down to nothing but jeans and a t-shirt Jesse could see the hunched shoulders; the arms crossed defensively over his chest.

The hell?

Jesse looked around, but there was nothing to see but the two of them and old Ace, now pressing against Jesse’s arm since he’d stopped giving him carrots. Absently, Jesse fished another out of his pocket and presented it, fingers carefully laid flat.

Cass shivered at the gesture and Jesse felt a grin coming on.

“Well, well…you’re not scare of horses, are you, Cass?”

He scoffed. “Me? Scared of a thousand pound devil beast that can run like a cheetah and kick like a mule? Who shoulda been the poster boy for ol’ Lucifer rather than the poor abused goat? Why in the fuckin’ hell would I be scared of somthin’ that one time beat me hard enough to bust my organs and then had the gall to run off before I could suck the bastard dry? No, no, not scared of him at all.”

Jesse had clapped a hand over his mouth, determined not to laugh... and then failed miserably, howling loud and hard enough to get him half draped across the stall door. Ace nudged his hair curiously, which made Cass flinched, which just set Jesse off all over again.

“You done yet?” Cass finally muttered.
“Cass... Cassidy...” Jesse shook his head, wiping tears from his eyes. “Ace is a sweetheart. The Saunders have had him for years and he’s never given them even a spot of trouble. He’s barely even a workhorse anymore, all he does is eat and give neighboring kids something to coo over. Look. C’mere.”

Cass had peddled back fast though. “Nah uh. No way in hell you’re gettin’ me near that thing.”

“Cass.”

“No.”

“You’re a vampire.”

“So?”

“Good god... you deal with Tulip on a daily basis!”

“And she’s a right angel in comparison.”

Jesse threw up his hands. He had to admit though that when Ace stomped Cass honestly looked scared; paler than usual, and he’d backed up so far he was nearly in the sunlight without realizing. In that moment their residential monster looked more skittish than a... well, a horse.

“Alright,” Jesse said softly. “I’m only feeding him while they’re away. We can go now.”

“Good to hear,” and Cass was back in his clothes lightning quick, keeping a good distance between him and Ace all the while. He threw up his middle finger on the way out.

It was halfway back to the church that Cass narrowed his eyes, sneaking out one gloved hand to poke at Jesse’s arm. “Hey... you’re not gonna be cruel about this, are you? Or, you know... tell anyone?”
“You mean tell Tulip?”

“...yeah.”

“Nah. I got you covered.”

“Good of you, Jesse. You’re a fine friend.”

Jesse smirked. “I’m just gonna stick a horse head in your bed someday, à la The Godfather.”

“GODDAMMIT, JESSE.”
Chapter 221

Jesse lay in bed, chest sticky with sweat and the sheets all bundled up around his calves. He paid those things little attention though, wondering instead if he was suddenly going to wake up. Or fall asleep and wake up again in the so-called ‘real’ world. Basically, on a hot night where anything seemed possible, Jesse considered the possibility that things were impossible as well.

Had he really met a goddamn vampire?

Tulip was convinced. Then again, it didn’t take much to convince Tulip of the supernatural. Growing up with a preacher living next to a bonafide haunted house had cemented her interest at a young age. Jesse would call her ’Mulder’ if he didn’t know from past experience that it would earn him a punch. And sure, everyone needed their hobbies. It was one thing though to consume the shows and the occasional ‘literature,’ to stay clear of the house next door for their own goddamn safety... but vampires?

“Crosses?” she’d asked, still all up in Cass’ face.

“Well I don’t like ‘em personally, but they don’t harm the species much. Minus the owners huntin’ us down of ‘course.”

“Mmm hmm. Mirrors then?”

“And miss out on this beautiful mug?”

“Garlic?”

“Ain’t no finer lover of Italian around.”
“I’m calling you out on that. Fangs then, you’ve gotta have fangs.”

In response Cass had opened his mouth wide, revealing a set of surprisingly well-kept teeth (minus a bit of Dorito dust). Tulip had peered in like a fanatical dentist and frowned deep.

“How they retract?” she’d asked hopefully.

“Nah, luv,” Cass garbled, mouth still half open, “I just gotta,” and he mimed tearing into a chunk of meat, like a doomed leg of chicken.

“Cool,” Tulip breathed.

That had sated her for a few minutes before the questions started right back up again, and as soon as Jesse heard something about Cass being over one hundred he’d said nope, nuh uh, not today. He’d filled up his weird quota, thank you very much. Chemicals or no chemicals, Jesse had shucked his shirt, jeans, and taken a quick dip in the pool, trying not to pay too much attention to whether Cass was watching. Oddly enough the afternoon passed quick, and soon even their two rude asses thought that maybe they’d overstay their welcome. After all, didn’t matter if your neighbor was human, vampire, or something else entirely, at some point you just had to get out of a guy’s hair and let him unpack his shit.

...though Jesse was a little curious about whether Cass had a coffin or not.

He turned over violently, kicking at the covers. “Just stop it already,” he muttered.

“Stop what?”

“Holy—!”

Jesse sat straight up in bed and had his knife halfway out from under the mattress before he realized that the voice was Cass’... as was the face peaking in through his window. Jesse stared, his sleepy mind not entirely making sense of what he was seeing.

“I’m on the second floor,” he said dumbly.
“And I’m a vampire who ain’t afraid of heights.” Cass hefted himself the rest of the way through, cursing and yowling as he fell atop the load of shit that made up Jesse’s bedroom floor. He picked up a sock in one hand and an empty beer bottle in the other. “You got this gorgeous house and whaddya do? Fill it with filth. Jesse Custer, I’m mighty impressed with you right now.” Cass stood, a little wobbly.

Jesse had his finger out and pointed accusingly as he slid out of bed. “I never told you my last name. Can vampires read minds too?”

Cass stared. “Holy fuck, dude, I just googled you.”

“...oh.”

“Ha! ‘Oh.’ You’re a riot.”

The compliment sent a warm rush through Jesse, stupid as it was, and all at once he realized that he was standing there in nothing but his boxers... with Cass dressed exactly the same; dark fabric that might have been black or blue, like a bruise. Jesse cleared his throat, wanting to offer a drink or something but, you know, it was freaking 1:45am, a time when most people would be asleep.

That seemed as good an opening as any.

Jesse gestured, hoping Cass would pick up on that. “So, you’re here because...?”

“Right!” Cass slammed a fist into his palm. “Well I’m kind of a night owl anyway, obviously, so you should expect a lot of this from now on—”

“Fantastic.”

“—but more pressing than that: I think the lil’ old ghost you were chattin’ about is tryin’ to kill me.”

Cass shrugged as Jesse gaped. “I know, right? What a shit way to start things off.”
Clarice liked taking the night bus. If you had to travel, they said, travel in style... but that could only provide you with the narrowest version of a place. Style was polished and sterile, aristocratic and so damn fake. It was the cheap seats that showed you the actual people.

Like the guy strumming his guitar two seats back.

He’d been playing a slow, positively lovely version of “Come on Eileen” for the last fifteen minutes, a song Clarice honestly never would have admitted to liking before now. The other passengers—just a lone man sleeping and a small pack of teenagers up front—certainly didn’t seem to mind, and though the nearly empty bus made her feel more self-conscious about it, Clarice turned in her seat to watch him.

He was a skinny twerp, kind of bedraggled, wearing ripped jeans and a Black Sabbath shirt that seemed at odds with the music he was producing. Clarice was no musician, but she thought he was good in a self-taught, natural kind of way. He was real. Like the night busses were real.

“You’re not subtle, luv,” he said, startling her. He’d cut off mid lyric and the sudden interruption set her teeth on edge. Clarice rested her chin on the seat’s metal bar.

“Wasn’t trying to be. You going to finish that?”

“Nah,” and he eased out from under the guitar strap. “It’s a shit song anyhow. Two out of two friends agree.” The guy had smiled brightly through his declaration, though it faltered at the end there. Clarice wondered where those two friends were now. Probably nowhere good. After all, you didn’t ride the bus alone if you had someone to share it with.

She’d certainly know.

“I liked it,” she said, smiling slightly as the guy rolled his eyes. “Seriously. My ipod battery died ten miles back. It was nice.”
“Well, now see you’ve gone and complimented me so I’m yours for the rest of the ride...”

He was fiddling with the guitar again, a little shy about it, and all of it should have been creepy, but Clarice felt no real threat from him—and she’d gotten good at picking that up from men. When he pulled the guitar fully back into his lap she nodded her encouragement.

“I’m Cassidy.” He said it like a throwaway, quickly moving past. “An’ you are?”

“Clarice.”

A bark of laughter. “‘Hello, Clarice?’”

“Right. Because I’ve never heard that one before.”

“Fine an’ fair, luv. How about this then?”

Cassidy shooed at her until she turned back around. Clarice did, and after a moment she heard the soft strains of music begin again, just slightly altered.

“Oh, c’mon Clarice, oh I swear...”

Chapter End Notes

1. The prompt was “music.” (Thanks, Metal_Is_My_Name! I’ll be filling the rest soon too :D)
2. I know exactly NOTHING about heavy metal, so you get the briefest of brief mentions. Sorry lol.
3. Yes, choice of song 100% in honor of the teaser trailer <3
“If that was really your best night...” Tulip shook her head, toasting Cass as Jesse pounded on the table, sending bottle caps flying to the floor. Beside him Emily was equally red in the face though slightly more composed, just a hand pressed hard to her mouth to keep in the laughter.

“I swear it,” Cass repeated. “Hands down the most glorious of experiences.”

“Jesus.”

Tulip waved them back down. “I got one, I got one. Honesty hour, people: what’s the stupidest injury you’ve ever gotten. I know Jesse’s.”

He’d gone from exuberant to sullen in the span of a second. Emily arched a curious eyebrow. “Oooo, tell, tell!”

“Don’t,” Jesse moaned.

“Too late, pal. I’m setting the scene, okay? About four years ago, middle of goddamn nowhere Alabama, me and Jesse are on a job that I’d have to kill you to tell you about.”

“Like it already,” Cass said and snagged another beer.

“Right? Because we’re tough shits. You know it, I know it, the whole goddamn state knows it. We’ve just taken out a whole slew of asswipes and came back with barely a scratch on us. Bullets whizzing, knives flashing—” Tulip waved her arms to demonstrate. “Nah. Shit couldn’t touch us.
But. We’re back in our apartment two goddamn minutes when Jesse decides he wants a freaking bagel.”

Emily’s eyes bugged slightly. “I think I see where this is going…”

“Uh huh. You gotta remember we’re not really the domestic sort—what’s the use of tongs? Who the fuck buys tongs?—so little genius Jesse here decides to retrieve the stuck bagel with a goddamn fork—”

Cass howled and thumped Jesse on the back, his head in his hands. A mumbled “I was tired,” eased out from between his fingers.

Tulip snorted. “I’m never that tired. Goddamn idiot electrocuting himself on my nice tiled floors.”

“Now wait, wait…” Jesse trailed off, shook his head, tried to find his bearings.

“We’re waiting,” Cass snickered.

He leveled a finger at Tulip. “What she’s not saying is the time she broke her leg jumping off the school roof because she thought she could fly.”

“I was six!” Tulip hollered, but it was far too late. The laugher rose as Jesse sat back, looking like the cat that got the canary.

She threw up a few choice gestures and took a long swallow. Only when a good few inches of the bottle was gone did Tulip resurface and say, “I think we’re missing something here. Cass? You’ve had a century and you’re an idiot.”

“Oh yeah.” Everyone snickered at his lack of denial. Cass spread his hands and took a seated bow. “Fuckin’ hell, where do I start? I’ve stapled myself, cut myself, set my arm on fire while making cereal—”

“Wait, what?”
“—got hit by my car because I forgot to put it in park, nearly killed myself in one of those damn grocery carts, broke my wrist and then in showing a mate what happened broke my other wrist in the re-enactment—”

“I once set a wasp nest on myself.”

Everyone stopped. Blinked. Turned to Emily. She had a glazed look to her eyes, but flushed and sat up straight as everyone stared.

“Camp,” she said, then hiccupped. “We were doing archery and I... I... I’m not very good.”

Tulip clapped a hand over her mouth, choking.

“And it...the arrow... it just flew. Right into the woods. With the nest.”

“Oh no,” Cass whispered.

Emily nodded her head slowly and solemnly. She accepted the drink Jesse pressed into her hand.

“You win,” he announced.

“Yeah, luv.”

“Agreed.”

Emily looked halfway between wanting to cry and cheer at the little victory.

“So many wasps,” she whispered and tipped back her beer.

Chapter End Notes
Prompt was "stupidest injury" and, fun fact, Emily's story is 100% true. That was my camp. That poor archery class came into the dining hall for dinner that day COVERED in stings. Jesse's story is also my idiot friend, minus the electrocution - we stopped her in time.
Sneaking into Tulip’s bedroom was always an adventure. Normally she welcomed Jesse with open arms. At least metaphorically. It was more open legs, arms behind her head, and an ‘impress me already’ expression, but same sort of idea. So normally a good thing overall.

This, however, was not a normal night.

Jesse kept a knife in the mattress of his bed. Tulip kept a shotgun beneath hers.

“Would you put that away?” Jesse hissed, motioning frantically for Tulip to lower her gun. He didn’t know why he was whispering, it was his house, but something about the dark and the goddamn weaponry made it seem like the thing to do. He saw Tulip narrow her eyes as a bit of moonlight fell across the bed.

Cass, meanwhile, had taken up residence behind Jesse...which if he was an immortal vampire seemed like a shitty thing to do. He peeked out over Jesse’s shoulder with a doleful expression.

“Now what’s that for, luv?” he said. “I thought we’d gotten along well today!”

Tulip suddenly grinned. “We did. But I hear two sets of footsteps approaching my door and I gotta be prepared, don’t I?” She placed the shotgun beside her on the bed, the barrel and muzzle on her pillow like a goddamn lover. Jesse rolled his eyes as Tulip patted the end of the comforter and Cass happily launched himself there. Apparently their vampire neighbor was also a thirteen-year-old at a slumber party. Good to know.

Jesse squeezed in between the two of them. There was silence. Tulip crossed her legs and rocked from side-to-side.
“What is this?” she whispered.

Jesse shrugged. “Don’t know.”

“You don’t know?”

“Ask the guy who just crawled through my window.”

“Cassidy?”

“Yes?”

“Gonna tell me what this is about?”

“Do I have to? I’m kinda enjoyin’ the moment here.”

‘The moment’ apparently involved Tulip whacking Cass with a pillow (“Jesus! It fuckin’ hits harder than the gun!”) until he spilled, and when he did… it was quite the story indeed.

Apparently, not long after they’d left, Cass had gone inside for a nap (“What with being a vampire an’ all.” “Yeah, we got that, you douche-noodle”), but had been awoken by what he described as a ‘presence.’ Tulip started to get mad, thinking he was just making fun of her interests, but Jesse put a halting hand on her shoulder, finding all at once that Cass didn’t have that joking demeanor anymore. He looked right serious… a little rattled even.

He’d been sleeping then, though far longer than he’d intended, and by the time Cass felt like someone was in the room with him it was pitch black outside. It was all a joke through, right? Silly little prank to play on the new neighbor. He’d talked himself out of it, going so far as to sarcastically ask aloud if there was anyone there.

Someone answered.

“So I sprinted over here, of course.” Cass cocked his thumb towards his house. “You guys should
probably see this last part for yourself.”

Jesse and Tulip exchanged a look. “Alright.”

So in the dead of night the three of them slipped outside, still acting like they were sneaking away from a pair of particularly stern parents. Jesse didn’t bother to throw anything else on—it was too hot for that—and with Tulip in a pair of his old star boxers and a tank, they probably looked like a triad of marginally affiliated burglars. Barefoot they crept across the grass, moving through the fireflies and keeping sight of the moon overhead. Cass took them through the front door this time and Jesse tip-toed past all the unpacked boxes, keenly aware that they provided plenty of places to hide.

Not that ghosts needed to hide, but... yeah.

“You’re a vampire,” Jesse felt the need to point out. They were creeping up Cass’ stairs and everything was stupidly eerie. Tulip was clutching her arms to her chest like a lifeline. “How are you afraid of the ghost?”

“I can still die,” Cass hissed back. “How the hell do I know this isn’t a ghost that’ll hold me captive until dawn, then shove me out into the goddamn sunlight? Fear is based off a’ ignorance you know. I’m not afraid of most monster-y things because I know them. I’m one of ‘em. But ghosts? Don’t know shit about that, my man.”

“... huh. Oddly philosophical of you, Cass.”

“Thank you.”

Tulip had stopped dead on a stair. “Are there other things besides ghosts and vampires?”

“You’re really the fixated sort, aren’t you?”

Tulip cursed him out and they continued on.

He might not have anything unpacked yet, but it was pretty clear which room was Cass’, considering it was the only one he’d flooded with light. Jesse felt his shoulders relax slightly, even if it was a
stupid reaction. Hadn’t Cass just pointed out that light might mean shit all to a ghost? Still, it was naturally reassuring.

Jesse had never actually seen the ghost after all, just heard the stories.

He wasn’t sure he wanted to.

Tulip tore forward though—courage and stupidity in equal measure, far as Jesse was concerned. He snatched the back of her shirt to keep her from leaving them behind and she whirled to whack his chest.

“C’mon now, kids,” Cass said. He paused, titling his head. “Aw thank fuckin’ christ. I think it’s gone. Not gettin’ that,” he shivered, back arching, “that feelin’ anymore.”

“Then why did you drag me out of bed?” Tulip whacked Cass this time, right along the bicep. “The hell am I supposed to be looking at?”

“That.”

Cass pointed into his bedroom and slowly, oh so slowly, Jesse and Tulip peered inside. There were boxes, beer cans, an empty Chinese carton, ancient mattress, a blacked out window...

...and something written on the wall.

It was ‘GET OUT’ carved jaggedly above where Cass’ head would have been as he slept. Cass gestured to it like an annoyed tenant negotiating the security deposit.

“See?” he said. “Now that’s just rude.”
“The king of meat,” Cass declared and bit into his burger with all the delicacy of a rabid dog. DeBlanc had gone a little pale at the display, sneaking quick, hesitant glances down at his own food. Eating as mortals did was one thing. Eating this was something else entirely.

The meat oozed fluids that weren’t blood. It had been pounded and slapped together by another’s hands. There was a slice of rubbery looking cheese, very wilted lettuce, limp bits of potato with a pile of—ah, that condiment looked like blood.

DeBlanc poked the bun. A seed fell off in disgrace.

“Is it really safe to eat this—?” he began, only to snap his mouth shut at Fiore. Oh, Fiore.

He was tearing into the hamburger with even more enthusiasm than Cass, fast, messy bites that surely weren’t good for his human vessel. It was getting to the point where a few of the other diners were sneaking glances their way, torn between disgust and amazement. DeBlanc might have been embarrassed—how far had they fallen? Not that he could truly sink any lower than he’d been before—if not for the fact that this was Fiore enjoying himself so immensely. Surely it was a good thing then? Holy, even?

DeBlanc picked up his burger and took a tentative bite. He was surprised by the flavor and texture, eyes widening comically. It was...good.

“There you go,” Cass said. He used his shirt in the parody of a napkin. “It’s not a Big Ass Texas Burger, sadly that’s a chain that closed down around here, but Joe knows how to get a decent burger done.” Cass slapped his stomach in satisfaction.

DeBlanc took another bite, chewing and swallowing with precision. “You eat these often?”

“Every American eats these often, pal. I told you: cow’s the king of the goddamn food chain around
DeBlanc froze in the act of chewing. Even Fiore paused, slowly setting his burger down.

“No,” he said; paused again. “Tell us.”

It was just the opening Cass was waiting for. He slapped the table with his palm, snagged his soda straw, and pointed at them in turn.

“See, I like you assholes. Ignorance breeds a good audience, don’t it? Well, it all started with these filthy lil’ vampire hunters...”
Tulip put her hand to the wall with a slightly awed expression. It quickly morphed into glee.

“It’s happened before,” she announced. “They had to completely re-do the living room walls after a relator insisted on staying the night.”

Cass’ faced morphed into a complicated expression. It wasn’t worried exactly… though not happy either. “What the hell happened to her?”

“Tripped on the top step. Broke her neck on the way down.” Tulip looked back at Cass’ staircase significantly.

He winced. Jesse winced too, and he already knew all this.

“Well that… that coulda just been an accident an’ what...”

“Couple before her died in a fire,” Jesse said. “Funny thing though, they were pretty much the only things that burned. Their stuff went up a bit too, but the rest?” He gestured to everything around them, from the walls to the ceiling beams. “Fucking untouched, man.”

Cass made a strangled sound in the back of his throat.

Tulip shrugged, unapologetic. “They were stupid. Couple before them was waaaaaay back. Early 1950s or something. Both of them got impaled by a tree branch that came through the window—”

“Aw now you’re just makin’ shit up!”
“Sorry, Cass,” Jesse clapped him on the shoulder. He was surprisingly warm for a dead guy. “We tried to warn you.”

Tulip was still inspecting the wall. The gouges were thin but deep, the kind of thing that, if done with a knife (and jesus yeah, this had been done with a knife) would have taken a good ten, fifteen minutes to complete. She let her fingers end at the bottom of the OUT’s ‘t,’ tapping there.

“You didn’t hear anything?” she asked.

“Nah, luv. Just woke up, got the creepies, acted like a stupid shit and started asking questions—”

“You asked if anyone was there.” Jesse nodded, bouncing his leg. He kept sneaking glances around the room. Half of it was the instinctual need to check for ghosts. The other was just because he wanted to know more about Cass and, oh hey, they used the same knock-off brand toothpaste. Imagine that.

Jesse shook his head. Focus, asshole.

“What did it say?”

“Huh?”

“The ghost, Cass, what did it say?”

“Oh I... well shit. I don’t rightly know.” Cass rubbed his neck sheepishly as Tulip glared. “Sorry! I hear a voice fuckin’ whisperin’ in my ear and I panicked! Got the lights on quick, noticed this lovely little addition,” he pointed accusingly at the wall, “and ran to find you lot. Nice of you, by the way, I must say. Real good takin’ a guy in under such circumstances.”

Jesse side-eyed Cass from across the room. Tulip froze in her inspection. They both turned as Cass nonchalantly began stuffing miscellaneous things into a CVS bag.

“I’m sorry. What’s this now?” Tulip said, hands on her hips.
Cass looked up, a bright, desperate smile on his face. “Well, you don’t expect me to go on sleepin’ here, do you?”
“Have you ever thought about it?” Tulip said. She stared contemplatively past Cass and out the diner window, her milkshake straw dangling from her lips. Jesse waited a beat and, when she didn’t elaborate, chucked a fry into her lap. Tulip turned to glare.

“You know, despite what some back home say I can’t actually read your mind.”

“Well no wonder, it ain’t simple like yours.”

Cass choked on his drink and clawed at the plastic tabletop as he tried to breathe. Tulip gave him a half-assed pat on the back.

“I mean, have you ever thought of having it all?” Tulip removed her hand to gesture around them, encompassing everything from the sticky floors to the jaundiced lighting. “No more shitty diner food, beat up trucks, cheap motel rooms with questionable hygiene... with Genesis,” she lowered her voice a bit, as if the very name would summon all their enemies to the door. “With Genesis we could be living the good life.”


“Uh huh.” Tulip tossed the fry back against Jesse’s chest.

He brushed it to the floor. “Yes.”

“Yes to livin’ it up?” Cass’ face brightened like a Christmas tree. Jesse smirked.

“No, yes meaning I’ve thought about it.”

“Aw, c’mon.”
“Well why not?” Tulip sunk down in her seat and as she did she morphed from a fiery woman to a sullen child. It was a little too much of a performance though. She already knew why.

All three of them did.

“It’s not right,” Jesse said simply. He dipped another fry into her milkshake.

“Fuck ‘right.’”

“No thank you, darling.”

“Don’t.”

Cass leaned his chin on his hand. “So wait, we can blackmail an’ threaten an’ murder a bunch of blokes and that’s all fine an’ dandy, but you draw the line at stealin’ some shit? Maybe gettin’ us a decent night’s sleep?”

“It’s an important line, Cass. We’ve blackmailed to protect people. Threatened them for the same. Killed the folks who wanted to kill us first. Murdering implies something else entirely.” Jesse dabbed his mouth with a napkin. “It’s all about context.”

“Jesus fuckin’ shit, you’re really a preacher.”

“Sadly,” Tulip grumbled.

“What got you interested in this now?”

Tulip nodded her head back at the window. Jesse couldn’t see anything out of the ordinary at first, that is, until he looked directly below their little booth where three motorbikes were parked. And huh, wasn’t that just a lovely coincidence. His eyes slide to the three guys they clearly belonged to, sitting at the counter with their collection of stereotypes: tattoos, piercings, nothing but black leather all around.
“I want them,” Tulip stated.

Cass pulled a face. “I hope you mean the bikes, luv.”

“Damn right the bikes. Jesse.”

And there it was. That tone. The sly mix of demanding and pleading that never failed to make him cave. Jesse bit the inside of his lip hard to keep from smiling.

“But Tulip,” he said innocently, “if we’re riding bikes how will we share music and wonderful conversation together?”

Cass snickered, muttering something about women, cars, and closed spaces. Tulip ignored him entirely.

“Jesse,” she said again.

“Alright, alright. We are only human.” Jesse removed his clerical collar, tossing it between the salt and jam tower. “Feel free to go get ‘em the old fashioned ways.”

“That’s what I’m talking about!” and Cass urged Tulip out of the booth.

The next five minutes was a collection of cries, pleas, and the hard snap of bone. Tulip got both the keys and the helmets (“Safety first, boys”), telling the wailing men how fucking great she was gonna look on their bikes. They should be pleased. Look here. Smile. Take a picture so you’ll always remember.

Jesse ate the rest of his fries.

Chapter End Notes

Prompt was "motorbikes" :D
Chapter 228

Chapter Notes

Part 8 of neighbors!AU. I've now passed 4k with this madness. We'll see how far it goes...

It was a long night all around.

Tulip, it seemed, didn’t mind Cass staying with them at all, especially when it wouldn’t impact her in any conceivable way. Why, they didn’t really think she’d let some strange man into her bedroom at this time of the night, did they? (Massive eye-roll from Jesse. Snarky comment from Cass that she already had.) But Tulip was insistent. She was a lady after all, with standards, and this new Cassidy fellow could damn well take the couch downstairs until the sun decided to show its rosy-cheeks again.

Tulip closed her bedroom door with a wink and that was that.

Cass, however, had other plans.

“You’re not seriously kickin’ me out are you?” he’d asked, doing a strange nervous bounce at the entrance to Jesse’s bedroom.

“Tulip said you could take the couch... I’m saying you can take the couch.”

“Yeah, but—”

But Cass had a temperamental back and a couch was no good for that, no sir.

But that was some heavy fiber he’d seen and it was far too hot a night to sleep on scratchy wool.

But he’d just found out that his house was haunted, Jesse, have a heart and he’d nagged on and on until Jesse had finally just yelled FINE.
What he was saying ‘fine’ to didn’t become apparent until Cass gave him a blinding grin, a thumbs up, and launched himself into Jesse’s bed, much like how he’d taken over Tulip’s— only this time he didn’t leave.

It was how Jesse had ended up here: still wide awake, holding extra still with Cass beside him, his body emitting heat like a small, slightly smelly furnace. Fucking hell. What even was this? He’d met the guy a few hours ago and here he was, curled up near Jesse’s shoulder in nothing but his boxers, his left hand this close to brushing his bare side. Jesse had indulged in his fair share of one-night-stands, sure, but they were always more ‘technically night but leave before dawn’ sorts of situations. He’d never invited anyone back to the house before. Tulip had always liked having her space when they were done. He sure as hell had never slept with a vampire.

Oh my fucking god. There was a vampire in his bed. And Jesse hadn’t slept with him.

This sucked ass.

“Pss, padre. You asleep?”

Jesse blinked up at the ceiling, wondering if his exhausted mind really was playing tricks on him.

“...What did you just call me?”

Cass rolled even closer to him. Now his knees were near Jesse’s knee and his breath was ghosting over his—no wait. Don’t go there. They’d had enough ghosts tonight, jesus.

“Just a nickname,” Cass said. “Man invites you into his home—”

“We didn’t invite you.”

“—into his bed, no less,” there was a nudge-nudge that rocked the old frame. “Least I can do is get cozy an’ give you a nice nickname.”
Jesse rolled over too. “So you call me a messed up version of ‘daddy’?”

He couldn’t see Cass very well in the dark, but Jesse definitely caught his front teeth catching his lip before he said,

“Not ‘daddy,’ you asswipe. ‘Padre.’ Like ‘Father.’ You did say your dad was a preacher didn’ you?”

“Well yeah, but I’m not.”

“Who the fuck cares?” Cass paused. “Do you want me to call you ‘daddy’?”

“No!”

“Well alright then.”

Jesse shook his head against the pillow, trying to drag a little bit more of it out from under Cass’ head, the goddamn leech. He was like a freaking—

—Like a vampire. God dammit. This had to stop.

“Shouldn’t you be awake?” Jesse asked, now more curious than annoyed.

He felt more than heard Cass laughing at him. “I am awake.”

“Oh fuck you. I just mean... up. Aren’t you nocturnal or whatever?”

“If I need to be.” Cass flopped onto his back. Jesse caught the shadow of his arms moving up and tucking behind his head. “If I’m on my own then yeah, I’ll sleep durin’ the day and stay awake at night. Easier, ain’t it? But if I’ve got people,” Cass’ foot nudged Jesse’s thigh, “I’ll try an’ be polite an’ what, sleepin’ at a normal man’s time. Don’t need that much sleep though, if I’m bein’ honest.”
Jesse rubbed at his eyes. “Then why are you in my bed? Go do something productive.”

“I’m one hell of a maid,” (why did that sound lewd?) “but do you really want to give me unsupervised access to your laundry? Or worse, your kitchen?”

Jesse took all of .5 seconds to think about it. “Absolutely not.”

“That’s what I thought.”

Cass began humming, a tuneless sound that he lightly bobbed his foot to. Jesse could feel the bed rocking slightly every time he did. It was just a little less sticky now—the early night heat giving way to something marginally cooler—and a single cricket joined in from somewhere below Jesse’s window. His eyes were slipping shut when he remembered just enough to say,

“What was it?”

Cass stopped humming. “What’s what, padre?”

“Whatever you wanted to tell me.” Jesse shifted, breathing deep. “The... mmm, ‘are you awake?’ Sounded like you had somethin’ to say.”

“Oh yeah.” Cass considered for a moment. “It’s just... I don’t recall the words, mind, but I suddenly remembered that the ghost was a kid.”

Shit. ‘Oh’ indeed.

Jesse’s eyes slipped shut, afterimages of children with ghoulish eyes filling the back of his lids. He should have had nightmares. Instead, with Cass beside him, Jesse slept deeply through the rest of the night through.

They could tackle anything in the morning.
Cass paused in the act of dumping a jumbo selection of toilet paper onto the conveyor belt, noticing that Jesse was shielding his eyes in embarrassment. Trying not to let the cashier notice, Cass gave him a quick nudge in the ribs.

“Hey, what’s wrong? We forget the fuckin’ money again?”

Cass was poised to just stuff the much-needed toilet paper under his shirt (it definitely wouldn’t fit under his shirt) and make a break for it when Jesse muttered back,

“She always does this.”

...Who? What? Where, when, why, ‘an all that jazz?

Cass scanned the line but all he could see was the grumpy woman behind them and the jock type with—ew—a cartful of greens and energy drinks. It was a slow day at the grocery store, nothing going on in the other checkouts, or down the other aisles except—

Oh. Okay then.

“She always does this?” Cass clarified, biting deep into his lower lip as he caught sight of Tulip doing some kind of bump and grind, getting down to the store’s otherwise exceedingly bland music. It looked like she was deep in thought over what cookies to buy, all while indulging in a swing and a sway, hips arching low and one hand raising towards the roof. Cass felt a bit like he was choking as Jesse groaned and leaned against the checkout stand. People were beginning to take notice. Some were recording. Their cashier stood on tiptoe to get a better look.

“She’s good,” she announced.
Jesse made a wounded noise in the back of his throat. “Oh jesus don’t let her hear. Don’t encourage her.”

Cass, meanwhile, was getting an Idea.

“How often?” he pressed.

Jesse threw some cash on the belt and made a break for it.

***

It became a game over the years. Or rather, call it a pet project, one that kept Cass entertained on the slow days and gave Tulip a not needed (but appreciated) confidence boost. The fact that it annoyed Jesse to no end was just an added plus.

Tulip, simply put, liked to dance and she’d indulge in that pastime wherever and whenever she could.

In the car with the radio blasting (driving or not), on the subway with a car full of people to applaud her, to the crap music of every corner store they walked into, during any lull in a conversation, in the fancy evening gown they swiped before crossing the border, or in filthy jeans, or in no clothes at all. For Tulip, every sound was a beat and every patch of sun was a spotlight.

“Don’t see why I shouldn’t,” she told Cass once. Tulip dug her heel into the dirt, twisted, hopped and started some fancy footwork that got Cass laughing. “Life’s too short not to.”

“Aww, that’s so sentimental of you.”

“Sentiment this,” and some of the dirt flew up in Cass’ face.

Fair. He started recording her.

“Why,” Jesse demanded the night Cass played back his trove in their dingy motel room, Tulip oo-ing
and ah-ing at her own image. He’d gotten a good shot of her on the hood of their car and even if Jesse threw up his hands in exasperation, Cass didn’t miss the looks he snuck at the screen (or the whispered request for a copy later).

Cass started an album on the piece-of-shit laptop he stole from some professor-y type forty miles back. On the long car rides he spliced Tulip’s moves together over various soundtracks. He started posting them to Youtube. He watched the view count climb.

“I’m a star,” Tulip gushed, waving her phone towards the backseat for Cass to appreciate. Jesse just shook his head.

“You’re conspicuous is what you are. Or did you forget that we’re on the run?”

“Look at the small man with his big words,” and Tulip shimmied into Jesse’s space, startling a laugh out of him as Cass caught it all from behind. Cut and save.

He was glad for that and every other piece of ridiculousness he uploaded. All the times Tulip posed and sang and pulled them both into the mix. Stupid as it was, they were precious to him.

Because when they were gone, only those videos would remain—and they were easier than the memories.

Dance like no one was watching? Nah.

Cass always would.
“Ten minutes,” Jesse begged. “If I haven’t persuaded you by then I’ll leave. No fight from me, I promise.”

“I don’t like the fact that you’re trying to ‘persuade’ me at all.”

“Please, ‘Em.”

Emily stood square in her own doorway, arms crossed and blocking the entrance that, before, Jesse would have had exclusive access to—day, night, whenever he designed to come over. That was ancient fucking history though. Emily felt mean. Vindictive even. She looked it too. Across the street and peeking through her flowered curtains, Linda Suthers wondered what the fool preacher had said to her this time. Something awful no doubt, because she’d never seen Emily quite like this. There’d been heated words between them after last week’s sermon, she knew that much, and everyone knew how Emily had shirked her duties in furious rebellion since, leaving that idiot Custer boy to fend for himself. It looked like he was finally at the end of his rope and attempting a layman’s apology.

Linda wondered where the hell his chocolate and flowers were.

She didn’t get to find out because Jesse finally succeeded in pulling Emily from here house and guiding her down the dirt road, looking a little weak in the knees that she’d agreed. Emily scuffed her feet like a petulant schoolgirl, but she did follow him, and Jesse was damn grateful. Running his church—running this town—was near impossible without Emily at the helm and he was ready to suck up his pride and fix things. Jesse knew Emily’s attention to details though. He hadn’t been kidding when he said he needed just ten minutes of her time. Exactly that took them to the old diner parking lot, abandoned going on six years...

Except for the projector planted in the middle of the asphalt and the truck bed facing the wall, decked out with pillows, a comforter, and snacks. A fuzzy title card (Gone With the Wind) was becoming clearer on the diner’s brick every moment as the sun went down.
“You mentioned you liked old drive-in movies,” Jesse said, looking at his feet in embarrassment. “Tulip and Cass helped me rig it up. You know, just... sorry. For before.”

Emily nodded slowly, looking a little dazed. “You remembered.”

“...yeah. Guess I did.”

So she let Jesse take her arm and guide her up into the nest, placing all the popcorn and Coke within easy reach. It was a little awkward at first—a lot of shifting and quick glances between them—but by the time the film got rolling Emily had relaxed back against the pillows, her hot anger forgotten. After all, Jesse had done this for her.

And if Emily’s arm snuck up around his shoulders once it got dark... Jesse let her have that too.
“Welcome to the town.”

“You said that already.”

Tulip stuck her foot out so it caught Cass’ ankle, sending him into a lurch. There was much cursing as he tried to keep his crazed outfit in place—poncho, wide-brimmed hat, umbrella, and a set of ratty flip-flops which were just stupid considering that they did nothing to protect him from the sun. In fact, one leg went wide out of the umbrella’s protection and Jesse watched, a little horrified, as the whole length of Cass’ calf started smoking.

“You see,” he hissed, batting at his skin. Cass straightened with dignity, pulling at a wedgie in his jean shorts. “You two are cruel.”

“Yep.”

“Never denied it.”

“Aw, fuck you both,” and an older woman with terribly dyed hair jumped like Cass had let off a gunshot instead of a curse. She clutched her purse and scurried off, leaving the three of them to commandeer the sidewalk.

To say that Cass didn’t fit in here was an understatement and it wasn’t just his strange outfit either. You could see he was an outsider just by looking at him: cheap clothes, slovenly hygiene, an uncultured slump to his shoulders. He stood out amongst all the expensive shops and niche decor. Didn’t matter if he’d just paid for one of their houses—if you didn’t look the part, it hardly mattered. Every mom tugged her kid a little closer and every man cast him superior looks. Jesse knew them well. He’d been getting the same since he was a teenager.

“Kinda uppity lot, aren’t they,” Cass said, craning his neck to stare at a man in a collared shirt, like
that was some kind of novelty worth staring at. The man looked back, seemingly offended by Cass’
mere presence.

Tulip snorted. “You have no idea. Bunch of snobs.”

“Bankers,” Jesse elaborated.

“Doctors.”

“CEO’s of miscellaneous companies.”

“Trust fund babies.”

“Oh, most definitely.”

“Right.” Cass’ finger flip-flopped between them. “Now no offense, but you seem a little disheveled
for this place, Padre, and you, luv, are a little... uh...”

“Black?” Tulip said, cocking an eyebrow.

“Yeah. That one.”

“Tell me about it, I—wait. *Padre*?”

“Don’t—” Jesse wedged himself between Tulip and Cass, trying to create as much distance as
possible between them. “Just...don’t.”

“Nickname I gave him last night,” Cass whispered, dramatically peeking around Jesse’s back.

Tulip’s grin was wicked and brimming with possibilities. “That so? You guys have fun last night?”
“I did.”

“I didn’t,” Jesse muttered.

“Liar.”

“You snore.”

“And you steal the blankets.”

“It was 92 last night, we didn’t have blankets!”

“You’re right, I made that up.” Cass shrugged and did a little skip-step over a crack on the walk.

Tulip just shook her head. “Glad to see you two jumped straight to the domesticity. But look, if you do have sex—”

“Tulip!”

“—don’t let the rumors spread. This damn town can barely handle an interracial relationship, let alone a queer one.” She did sarcastic jazz hands that somehow expressed the depth of her loathing.

All at once Jesse let his shoulders slump, the fight going out of him. “Yeah. What she said.”

Cass had slowed though. A surprisingly serious expression crossed his face, lips pursed and eyes narrowed. “There’s a conversation to be had here,” he said, finger now circling between the three of them, “but if they’re all such a load a’ gobshites then why...?”

“Family. Messed up as it might be.” Jesse tugged at the poncho until Cass started walking again. “Mom came from money. Born and raised here. Met Dad in her travels and you know that story: pretty little rich girl falling for the dangerous bad boy.” Jesse chuckled. “Nothin’ much bad about a
preacher though, not that Dad was that when they met. But it was respectable, enviable even, and when he married her the town gave it an ‘alright’ and a side-eye all at once. Mom dies and they don’t quite like the preacher all on his own. Like his curse-throwing, hard-drinking son even less. They don’t like the runaway girl they took in at all.” Tulip turned, walking backwards while giving a bow. “Little girl doesn’t leave though. Starts loving the preacher’s son and oooh, that’s all kinds of wrong. She grows into a fine young woman and drags her uncle back here, whether the town likes it or not. Preacher dies. Leave his son the house. They don’t fit in much, but...”

“But it’s home.” Cass said it like a sigh. “I feel ya, Padre.”

Tulip stared. “Do you?”

“I’m a freaking vampire, luv, what do you think?”

“...right. That’s fair.”

“So what now?” Cass clapped his hands and rubbed them together. “I could return the favor, woeful tales about being the outsider, but my own life story is gonna take a tad bit longer.”

“Which is why we should do it over lunch,” Jesse pointed to a pub a few doors down. “Then we’ll head over to the library.”

“Library?”

Tulip had started skipping, a maniacal gleam lighting up her eyes. “Duh. We need to research ghosts don’t we?”

“Preferable exorcisms.” Jesse elbowed Cass in the ribs. “You’re not living with us for forever, you know.”

“ Fucking try and stop me.”

Another demonstration of just how vulnerable Cass was in sunlight proved that they could, in fact, stop him, but that was entirely beside the point.
The challenge sounded a lot like a promise and oddly enough, Jesse was feeling pretty glad that it had been made.
“Excuse me, sir. I’m going to have to ask you to step back.”

Cass pointed violently to the line of people on either side of him. “You’re not tellin’ them to step back!”

“They weren’t trying to jump the rope, sir.”

Ah. Alright, fair. He thought he’d been a little more subtle about it. Cass gave a sheepish grin and took that ordered step backwards, hands raised in a mockery of ‘don’t shoot.’ Not that he thought these security types were packing. Probably. Then again, this was for Jesse Fucking Custer so who could really be sure. Anything might go down tonight.

Cass just had to see it.

“Hey, hey. Now wait. Where you runnin’ off to so fast?” The security guard just gave him a bored look, her arms crossed and foot tapping, but Cass wasn’t deterred. He pressed right up against the red velvet rope and turned so she could see the small wad of bills in his palm. “I’m glad we ran into each other, luv. There’s been a bit of a mixup. See, I’m supposed to be with the band an’ all...”

She gave him a dry look. “Really.”

“Oh yeah.”

“You wouldn’t happen to be bribing me, would you?”

“What? Never.”
“Uh huh.”

“Do I look like I belong with these other slouches, huh?”

The security guard gave the manic crowd a once over before staring down at Cass’ filthy jeans, flip-flops, and Preacher t-shirt. Whatever she gathered from all that didn’t seem to impress her.

She popped the gum in her mouth. “You look worse.”

“...really now, that’s just rude.”

“They’re here!”

Cass didn’t know who shouted it because all at once it was like a tsunami had hit his back, the whole damn crowed pushing against the ropes as the black limousine pulled up. Cass scrambled, fighting back his share of elbows and knees as he worked to get a better look. The poor security guards had their work cut out for them—even moreso when Tulip stepped out of the car.

“She’s perfect,” Cass said, awe coloring his voice.

And she was. Legs for days commanded the carpet, jeans spiced up with a black top so low it left nothing to the imagination. Tulip waved at the crowd, soaking up their attention, and playfully rolled her eyes when the roar changed from her name to Jesse’s. He followed her out of the limo in his signature black and fake clerical collar, the symbol of his brand that had girls swooning and mothers gaping in offense. He already had his guitar slung across his back and Cass’ fingers just itched to touch it.

“Don’t even think about it,” his security guard hissed. She was just barely keeping everyone back, but apparently she still had time to hone in on him. Cass stuck his tongue out petulantly—and was surprised when he heard a sudden laugh.

“Think about what?”
It was Tulip. There. Here. *Right in front of him.* She stared straight at Cass and he stared back and swear to god, he nearly dropped dead at the mere knowledge.

Here lies Proinsias Cassidy: Fool, Wanker, but he Died a Good Death.

“Thinkin’ about you.”

Was that his voice? It must have been because Tulip grinned slow, using a finger to raise his chin and good god, her touch *burned.* The crowd surrounding Cass howled in jealousy and he barely noticed, too wrapped up in her eyes and mouth. He did notice Jesse coming up behind her though. He leaned on Tulip’s shoulder, smirking at them both.

“He’s scrawny,” Jesse said.

It took Cass a moment to realize Jesse was talking about him—they were both talking *to* him—and he tried to straighten his back, his clothes, and anything else that might need a touch up.

“Yep, right, that I am. I can get scrawnier too if that’s somethin’ you like...I just... I just mean... ah shit.”

Tulip was laughing in earnest now, peoples’ phones going off all around her, and Jesse just shook his head.

“Oh, I fucking like him. Jesse.”

It was apparently an order because Jesse leaned forward himself, right past the security guard to lift the rope. Cass stumbled into their world and was a breath away from fainting when Tulip slung an arm over his shoulders.

“What’s your name, scrawny?” she asked.

“C-cassidy. Cass for short but holy hell, luv, you can call me whatever you want.”
Tulip laughed again, pulling him along so fast that Cass stumbled, but who the hell cared about \textit{that}? He looked back at the shell-shocked crowd only once and caught Jesse shrugging at the thoroughly unimpressed guard.

“Don’t be like that, Em. Tulip wants what she wants.”

And apparently Tulip wanted him.

“Let’s go, scrawny,” she whispered. “We’ve got some music to make.”

Chapter End Notes

I think that's all your prompts, Metal\_Is\_My\_Name! I had a blast filling those~
Chapter 233

Chapter Notes

Chapter 10 of neighbors! AU. Feels like some kind of milestone lol

“Friends. Buddies. Pals. This is some kind of an abomination.”

Cass stared in horror at the pub Tulip had dragged them into, drawing his poncho a little tighter around his shoulders, like a child in need of comfort. Because this was just all kinds of wrong. Seedy, perhaps? Rough enough to give a grown man nightmares? No. Quite the opposite, in fact. This place was homey.

“Welcome to The Chili Dog. Oh hey, Tulip. You got three this time?”

Tulip pointed to the men on either side of her. “Yep. Picked up another stray, Wendy. The corner booth open?”

Wendy laughed. “Yeah, if you give me a sec to wipe it down. You new or just passing through?” She held out a hand that Cass shook limply. Wendy smelled like grease and disinfectant.

“Uh... new.”

“Great! Listen, tell me all about it when my shift ends.” Wendy leaned in conspiratorially. “Donnie is a bit of a slave driver. He’s a sweetie at heart, swear it, but during the lunch and dinner rush hour you’d best be working your ass off or else,” Wendy drew her index finger along her neck.

“Donnie,” Jesse muttered. The tone was foul enough to startle Cass. Wendy just laughed again.

“You two. I’ll go clean your table. Gimme just a sec.”

Wendy trotted off and Tulip raised a hand towards her retreating back. “Behold, the one non-asshole in this entire town. She is young though. Impressionable. We must protect her at all costs.”
Cass smirked. “Not sure you want me talkin’ to her then. Who’s Donnie?” He poked Jesse’s shoulder and ooooo, it was like poking solid rock. Nice.

“He’s the cook.” Tulip answered as Jesse just glared daggers at the kitchen door. “He and Jesse have this stupid feud going on—”

“He’s scum. I’m just responding to his scuminess.”

“Please. You two fools are the only poor white trash in this town and you fight over that title like dogs.”

Jesse scowled as Cass cackled, the three of them following Wendy as she waved them over to the corner booth. She laid three menus out on the table and gave Tulip a wink before running off for water.

Cass slid across the squeaky leather with distaste. “Alright. I’m serious now. This place is freaking clean.”

“You expected a pigsty?” Jesse asked, shoving a menu at him.

“Well yeah! The hell you think a pub is anyway?”

Jesse and Tulip frowned together, each turning to take a closer look at their surrounding: nice wooden tables with red leather booths, paneled floors, soft lighting, decor that said ‘rustic’ without being garish about it. They turned back to one another and shrugged.

“Yes?” Tulip ventured.

“Oh good fuckin’ god, and you call yourselves trash. Where’s the broken window, huh? The empty bottles everywhere? The floor should reek with all the disgusting fluids that have spilled on it over the years. It ain’t a pub unless there’s a guy passed out on the table. Does that guy look passed out to you?”
Cass pointed violently to the couple across the room, oblivious to them as they enjoyed their lunch. Jesse was glad. He slowly lowered Cass’ hand back to the table.

“You’re weird,” he announced. “And you came to the wrong town. If you like the slums so much why didn’t you stay there?” It wasn’t an insult or a condemnation—and Cass didn’t take it as such. He just nodded thoughtfully, playing with the saltshaker.

“Guess I wanted the change,” he murmured. “I’ve lived a long time, Padre. Been a whole lot of places and seen a whole lot of shit. Never lived the good life though.” He gestured vaguely, encompassing the whole town. “Finally got the money together. A few lucky investments, pals who owned me big, a will or two I squeezed into,” Cass chuckled at Tulip’s distasteful look. “Figured I’d treat myself.”

“And you end up with a house that’s haunted,” she said.

“Fuckin’ figures.”

“At least it’s interesting,”

“You’re interesting,” Wendy said, winking at Tulip as she sauntered over. “Enough of that though. What can I get you three lovelies? And what’s the latest gossip?”

“Burgers all around,” Jesse answered, only casting a quick look at Cass to make sure that was okay. “Cokes too.”

“We’re all outta Coke. Pepsi okay?”

“The hell you mean you’re out of Coke?”

“Just what I said. Out. Of. Coke.” Wendy cast a significant glance back at the kitchen, then bent close to murmur, “Work with me here, Jesse. They basically taste the same.”

Jesse scowled. “Like hell they do.”
Tulip laid a hand on his arm. “Pepsi is fine, Wendy, thanks. Well-done for the burgers.”

“Not mine, luv.” Cass wiggled his fingers. “Rare as they'll let you make it. I want to see that cow's blood oozin’ across my plate if you can swing it.”

Wendy stared. "...alright," she said and walked away, casting some overly curious glances behind her. Jesse put his head in his hands.

"You're gonna be the death of us, aren't you?"

"Probably," Cass agreed. "Especially considerin' we've got a homicidal ghost on our hands, and like I said, I've got shit all experience with these buggers. Met a friend down in New Orleans who claimed to perform exorcisms, but honestly I think the boy was just high as a fuckin' kite. You really think your lil' goody-goody library is gonna have info on that?"

Tulip shook her head. "Nope, but its got a real detailed history of most of the folks who've lived in this town. Lineages, obituaries, local accomplishments and shit like that." Tulip sighed as the two just stared at her. "Maybe if we can figure out who died there we can, I don't know, help them move on or something."

"Ah."

"Smart."

"Jesus you two are hopeless."

"You really think that'll work though?" Cass pulled a face. "Kumbaya-ing the ghost outta my house?"

"Not really. But we gotta start somewhere, right?"

"...alright. Fair."
They settled into a companionable silence, the kind that normally took years to develop with someone, and which they'd managed to pull off in just a day. Cass and Jesse started a 'hockey' game involving skidding the salt across the table and hoping to land it in the other's lap; Tulip tried to think through how best to start their research without drawing even more attention to themselves. Not that she gave a damn what the town thought, but things would be a little easier if they could be slightly more inconspicuous.

"Hey there, Wendy whatsit? You know anything about ghosts, luv?"

Tulip closed her eyes.

Yes, because having the pasty outsider in a poncho yelling about ghosts to their waitress—that was inconspicuous.

Wendy was a good soul though. She made a face at Tulip before turning back to Cass with a blinding smile. She held two trays masterfully, one with cokes and one with burgers.

"Can't say I do," she said. "You got an interest, newbie?"

"Could say that. One's trying to cheat me outta my real-estate."

"Place next door," Tulip clarified. "Cass moved in yesterday. We saw some... strange shit last night."

Wendy shivered and threw up her hands. Luckily she'd already deposited the food. "Nu uh. No more out of you. I don't want to know. That stuff gives me the creeps. I don't know how such a pretty little place can be so eerie."

"...don't think my spot's eerie exactly..." Cass murmured sadly. Jesse was engrossed with poking at his food.

"The hell is this, Wendy?" he demanded. Jesse flipped the bun to reveal a charred, sad looking piece of chicken.
"Sorry." Wendy shrugged. "We ran out of burgers after these two," she pointed at Cass and Tulip.

Jesse narrowed his eyes. Slowly, with deliberate control, he reached across the table and snagged Cass' drink, taking a sip. His expression went positively blank as he tasted Coke.

Just to be sure Tulip grabbed his drink and took a sip of her own. Pepsi.

Shit.

"DONNIE!" Jesse hollered, clamoring over Cass to get out of the booth. Wendy stepped back lightly and let him pass.

"Just the messenger," she said as Jesse barreled by her to get at the kitchen. "Enjoy your meal!"
Chapter 234

Chapter Notes

Prompt: At the playground :D

"Heeeey there. Are you my appendix? Because I don't understand how you work, but this feeling in my stomach makes me want to take you out."

Jesse very slowly looked up from the book he'd been reading. This skinny guy stood in front of him, trying to... pose? It was a little hard to tell whether he was squinting for sexiness or just at the sun. Probably the sun, honestly.

And the gaggle of kids behind him wasn't helping his image.

"I don't know whether to praise you for that line or punch you," Jesse said honestly. The guy's face split into a grin and he threw himself onto the bench, sliding incredibly close.

"Praise me," he said. "Took me ten minutes to pick it out online an' it's true enough. Do you know what a fuckin' appendix does?"

Jesse's lips twitched. "Nope."

"Exactly." The man held out a hand. "Cassidy. And your handsome self is called...?"

This time he smirked. "That line's better. And it's Jesse, Jesse Custer."

"Course it's better. That one took me twenty minutes to find." Cass sat back watching all the little gremlins covering the playground. They looked like blights on an otherwise gorgeous Earth.

"Now I've got three important questions for you."
Jesse raised an eyebrow. Strange or no, this guy was entertaining. Not bad on the eyes either. "Alright."

"One, got a girlfriend?"

"Yeah, but if your next questions are 'straight?' and 'would she mind?' the answers are both no."

Impossibly, Cass' grin grew. He stretched his legs out into the dirt. "Fuckin' ace. Alright then. New questions, two and three. You got any kids over there?"

Jesse shuddered. "No, thank god. I'm just babysitting my neighbor's three brats. They're... somewhere."

"Mm, leave 'em to eat mud or whatever it is the tykes do. Final question: you up for me takin' you out?"

"Like your appendix?" Jesse quipped.

Cass shrugged. "I was thinkin' a little less blood and pain, but yeah."

"What were you thinking then?"

"...McDonald's and this here playground because I'm broke as fuck."

Jesse laughed. He slammed his book shut. "Sounds great. Emily's brats will survive without me for a bit. Woo me with chicken nuggets and fries. We'll fight the other kids for the swing set."

As they stood Cass swung an arm around Jesse's waist. It quickly fell to grab at his ass.

"Sounds romantic to me."
Chapter 235

Chapter Notes

ANGST 🔳(ilters)⟩

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

"Used to be afraid I'd just... float off," Cass said. "When I first realized what the sun did to me, you know? So many ways you can fuck that up. Little slit in the window. Someone openin' a door. Passin' out in an alley when you're too pissed to realize and wakin' up to the actual, goddamn sun in your face... I figured it would happen one day. Sooner rather than later. I'd get caught unaware and burn quick, floating away on a breeze before I even realized what the fuck was happen'. Just ash, Padre. Used to fall asleep clutchin' the bedpost or whatever the hell else was nearby, as if that would make any difference."

Cass opened his eyes and snorted at the shocked look on Jesse's face. "You're the one who wanted some truth. It ain't all cool fights an' handsome looks, my guy."

Jesse's face smoothed out. "I know. Just... fuck, Cass. What the hell do you say to that?"

"Nothin'." Cass shrugged. "Nothin' to say."

Jesse considered. Then, slowly, he eased his hand across the bed and beneath the covers, groping until he found Cass' arm. His fingers then traveled down lightly until they could link with Cass' own.

"You can hold onto me," he whispered.

Cass jerked like he was seizing, laughing so hard and suddenly that he could only curl in on himself protectively. Jesse scowled at the display.

"Hey! I'm trying to be romantic here. And supportive!" He made to take his hand back, but Cass kept a tight hold. He used his free hand to wipe the tears from his eyes.

"Yeah, and you're real good at it." He chuckled some more, finally tugging Jesse closer. "Alright, softie. I'll hold your hand."
"I'm holding yours, asshole."

"Sure, sure whatever you say."

Neither let go though. It was a joke the next night, and the night after that, quickly becoming a dare regarding who'd chicken out first... until somehow, along the way, it wasn't just a joke anymore. If separated Jesse felt a whole void resting in the center of his palm. If separated, Cass still clutched at something nearby—and it was never quite the same. He worried less about the sun now and more about Jesse.

And he was right to.

For him it wasn't much blood at all, a mere snack before dinner. For a human it was lethal. Cass pressed hard on Jesse's chest and watched in horror as it bubbled up, running over his fingers and pooling into the dirt. Get back, he wanted to scream. Get back in there, you bastards. What a waste. In every sense of the word—a waste.

Cass startled as thin, shaking fingers collapsed overtop his. Jesse didn't have the strength to squeeze, so Cass left bruises for the both of them.

"You were right," Jesse garbled.

Cass couldn't see him. He was just a black blur surrounded by muddied red. Cass used his free hand to wipe the tears from his eyes and left a streak across his face.

"About what?"

"You holding my hand." Jesse, impossibly, grinned at the sky. "Once more, yeah? I think I'm falling asleep."

Chapter End Notes

OTP Prompt: "Imagine Person A always holds Person B's hand till Person B falls
asleep. One day Person B gets shot and is bleeding pretty bad. When Person A hurries to rescue them, Person B says, "Hold my hand, I am falling asleep."
It was rare to find a day like this in Annville, where the sun was warm but not hot, the breeze there but gentle enough not to kick up too much dust. They'd found a decrepit hammock in her uncle's garbage and had hung it between two dead trees. There were no shadows for miles around—except for the one beneath her.

Tulip stuck her foot over the edge and kicked off the ground, starting the hammock rocking again. Grumbling sounded from below.

"Not too hard now, you're lettin' the sun in."

"Sun feels good, Cass."

"Maybe for you, lucky lass."

Tulip smiled lazily, thinking that she could fall asleep in this moment and that wouldn't be half bad. Her words were slightly slurred as she said, "This is nice. Lazy. I feel like a queen."

Cass chuckled. "You are a queen."

"Oh right. Duh."

He laughed a little louder. "Here," and there was the sound of him rummaging in their picnic basket. A second later something was nudging her back. Tulip moved her hand from her lap to the side and Cass slipped something up through the holes of the hammock. It was a single, green grape.

"Pretty sure you're supposed to feed me these by hand," she said, popping it into her mouth.

"I'm pretty sure I just did."

"You know what I mean."

"You gotta get down here for that, luv. Down and dirty."

"Then there'd be no shadow. You'd burn." Tulip shook her head at the sky. "I'm your shadow, Cass."

It was a long moment of silence.

"Yeah... you are."
Chapter 237

Chapter Notes

Work is absolutely disgusting this summer, but I'm determined to find time to write! Kicking off that resolution with a little Jesse/Tulip fluff. More neighbors!au to arrive soon <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Tulip had never been very good at keeping her head. That Tuesday she nearly took hers off when she ran into Jesse, her nose buried in a book and his in the air, hurrying towards the cafeteria.

"Jesus—!"

An appropriate first word for the two of them.

He went down fast while Tulip wobbled, wondering what the hell kind of wall she'd just hit. Her book landed on his chest—that fine, chiseled chest, holy hell—and Tulip dropped too. Maybe she was weak at the knees for this boy, maybe she just sensed an opportunity. The point was she was in Jesse Custer's lap, objectively the hottest guy at Annville High, and really, did that need an explanation?

"Hey there," she said, squirming a little closer. Tulip had legs, torso, and heat nestled between her thighs, oh yes. Jesse didn't notice though. He was busy rubbing his arm and hey, maybe he'd broken it! Maybe Tulip could take him to the off campus clinic and then home to bed, you know, where she could nurse him back to sweet, sweet health—

"Did you hit your head?"

Jesse was staring at her now, a little strangely. It occurred to Tulip that time might have passed and perhaps, conceivably, Jesse had asked her to get off him more than once.

"...Yes."

In for a penny and all. Maybe she needed nursing. That would mean Jesse. In a nurse's uniform.
"Shit! Hey, you okay? Fuck, please be okay. I'm sorry, I shouldn't have been running, here, c'mon —"

Jesse scooped Tulip into his arms and started a steady jog towards the clinic, his bag and her book long forgotten. Tulip weakly put her arms up around his neck, head over Jesse's shoulder, and she grinned wickedly at all the jealous faces she passed. What a glorious moment for her.

"I'm fine," Tulip said, making damn sure her voice didn't sound fine at all. Thank you, drama club. "I'm... I'm Tulip."

"Jesse." He smiled crookedly. "Sorry about all this. Mom says I'm a bull in a china shop, at least when it come to getting at food."

Tulip was picturing rather explicit images of Jesse getting at food on *her* when she said, "It's no problem."

That, at least, was true. No problem at all.

"You'll be fine, Tulip. I promise."

She would. Tulip planned to make a full recovery…

(she nestled a little closer)

…eventually.

Chapter End Notes

Prompt: Crash
Chapter 238

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

On the very outskirts of Annville, in the one (supposedly) holy place, past the pews, up the steps, and through the humid wall that separated the attic from the rest of the church, there was a chorus of giggles escaping on the night air.

The sound would have conjured up images of innocent, carefree children partaking in a sleepover; or perhaps solidifying some treasured summer memory. They weren't kids though. Not in the physical sense, anyway.

They were...whatever.

"An alpaca," Tulip snorted root beer up her nose and spent a good few seconds choking on it. Cass took the opportunity to cheer for her demise.

"Yes, an alpaca," he said. "C'mon, don't laugh! It's all I know how to do." Cass raised his hand again in demonstration, extending his pinkie and pointer fingers up while the other three flattened together. A vaguely animal-shaped shadow appeared on the far wall.

Jesse framed the image between his palms. "Looks more like a llama."

"Like you'd know the fucking difference."

"Pretty sure one of them is nicer. Can't ever remember which though." Tulip struggled back into a sitting position, drunk only on humor considering that, for the first time ever, they'd opted for soda and nothing else. That's what happened when it was too damn hot to move.

Hands were all they could manage, really. Tulip collapsed into Cass' side instead and raised her arms lazily. After a bit of fumbling and cursing there was a shadow snake rearing up across from them. Tulip hissed in between her giggles while Jesse provided a shadow man for her to bite.

The two went at it until the man and the snake were having some truly awful, shadow sex.

"Ought to be ashamed," Cass muttered.

"We are. A little." Jesse shook out his hands. "Seriously though. You really never did shadow puppets as a kid? I mean, you're fucking ancient, man. No sleepovers? Summer camp?"

Tulip toasted. "Small town life where there's literally nothing else for you to do?"

Moments like these—poised between the laughter… it wasn't something Cass wanted to bust up with a sappy revelation. Because no, there'd never been any camp. No friends for sleepovers. And the likes of him didn't stay in small towns too long. That right there was dangerous.

Cass leaned back and raised his hand. His stupid alpaca-llama gazed fondly around the room.

"I'm here now, aren't I?"
Prompt: Dim
"This is fine," Tulip insisted, the sounds of a fight now emanating from the kitchen: metal pots striking the floor, endlessly growled insults, something that sounded suspiciously like the whoosh of a blow torch. Cass' eyebrows crawled up into his hairline and he slowly began easing out of the booth.

"Don't bother," Wendy said. "I give them another...ten seconds, Tulip?"

"Five," Tulip said and took a bite of her hamburger. "Mm, nice," and she lifted the sandwich in praise.

Jesse obviously took more issue with the cooking.

Sure enough though, just a few seconds later a well-built man in a white apron and jeans came stumbling out through the doors, tripping over his own feet and cursing up a storm. Jesse was right on his heels, a knife lifted threateningly towards Donnie's chest.

The couple over in the corner were staring, mouths hanging wide. The woman had a bit of salmon hanging from the edge of her lips.

"They're new here," Wendy whispered. "Not used to the entertainment—don't you dare, Jesse Custer!" Everyone jumped when she raised her voice. "You kill my cook and the price of a new one is being put on your tab."

Donnie turned from the sharp edge to scowl at her. "Really? That's the only thing you gotta say to this?"

Wendy shrugged. "Your food's good, but not that good."

"I don't know. This burger ain't half bad." Tulip stole some of the fries off Cass' plate.

"I think his food is shit," Jesse said, still waving the knife. "Then again, I wouldn't know for sure, considering he doesn't serve it to me."

"I served you, Jesse. Not my fault you don't like what you got." For all his big words though Donnie was backing up fast from that knife. Even Cass was a little taken aback. Now this felt like a pub...even if it didn't fit in with the rest of the aesthetic. He took in the still horrified looks on the customers’ faces, the group of women who'd gotten halfway in the door before turning right around, the otherwise idyllic town just on the other side of that window... Tulip with her messy eating and Jesse with his violent reaction, they just didn't fit here—and Cass was loving every second of it.

"Gonna gut him, padre?" he asked, maybe a little over-eager. Tulip cast him a disgusted look over her food. Cass didn't see the slap coming until Wendy had already connected her palm with the back of his skull.
"He does and you'll be cleaning up the mess."

"Why me?!"

"Oh c’mont" Donnie gestured desperately between him and that knife. "How is that your priority!"

"Whatever," Wendy drawled. In an instance she transformed back into the happy-go-lucky server, flashing a smile over at the far table. "Can I get you nice folks anything else?"

They slowly and numbly shook their heads.

Wendy's grin remained fixed. "No really, I'm so serious. Order something so I can send this asshole back into the kitchen."

"Not until I get my burger, you're not." Jesse raised the knife a little higher. "Ain't eatin' no chicken sandwich," he muttered.

"You're crazy!"

"Uh..." the man hesitantly raised his hand. "We'll take some ice cream?"

"Excellent!" Wendy clapped her hands and bounced in place. It was all a little eerie. "Donnie, get the man his ice cream."

Donnie didn't move. Jesse didn't lower his knife. No one so much as breathed. It was a standoff, the kind of which Cass had never expected to witness but sure as hell was glad he did. He kept his eyes on Jesse while he reached across the table to pat Tulip's arm.

"Are you guys always this serious about food?" he whispered. "Because I can really get behind that."

"Jesus."

Tulip threw down her burger, letting the bun fly up, the meat and lettuce and cheese skittering across the plate, and stood with such power that the table shook. Everyone, despite already being still, seemed to freeze in place. Like they'd gone from mere ice to stone. Tulip was Medusa and, ironically, all it took was a single look from her to spring Donnie back to life.

"I'll... get... get the ice cream," he said. Tulip was there then to catch Jesse's wrist, keeping the knife's edge away from the fleeing man's face.

"Eat Cass's," she sighed and practically dragged him back to the table. Jesse seemed to consider it, nodded, and used the knife to cut Cass' burger cleanly in two. He crammed a good hunk of it into his mouth and took a long pull of Coke before swallowing. Cass looked up at the display adoringly.

"Threatening makes me hungry," Jesse said, the words garbled by food. There were juices seeping down his chin from how rare the burger was, and Tulip and Cass both wanted to lick it away. Cass settled for wagging a finger under Jesse's nose.

"Human," he admonished. "Gonna give yourself food poisoning that way."

"Probably. Better death than lookin' at your face though."

"Bastard."

"Asshole."
"Children," Tulip said and began snagging her things because really, she'd just wanted a nice, sit-down lunch before things got underway, but no. She got death threats and blood talk instead. "C'mon, we're leaving. Jesse? Touch my soda again and die."

"Already dead of food poisoning and Cass' awful mug." Jesse kept slurping as Tulip rummaged in his back pocket for bills. Wendy always deserved a little extra whenever they came in. For the property and emotional damage.

She was still chipper though. Wendy waved them out.

"Great to see you, come again, so on and so forth—Tulip! Give me a call sometime."

She shook her head fondly. "Will do, Wendy."

"Just no talk about ghosts. Your social life gives me the heebie jeebies." The couple looked traumatized beyond words. Wendy cleared a plate right out of the man's nerveless fingers.

"Noted."

They were nearly out the door, but at the last second Cass stopped, grabbed his umbrella, jogged back, and swept it clean across their table. The smash of plates and silverware froze everyone in their tracks. Cass just nodded contentedly.

"Now it's more like a pub," he said and slapped another thirty down on the table.

"What the fuck—?"

Donnie came out just in time to see the final fork come skittering to a stop by his shoe. No one answered his question or stopped to explain. The only person who even glanced his way was Jesse.

"Thanks," he said and snagged the chocolate chip ice cream. Jesse left the restaurant with it, bowl and all.
Jesse said, "Just fix the air conditioner" in the same way his mom had once said, "Just come back safe," with the hopeless, resigned tone of someone who really needed to pretend. Cass hadn't come back safe—hadn't come back human and ultimately hadn’t gone home at all—and Jesse's machine was still a spluttering mess in the corner.

"You don't know how," he announced, walking from one end of the church to the other, bottle in hand and an invisible cop telling him to manage a straight line. "Bet that was just a lie, wasn't it? Something to—to--make you seem even more impressive."

Cass was stretched out on a pew. He listened to the clomp-clomp of Jesse's footsteps and smiled up at the ceiling. Oh, but he did like the 'more' in that sentence.

"Nope," he said. "Sorry to disappoint. I can definitely fix the blasted thing. Live long as I do, Padre, an' you pick up a skill or three."

He felt Jesse wobbling as he passed—just the slightest breeze passing over Cass' face. Then he regained his equilibrium and started back towards the entrance. Cass wondered just how much Jesse had drunk before he'd showed up, to get a man of his reputation pissed as shit.

"Then you don't have the right tools," he said. Jesse had all the confidence of the wasted.

"Still nope."

"You need help?"

"Don't insult me now."

"...huh."

Cass waited for the final conclusion, but for whatever reason it never came. Maybe Jesse's brain was just sloshing in too many juices to think straight. Or maybe it honestly didn't occur to him that Cass didn't want to fix the damn thing.

Not out of any malice or laziness (though that second one did reign at times). No. It was just a simple matter that if he did, there'd no longer be anything holding him here. Cass wouldn't have an excuse to stay.

Jesse shambled over. Cass huffed as he suddenly appeared above him, draped over the pew and dripping the dregs of his bottle onto Cass' stomach.

"It's hot," Jesse whined. "Can't you just fix it already?"

"And cool you down? Not a chance, Padre. Not a chance in hell."

Chapter End Notes
Prompt: Futile
There were only four surefire ways to keep morale up on a long road trip: food (shitty by anyone’s standards around here), music (that they couldn’t agree on), sex (which couldn’t happen while you were driving—well, it could, and it did, but they did have some sense of self-preservation), and high-stakes bets.

There was currently a bet on what would ultimately crash the car.

"Floor it, luv, c'mon fuckin' level the pedal!"

"What the fuck do you think I'm doing over here?"

Still, Tulip leaned her weight against the wheel, tongue between her teeth as she took their rusty bucket of bolts well past seventy. Behind them the cop car was trying to gain and failing miserably, either due to lame police equipment or an equally lame driver. With a yell Jesse threw his head out the window and flipped the woman off. His hair was as messy as his grin.

"Left, Tulip!"

Helped by Cass' shout, Tulip missed the massive pothole just in time. It had been like this for a good eight miles, not quite outrunning their tail, barely keeping from hitting holes and branches and the occasional deer. Better rush than a video game, that was for sure, and with a yell of her own Tulip cranked the wheel to straddle the dividing line.

"I'm raising to 100!" she shouted.

"Oh please, I'm 200, easy."

Jesse thought they'd hit something and blow out a tire. Or flip themselves. Something fiery.

Tulip thought they'd make it through this section of New Mexico safe and sound (relatively), provided they didn't run out of gas first.

With the growing twilight Cass (high as absolute fuck) thought they'd be abducted by aliens before the sun sank. Though then again, given their history, that was no less a possibility than anything else. They accepted that option and his money alongside it. The pot grew every few minutes.

The important thing was that none of them thought they'd get caught by that cop. That kind of stupidity wasn't even an option.

Tulip pulled into the opposing lane and shrieked with laughter, the light fading and the wind cutting hard into her face. There was nothing but the sirens behind them and a whole slew of fun ahead.

Didn't really matter who'd win the money in the end. This right here was one hell of a reward.
Prompt: Erratic
You are love embodied, he was told. You are light and justice and order. You are eternal. You obey.

It never occurred to Fiore that all those things might one-day conflict.

Of course, ‘one-day’ was negligible because in the beginning of his existence (which encompassed all existence) there were not days or times or anything so limiting. There was only the Lord and the Lord’s creations, all of which Fiore loved as he was told to do. He loved the clustered atoms that soon became things, and he loved how those things began to evolve. There was no difference between the gas-based creations of space and the sentient creations below. Fiore loved them all with equal, unrelenting necessity. That would never change.

…until the creation of time, that is. When ‘never’ suddenly had meaning and the whole universe became a matter of comparison; of value based on individual subjectivity. Some of his brothers claimed not to love the newly born Humanity and were duly punished for their arrogance. Others loved them too much and faced equal retribution.

Fiore paid no mind to either, for with the creation of time he now understood what it meant for it to stop.

It did, in the moment he saw a demon across the boundary between heaven and hell.

His understanding of the creature was instantaneous, yet also infinite. In that moment Fiore took eons to contemplate certain complexities that had previously been denied him: like how light could only exist if there was darkness, how order and justice were held in a body made of brimstone and fire, that if it was eternal it was worth being understood…

Who are you? he asked, the first of many rules he’d come to break. The answer seared across Fiore’s mind and soul.

DeBlanc, the demon said.
DeBlanc, he repeated. *You are love embodied. I am Fiore.*

Chapter End Notes

Prompt: Love
"Bad night?" Tulip asked and for once Cass didn't respond. Normally he was the first to run his
mouth, the one in the group most eager to talk his way out of any situation, to use words as a weapon
equal to his fist (or his teeth). Now though he just sat on the church's ratty couch, head pillowed on
his knees. After a long moment Tulip got a jerky nod.

"I feel that." She ran her hand briefly through his hair, reassured when Cass leaned into the touch.
"Sit tight. I'll be back in a few minutes."

It was just something to say though. Tulip didn't think Cass would actually get up and leave. He
looked like he'd been sitting there for hours.

In fact, she knew he had. No need for lights in the bright afternoon. Cass hadn't bothered to turn
them on after dusk though.

"Check your phone, preacher boy," Tulip murmured, sending off a quick text. It was a message the
two of them had come to occasionally expect over the years: tonight is a Not Good night; a Non-
Verbal night; a Please Refrain From Being a Shit for a While night. It was while Tulip was dragging
a fuzzy blanket off Jesse's bed that he wrote back:

*got it. i'll grab cocoa on the way home*

Tulip's lips twitched. Good. It was the only damn non-alcoholic drink Cass ever wanted.

Meanwhile, her job was short and sweet. She bundled the blanket into the downstairs dryer and put it
on a quick spin, hoping Cass could hear the old machine from the living room, take some kind of
comfort in it. Tulip watched the blue fabric tumble and turn for a few minutes before ripping the door
open, bringing everything to stop. She took a second just to press her face into the heat.

When Tulip draped the warm blanket around Cass' shoulders he melted like butter against her. It
didn't matter if it was 80 degrees outside. This helped.

Nuzzled up against his side, Tulip could easily understand why.

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**Chapter End Notes**

Prompt: soft
HAPPY PREACHER DAY!

I didn't get to 300 drabbles (obviously...), didn't even get to 250, BUT I'm planning to take lots of notes during this new season for tiny fic ideas~

Until then have this. It is entirely Sandpapernowman's fault. If you either love or hate this stupidity, take it up with them :D

When the first crash sounded Tulip paused, then resumed drinking her beer with a casual air. She gestured at Cass with the mug.

"Your boyfriend is starting another bar fight," she said. The shattering of glass and a man's squeal punctuated her words.

Cass glared. "You mean your boyfriend is startin' the fight. My boyfriend exists between the hours of 10:00am and not whatever fuckin' time it is right now."

"Yeah, except he was your boyfriend when he bought you those chili cheese fries an hour back. Uh huh. There it is. Quit your grumbling and hop to."

Cass went, but no, it sure as hell wasn't quietly.

"Jesse! Aw c'mon, padre, let the asshole breathe!"

***

"So which of us is gonna tell him that the shit he's mixing is flammable?"

Either could. Neither would. Cass fished a coin out of his pocket and tossed it high into the air.
"Call it," he sighed.

"Tails."

"Hell yeah, between your legs you mean." As Tulip cursed a blue streak Cass pressed his lips to old George Washington's head. "Thank you kindly, Mr. Pres."

***

They stood smack dab in the grocery store, for once determined to eat something other than gas station filth and fucking McDonalds. After a brief argument it was decided that Tulip would actually shop while Cass watched Jesse. That way they wouldn't die of survey or something, Maybe.

"Is Jesse your son?"

Tulip turned, slow, meeting the old woman's gaze with abject horror. She was a pure grandmother complete with moth-eaten sweater and glasses on a chain. Oh god.

"Jesse is a thirty-eight year old man baby with supernatural powers and a talent for breaking Guinness World Records associated with stupidity. He drinks like a sailor, smokes like a fiend, and fights like the two combined. You know nothing of suffering, ma'am. Nothing. So please take your photos and stories and just leave me to die."

Tulip wouldn't have thought that old legs could move that fast.

_Cleanup in aisle three. Clean up in—what? Oh god, emergency cleanup in aisle three—!

"Goddammit, Jesse."

***

Four months into the road trip they got matching t-shirts. Cass ordered them special online and—somehow—had them delivered to a random Target in Arkansas where they'd been camping in the
parking lot. Without a washing machine and all they got kinda smelly, but well worth it in the long run.

Jesse now had a black tee with, "If found, please return to Cass or Tulip."

Cass's shirt, in big bold letters read: "I'M IN NO WAY, SHAPE, OR FORM CASS"

Tulip's: "I'm definitely not Tulip."

They kinda hoped he'd get lost someday.

***

Jess didn't get lost. Pity. He did blow up a large barn though.

Standing before the local police—Tulip putting on her cute, innocent act; Cass wondering if he could bribe the sheriff with weed—they realized that there had to be some kind of united front here. For all their sakes.

"And how do you know this man?" the sheriff asked, thumbing his hand at a pissed off Jesse in the backseat of the cruiser.


"Ha! Alright then, luv. Let's take our asshole boyfriend home."

So they did. They could continue bitching about custody tomorrow.
Jesse was starting to wonder exactly how dense Cassidy was.

After all, Genesis had been their thing right from the start: Cass finding Jesse's unconscious ass splayed out on the church floor, Jesse testing his powers out for the first time on Cass. (He'd tried to play some Justine Bieber in the car. It hadn't gone over well.) Cass had been the one protecting him from “secret government agents,” consoling him about Eugene, and knocking him over the head with a fucking fire extinguisher when he'd let said appendage swell just a bit too much. How the hell could Cass watch Jesse using Genesis and not think about them?

Jesse had been all ready to play the cop's game... until that one asshole threatened Cass with sunlight.

He told the asshole to mace his own balls, hoping that maybe a crude reference to genitals would get Cass' head in the right space.

No? How about two men holding hands? Did that get the point across?

Apparently not. Jesse rolled his eyes and told another cop to start singing "The Yellow Rose of Texas," wondering if Cass would listen closely to the once impossible love story.

No. The man was an idiot.

"Shoulda just had the guy shout, 'Fuck me, Cassidy,'" Tulip smirked. "That he might actually notice."

Jesse groaned.

Little time for that. When the Saint arrived and the shootout began, with Tulip safe beside him, Jesse
had little on his mind except where Cass was and whether he was safe. When he finally found him under the car, Jesse had just enough flair left in him to play the gentleman card, holding Cass' umbrella like he would for any lady.

"Ready to go?"

"Yes, please."

This fool. Subtle didn't work on Cass, not at all, and one of these days Jesse was just going to have to come out and say it.

*All those commands, asshole? All that power?*

*That's for you.*
"I'm not leaving my car, Jesse."

Cass hadn't gotten to hear the words (considering he was trying to save his own ass by crushing the skull of one of those gobeshite cops—may he rest in peace), but he sure as hell didn't miss their escape in the previously gas-less vehicle; couldn't fail to notice the smears of blood around Tulip's mouth that spoke of some really fucked up lengths that girl went to.

"What's up with that, luv?"

It occurred to Cass, as Tulip gave him a Look across the motel table, that she wasn't actually a mind reader capable of following his train of thought from two days before. Right.

"Just thinkin' about your car," he said. Cass waved vaguely towards the cracked and dimly lit parking lot. "We coulda taken' any of the pigs’ cruisers. You coulda saved yourself a whole mouth full of nasty." He grinned as Tulip gagged, remembering. "Why are you so attached to that beaten down ol' shithole anyhow?"

She chucked the empty packet of chips at his head. "Don't go insulting my car."

"I'm not!"

"You just did, asshole."

"I—" Okay. He had. But that was entirely beside the point. Cass flailed and knocked the chip bag back with a glare. Tulip sighed and leaned into her chair, like she was doing him some kinda big favor.

"You believe in premonitions, Cassidy?"

"I'm a 119 year old vampire whose best bud is possessed by some unholy offspring and we're off to find god. I believe in a lot of shit, luv."

Tulip snorted. "Fair enough. Well I had one. Out on that road with Mr. Trigger Happy trying to blow my brains out. Some goddamn stupid feeling told me, 'Don't you leave that car now, Tulip. Don't you dare,' and so I didn't. Best not to fuck with that kind of stuff, you know what I'm saying?"

"Yeah," Cass nodded slow. He’d heard things from mates in the past and given recent experiences? He didn’t doubt it for a second. "But why—?"

"I figure it was Annville."

Tulip stood suddenly, snatching the chip bag and crushing it in her fist. She didn't look at Cassidy.
"Guess some part of me just knew. That car, our shit in the trunk... that's all that's left of our town now. A whole community reduced to my ‘shithole’ and Jesse’s torn up socks. Jesus. But we gotta take care of it, right? Least, that’s how I figure."

Tulip left the room silently, though Cass barely noticed since he was fingering the threadbare shirt he'd had on for near a week now. The one he'd filched out of the church's donation box when Emily wasn't looking. The one with a tiny stain on the cuff from her cooking.

"Yeah," he said again.
"Was there something else you wanted?"

Tulip went back to chugging lemon juice, the hot pinpricks of Tabasco still dotting her tongue. Damn if this boy didn't have a whole host of talents hidden up his sleeve. Tulip never would have thought it, but the taste of intestines and gasoline just swept straight out of her mouth—which was more of a miracle than she’d seen on their whole trip so far. It was that fevered gratitude that had her asking, "Something else you wanted?" in the same tone she asked Jesse, "Wanna go out sometime?" Playful with just a hint of sarcasm. Cass could role with that too.

"Lots 'a things," he said, sliding closer. Cass had grime under his nails and some sort of cut was bleeding into his shirt, right above the waistband of his jeans. Tulip considered pointing that out until she caught a whiff of the smoke on him; until he had mildly burnt palms skimming the inside of her wrist. "Lots 'a regrets, luv."

Tulip blinked. Regrets? He'd best not be saying what she thought he was saying, because the store clerk was gone and Jesse was busy outside and really, truly, honestly, what was the harm in doing it again when the sin was already eating you?

That was Tulip's motto, anyway.

To her relief (and her shame) Cass grinned quick, finally fitting his fingers all the way round her wrist, thin and strong as a bird’s bone. He used the leverage to tug her closer.

"Shouldn't have taught you that little trick," he murmured, skimming her hair with his nose. "Best to just get the taste out myself, don’t you think?"

She did, even if they weren't words Tulip could say yet. Not that it mattered. Not with Cass' lips fitting over hers, moving so slow and teasing, like they had all the time in the world.

They didn't. Even has his hands slipped down her ass and hers moved to play in the blood along his stomach, Tulip kept one eye on the door.
Nearly 4:00am and people were finally starting to clear the streets, leaving behind Mardi Gras beads, beer cans, cigarette butts, vomit, gum, the occasional shoe, and a lasting feeling of vertigo. Jesse knew it all well. He'd have indulged in it if there wasn't a mission to complete. Still, he didn't mind having one last drink, leaning against the brick wall that separated a nameless strip club from an equally nameless bar. The tequila felt good in the back of his throat.

"Hey there, sonny. Mind holding this a minute?"

One of the stragglers came out of the shadows to shove their purse in Jesse's face. He was so shocked by the action—who just handed over their valuables?—that he automatically did as he was told, momentarily stunned by the bright neon yellow and the lingering stench of incense.

Jesse lowered the purse to find a woman rummaging in another bag. She wore a purple, ruffled skirt; skin-tight crop top, her long hair pulled messily into a half-up half-down do. Kitten heels completed the outfit and the whole thing might have been quirky cute if she wasn't in her early 80's. At least.

The beads around her neck drew attention to sagging breasts. Jesse jerked his gaze away and found a wrinkled stomach instead, her belly button like a tiny black hole. He rolled his eyes to the heavens.

Beside him the woman cackled. "Look if you want, sonny, not many do anymore. Least none as handsome as you." She cursed under her breath then and Jesse caught a whiff of something flowery and toxic. The woman bent so far into her tote that she nearly disappeared. "Now where the bleeding fuck are my keys. C'mon, you rat bastards. Show your furry little hides."

Jesse choked on a laugh.

"Find that funny, do you? Well I'm not touched in the head so you know. Not yet anyway. I've got a rat's foot attached to the keychain. Now don't go giving me a look like that. It's for good luck."

"Thought that was a rabbit's foot," Jesse said.

"Ha! Only a fool buys into that shit. It's a rat's foot you want, one of the big ones they've got in the wild. Or in the heart of New York City, so I'm told. You'd think a damn charm would be half decent at showing up though when you need—tHERE YOU ARE."
The woman pulled out a mess of keys that, yes, had something black, furry, and massive attached to the end of it. Jesse pulled what he was sure was a distasteful expression and handed the purse back by thumb and forefinger. After a second he handed over the rest of his drink too.

"Thank you kindly," she said, downing the rest of his tequila. "Now. Good deed for another, I suppose. Anything I can do you for?" Her tone left no ambiguity about what she was willing to 'do.' "Can't imagine a man like you hangs around when the party's done for no good reason, eh?"

Fair enough. Jesse figured it couldn't hurt.

"I'm looking for God, ma'am. And no, not the one with the dog."

A grin spread across her face, the skin so thin Jesse thought he could see the tops of her teeth. He shuddered a little.

"No, didn't figure you for the type. Here," she shoved the empty glass back into his hands. "There's another bar you should check out. Just a few doors down. One with the boa on the sign, can't miss it. They'll be open a while longer. You do yourself a favor and ask the barman if he's heard anything about God."

Jesse palmed the glass. He rolled it between his hands. "Why that bar?"

"Let's just say I've gotten lucky there in the past."

She curtsied then, a wobbly thing that left her chuckling. The woman turned and left before Jesse even considered getting her name. He watched her yellow bag bobbing away, thinking of rat's feet and luck.

"You meet all types," he muttered.

Still, Jesse turned down the street where one bar still had its lights on, a pink, feathered boa waving gently in the breeze.

As said before, it couldn't hurt.
Hello, hello, hello!

Busy week, nasty cold, and endless allergies laid me out for over a week. I feel like I've forgotten how to write lol. But here's some shit and I'll be catching up on Preacher over the next two days hell yeah~

Cass held perfectly still. One might even say he was corpse-like.

The comparison amused him, which was all kinds of bad considering he was trying valiantly not to move. That wasn't helped much by the fact that he now had a massive bubble of laughter simmering in his gut, just waiting to spew forth and ruin everything. With careful slowness Cass pressed his lips together, forcing the laughter back down. It wasn't even that funny. The dead man loooking corpse-like. Ha. Stupid. This was just stress laughter, trying to worm its way out and make his life a living hell.

Like it wasn't already. Cass could feel every line and contour of Jesse's body snug against him; could smell his cheap aftershave and clock each time he breathed. Tulip was nearly as tangible, a mere foot away and shifting beneath the covers. He'd already lost the battle earlier, babbling about how Tulip and Jesse could get it on if they wanted. Cass wouldn't mind. Good golly gosh no he wouldn't, because watching the two of them together was the closest he'd ever manage to get them both, or either. This, this bed sharing madness, it was straight out of a harlequin paperback and driving Cass mad.

"Hey, Tulip."

Cass froze. It wasn't possible since he was already completely, totally still, but there you have it. Jesse's words shot through his body like good old Medusa and Cass turned straight to stone.

"Mmm?"

"What the hell are we gonna do about Cass?"

"Do?"

"Yeah, 'do.' Guy's a bit of an idiot don't you think?"

...rude. He was right there!

Oh god what if they'd forgotten he was there?

"Idiot?" Tulip seemed to consider that. She shifted a little, moving the whole bed with her, and Cass noted the sleepy tinder to her voice. "Isn't he, like, nearly a hundred years older than we are?"

"Yep. You'd think he'd grow a brain in that time, but I guess not. See, here we are, sharing this bed, and he's real nervous about it. I can tell. Guy's like a damn plank of wood over here. And not the good kind of wood either, if you get me."
Oh Jesus Fucking Christ. Eyes squeezed shut, Cass stiffened even further. Which didn’t help!

"My guess is the fool is thinking he's in the way or something. Interrupting our time together. But, well, to my mind at least, he's forgotten one real important thing."

"What's that?"

Yeah. Inquiring minds wanted to know...

"Just that anyone we didn't want in our bed wouldn't be in the goddamn bed. Perfectly good floor over there. Anyone tried to encroach and we'd wail on them good, right?"

"Right." Tulip yawned. "Always loving the broken knee-caps."

"Too right. So I suppose that means we do want to bastard here. Too bad he's not smart enough to realize it. If he did maybe he'd relax a little and get some goddamn sleep."

As Jesse said it he turned, slipping one arm up around the top of Cass's head, his body now melding to his rather than just running alongside it, concurrent. In the shift of the springs Cass could feel Tulip doing to same to Jesse.

"…You're both right assholes, you know that?"

"Funny," Jesse murmured. "Thought I heard a sleeping man speak."

Cass snorted and with it he finally relaxed. Mike's mattress was absolute shit, but the blanket wasn't too scratchy and for once his feet didn't touch the footboard. More importantly, he had two living heaters cocooned on his left, making the world all simple and fuzzy.

Seemed like there was a fair bit to discuss between them. Luckily, that could wait until morning.
Chapter 250

Chapter Notes

250 CHAPTER WOO!
(Also you all know the vine that really inspired this lol.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Humanity confused Fiore a great deal. So much of what they did was purposeless.

He watched people when he went outside, playing iPhone games that neither increased their skillsets nor earned them money. What use was matching fictional, colored candies together? They had whole conversations that just went in circles—or worse, they wrote and spoke to diaries that, by all logic, would never, could never speak back. There were articles of clothing that didn't keep its human warm or dry. It was just... there. Existing. For "fashion." And what was the point of chewing a bubble-flavored substance that you never actually swallowed? What was the point of bubbles? They just floated away or, in Fiore's limited experience, tasted horrible on the tongue.

"They're looking for purpose," he said decisively. It wasn't the first time and DeBlanc merely rolled his eyes, a fascinating human quirk that, Fiore was disgusted to note, he rather liked.

"Not everything needs a purpose," he shot back. DeBlanc raised the book he'd been reading. "Some things are just enjoyable. That's their purpose."

He'd been on Earth one week, three days, eighteen hours, and twenty-six minutes. Fiore wasn't convinced that he'd understand these concepts any better once the clock reached twenty-seven.

Still. DeBlanc had yet to lead him astray.

The motel television was on, as per usual now, and as DeBlanc went back to his book Fiore watched a commercial for a summer camp, soaking up all the brightly colored frivolities that humans longed to indulge in. He saw suits made specifically for swimming, bright orange campfires, the rhythmic chanting of many girls, other who climbed ropes up into the trees and risked breaking their fragile bones. There was something called bug juice.
Despite his confusion Fiore was fascinated, and perhaps that right there was the key.

He stood, pulling out their bag of supplies and rifling through it. By the time Fiore found what he'd been looking for DeBlanc had set his book aside. He didn't flinch at all when the handcuff was snapped firmly over his wrist.

Fiore had to sit on the other side of the bed now, just a foot from DeBlanc's chair. He kept his eyes on the TV even as the chain between them was lifted and rattled.

"I haven't a clue what's going on in that head of yours."

"...friendship bracelet." Fiore glared briefly at the metal. "Or, you know, closest I've got. The girls on the telly have got colorful beads."

There was silence. Then a huff of amusement from DeBlanc.

"Well, maybe we can find some beads later." Which would be purposeless. Stupid even.

Fiore was rather looking forward to it.

Chapter End Notes

Prompt: Shackles
Chapter 251

Chapter Notes

H/C, yeah! The prompt for this one is in the end notes :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Things were dead silent in this part of Texas. Nothing but desert and a dusty road—which hadn't seen another car in hours, if not days. It made the crying in the backseat quite loud, sort of ricocheting off the torn seats and seeping out the bullet holes in their roof. Jesse swallowed around the sound. Anyone passing might have thought they were hearing a ghost on this old, deserted stretch.

For all that though, Cass still cried like a human.

"Easy, easy," Jesse murmured. He wasn't much for comfort. Not unless you needed a free drink and an awkward pat on the back. This though... this was different. More. Cass was curled into a ball with his face pressed hard between his knees, the shiny surface of his back glinting in the twilight; raw strips of flesh casting shadows. It was bad. Holy fuck it was bad, yet Jesse couldn't help but think that Cass had suffered worse, hadn't he? What was a flaying to burning yourself alive just to prove a point?

Yeah. This was why he sucked at comfort.

Cass was shaking. No, he was rocking. With a curse Jesse realized that Tulip just wasn't getting back in time. Funny thing about escape plans: no one ever thought about the gas, and there was no one in this empty hell hole for Jesse to command. Tulip had slipped off her heels and hoofed it straight ahead over ten minutes ago, shouting promises over her shoulder that she'd come back with gas and supplies and anything else that might need. It was a shaky promise, but it calmed Jesse a little. He pictured the gravel outside, Tulip's bare feet, and he wondered just how torn up they'd be by the time she got back. They'd probably look a lot like Cass' back.


If Cass heard him he gave no indication. His cries, far from tapering off, seemed to be growing in intensity. Jesse watched as dirtied fingers dug hard into Cass' jeans, knuckle-white from distress or outright pain. The hiccupping sobs were wet due to emotion or blood. Jesse just couldn't tell anymore. He ran hands through his hair, gripping the strands, and forced himself to look at Cass.
because he wasn't some fucking coward. No. Not with this. Because sure, men weren't supposed to cry, or if they did they did it alone. They did it soft. And somehow the vamparism just made it worse because what guy tore men's throats out and then sobbed like this, open and endless like a child? It felt wrong. It looked worse. But Jesse wouldn't turn away. It...

It was Cass.

His own hands were shaking as he clamored forward to the front of the car, snatching Tulip's almost-empty slushy cup from three days back. Before the kidnapping and everything went to hell. Jesse cranked down the manual window and tossed the remnants out into the dirt, nose curling at the smell and dead flies. That done, he fished in his back pocket for his swiss army knife.

Here Jesse paused. He didn't want to slice into his hand—he might need it later, in case those bastards caught up with them. Carving a chunk of his arm didn't seem particularly useful either. With a curse Jesse pulled up his jeans and cut a thin slice along his calf, muttering about how the movies always made this look so damn easy. Gravity helped though and the pain meant shit all to him. Within a minute Jesse had a couple inches of blood pooled into the slushy cup. He tugged his jeans back down without bothering to bind the wound.

"Here," he said. Fuck. Was that his voice shaking? Jesse ground his teeth and slid a little closer. He went to drape his arm around Cass' shoulders and then realized what a fucking colossally bad idea that would be. Jesus. What was wrong with him?

You're panicking, a little voice whispered and Jesse wanted to scream with laughter. He hadn't panicked through any of the shit he'd been dealt over the years. He hadn't even panicked when Tulip said, "My baby."

Maybe that was because, throughout it all, Tulip had never cried.

Jesse pushed the cup against Cass' knees, right between his shaking hands. "Drink," he said, insistent. "C'mon, Cass. Haven't you ever had Blue Raspberry Blood before?"

It didn't get him a weak chuckle like Jesse had hoped. If anything the sob that sounded right after his joke was more heart rending than all the others, so much so that Jesse nearly dropped the precious blood as his whole body went nerveless.

Fuck it, he thought.
His daddy had never taught him this, and Cass wasn't Tulip, but for all that there was hardly any hesitation as Jesse closed the distance between them, pressing a hand into the back of Cass' neck since he couldn't touch any lower. He felt the exact moment Cass felt him: the way his entire body tightened and then loosened like Jello. Tenderly, Jesse dragged his hand up into Cass' hair, petting him.

"Drink," he said again.

He'd thought about his child. How it would be to cradle and rock them, care in an abstract, all-encompassing way. Jesse felt like he had an infant under his hand now as Cass stirred—fragile and miraculous. Cass raised his head and Jesse helped him down the blood he'd collected. Steading the cup wasn't necessary, though in another sense it absolutely was.

Cass was still crying lightly. Tiny, jittering breaths that made swallowing difficult. Jesse didn't realize why until Cass finished and leaned his face into Jesse's palm, shutting his eyes.

"I thought they had you," he whispered, broken. "I thought they were doing this to you."

Chapter End Notes

Written for the Preacher Kinkmeme prompt: "Cassidy gets tortured and Jesse needs to let the guy feed on him to recover" found here. As the keeper of this blog I've decided that it's my solemn duty to try and fill some of these fantastic prompts~
Chapter 252

Chapter Notes

Who wants to hear about how I go back to school in two days and in a state of deep denial I've done basically NOTHING but play World of Warcraft for practically a week? That's cool right?!

And when I write again I write trash. Enjoy :D

"So what other terrible tastes do you have?" Tulip asked.

It was the first thing anyone had said in hours. Jesse blinked hazily, still picking mud off the cuffs of his pants and dropping it into the carpet. His trip back from drowning the Saint had exhausted even his seemingly endless reserve and he yawned in response. Not like the question was meant for him. He didn't have any terrible tastes.

Jesse smiled. It felt like the first in a long time.

"Well?" Tulip demanded and now Cass stirred, taking his hand out of Dennis' hair to blink at her.

"Say what now?"

"What other terrible tastes you got?" Tulip seemed bored with her own words, leaning back in the chair and staring up at the ceiling. Jesse knew that ploy well. She'd pulled it often enough on him. Mostly when she was trying to push past an argument they'd had, even apologize, in her own way.

She found a pen between the cushions and twirled it between her fingers. "We know you like Bieber, disgustingly cheap wine, soap operas, PB&J with chips in it..."

Cass was scowling now. He used Dennis' thigh to leverage himself up.

"—sparkly butterfly shirts, sparkling skirts, those goddamn gel pens. What is it with you and glitter?"
"Now wait just a fuckin' minute." Cass flapped his hands frantically and Tulip caught Jesse's eye, winking. "You gotta slow down so I can tell you how wrong you are about all of that! Glitter makes everything better, you soulless heathen. Don't go knocking chips in your sandwich until you've tried it—and I know you have not. You haven't watched any *Young and the Restless* yet either, now have you? And, and..." Cass narrowed his eyes. "What was the rest of it?"

"Bieber," Jesse and Tulip intoned and Cass squawked like an indignant parrot.

"We've been over that! So many times! When will the two of you let it go?"

"Never."

It was amidst all the squabbling that Dennis shifted, still a little shaky in the arms and legs. He looked among the three of them, mouth occasionally working as he tried to follow the rapid-fire English. Oh, he knew more than he let on, a whole lot more than the few, lascivious words of French his father had bothered to learn over the years, and Dennis thought he deserved every ounce of discomfort he could squeeze from that man. Including:

"Ponies."

His soft voice cut across the room and his three—largely uninvited—guests ceased their bickering to stare at him, one with horror and two with hopeful glee. Dennis knew the whole title of course, but he put on his patented old-foreign-man face just to see his father start scrambling in panic. He had just enough strength to shove Cassidy back and plant his face into the couch cushion.


"Oh," Tulip breathed. "My Little..."

"Pony," Jesse finished.

Dennis definitely couldn't catch the explosion of language that occurred after that, but the sentiment was clear as his father succeeded in pushing to his feet and started yelling, his words unheard over his strange friends' cackles. Dennis sat back, satisfied, and resolved to 'accidentally' leave out the colorful DVD collection that father was so fond of—wreak a little more havoc when they next
needed it. 'Friendship is magic' indeed.

Oh, his father had terrible taste. No doubt about it. But not, perhaps, when it came to companionship.
"You're honestly trying to tell me that paying over $800 is worth it because we get pretzels?"

Cass raised his hands in defense against Tulip's incredulity. "I'm just sayin', luv, they don't have to give us those, now do they?"

She turned to Jesse. "$800 pretzels. This man."

"Told you he used to be rich." Jesse didn't even bother looking up from his phone.

It was DeBlanc who leaned in, trying not to pull out Fiore's phone charger, or knock over any more of their luggage, or do anything that might force the travel-temper wrath his way. "Tulip. Where exactly are you getting that number?"

"Oh, I don't know, maybe it was from the $600 ticket, the $25 I paid to check a bag, the $100 more because it was two freaking pounds over—" Tulip gnashed her teeth. "The cab ride over here, the Starbucks Jesse just had to have—"

He toasted her, still not looking. "Don't pretend you didn't want your latte."

"Humph. And this man is okay with it all because there's in-flight pretzels."

“And drinks!”

DeBlanc had gone a little bug-eyed. "So getting us to California costs over $800?"

“No,” Tulip said slowly, “It’s more because we each got a ticket. You following me?”

“That's, that's..." He struggled for a moment, turning to Fiore. "I don't know how many nights that
"Of you two together?" Cass tilted his drink with a saucy grin. "Why Fiore, I didn't know you charged so much. Not that it's not deserving..."

Fiore's glare sent Tulip into a spasm of laughter. "Nights in our hotel room."

"My comments still stand."

Jesse finally threw his phone down in disgust. "Fucking zombies."

"You're not planting the right plants," Fiore said.

"Like you'd know?"

"I was in the business of helping to create life."

The adoring look DeBlanc cast his way was just enough to dispel Jesse's bad mood. He rolled his eyes, knowing travel always did him in like this, and tossed the phone Fiore's way, practically daring him to do better. As DeBlanc peered over his husband's shoulder Jesse mulled over their comments.

"Probably $40 a night," he said, gesturing vaguely as everyone looked his way. "For the motel I mean. Those rooms are shit, but Annville is cheap all around. It's what comes of 250 people circulating the same cash day in, day out. Hey, you remember that dollar with the mustache on it that kept showing up in Shelley's diner?"

Jesse expected Tulip to laugh, but her eyes were suddenly somber as she stared down into her lap. "Was," she said.

"Huh?"

"Annville was a cheap-ass place."
Fiore put down the phone and leaned against DeBlanc's side, shutting his eyes as an arm came up around his shoulders. After a moment of hesitation Cass leaned forward to grasp Tulip's hand and Jesse didn't miss how the path laid Cass's arm across his leg as well. The noise of the airport—people talking, babies crying, luggage rolling, everyone sighing—was both cruel and oddly comforting. Jesse bathed in it a moment and thought, sappily, that life really did go on. Their town was just a small blip in the grand scheme of it all.

But an important blip.

"Think we'll like California?" he asked, nudging Tulip’s side. He felt her release the breath she'd been holding.

"It had just better be worth the price."

Chapter End Notes

I had to travel the other day and when I suffer these characters suffer with me. Also, Tulip's complaint about her bags is 100% based on a real story T____T
"You did what?"

Trust Jesse Custer to make this sound like some awful kind of sin. Cass dithered for a moment before tapping the basket with his foot.

"Did the laundry," he muttered, feeling the squishy sweatshirt against his toes. When Jesse continued to stare Cass adopted a scowl that was so very far from what he'd been aiming for. Couldn't make it go away though. His stomach was in knots and his hands were pouring sweat, but you sure wouldn't know it from his expression.

"What? There's a mat just a few blocks down. Can't a bloke pull his weight once in a while?"

Jesse softened. "You do, Cass," he said—and then the suspicion came rushing back. "But you despise doing laundry. So what exactly is it you're after?"

He had no spit to swallow with. Cass had to clear his throat twice before getting a word out and when they did come they were raspy with nerves. "Right now all I'm 'after' is someone to help me fold this mess. You up for it?"

Jesse paused.

"Nice try," he said, standing from the motel bed and laughing as he went by, clapping Cass hard on the shoulder. "You started this little chore, you can damn well finish it. Help the vampire fold laundry..." Jesse shook his head like that was the funniest thing he'd heard in years and hell, maybe it was.

He left, closing the door behind him. Slowly, Cass picked up a shirt from the top of the bundle, the one he'd been hoping Jesse would grab for himself.

A pretty gold ring tumbled out onto the carpet.
"Well that didn't fuckin' work," Cass muttered.

***

He tried again the next day, with food this time, though there wasn't much fancy to work with out in Bumfuck Nowhere, Texas. To make matters worse, Jesse's normal munchies were... problematic. Ring didn't fit into the top of a beer can or a bottle. And who the fuck put one under a burger bun? Getting all slimy with ketchup and mustard, to say nothing of the fact that Jesse would probably break his damn tooth on it. Honestly, didn't the man have anything refined in his life?

The answer was no. Cass settled for dumping the ring in a bag of Funyuns.

"Thanks," Jesse said absently. He took the bag between thumb and forefinger and it was like severing Cass' whole arm. "You seen Tulip?"

Cass loved the woman, but he didn't want to talk about Tulip right now. "Nah. Out somewhere."

"Excellent," and Jesse quickly changed the channel to Say Yes to the Dress. "You say nothing."

Cass mimed sealing his lips despite the fact that they were splitting wide with a grin. "Never, padre."

And for a while things were perfectly normal. Jesse watched his chick-flick material as Cass watched him eat the Funyuns, one after another after another until he was sure the goddamn bag was endless. Cass was a pathetic, jittery mess—and Jesse noticed.

"You okay?" he asked. "Aw fuck, Cass. You're not using again are you?"

"No!"

"Well then what's got under your skin all of a sudden?"
His mouth worked. Nothing came out. Again. Cass settled for shrugging until he could say, "Just bored."

"Well then let's go find something fun to do. I’ve seen this one anyhow. A lot."

Jesse popped one last Funyun into his mouth, extended the bag to Cass, and when he could only shake his head dumbly he balled up the rest and tossed it into the trash. Jesse was going on about a shooting range nearby, already heading towards their stolen truck as Cass dived into the basket and fished the bag out.

He pocketed the ring, smelling of cheap, fried goodness.

***

Day three. What was it they said? Third time was the charm? Not bloody likely. Not by that look on Jesse's face.

"You heard me," Cass said. The nerves were gone. "I fucking love you, Jesse Custer, now are you gonna marry me or not? Because I'm getting real sick of this nonsense."

"Getting sick of...?" Jesse went cross-eyed trying to see the ring shoved under his nose.

"Yeah. Not all of us are oblivious assholes. So just give me an answer because romance is way fuckin' dead and I—"

Oh. Hmm. Or not. That kiss felt pretty romantic...

In fact, it felt like a 'yes.'

Chapter End Notes
OTP Prompt: "Imagine person A trying to tell person B they like them for the very first time in a very cute way. Person B suspects that something is up because A is acting very nervous. A gets so nervous that they dodge telling them entirely. A few days later, B tells A that they actually love them and have had feelings for them for a long time in the most straightforward way possible. How A reacts is up to you."

Such fluff :D
"Nu-uh, no way, I'll be dead and buried before that happens. You have your fun with my cold corpse, Cassidy."

He squinted at Tulip under the neon lights, needing to shout to be heard over the music. "Okay first off, that's all kinds of messed up imagery, and this is comin' from the literal undead guy, alright? And second, why the bloody hell not?"

Tulip crossed her arms and settled in. "I don't dance."

"You don’t…?" Cass gapped and turned to Jesse—who shook his head in defeat.

"Trust me, she don't dance."

"But you're exactly the dancin' type!"

"Tell that to my friends 'no' and 'fuck you.'"

They were starting to hold up the line to the bar. It wasn't really the kind of venue for standing around. The whole space was the dance floor and if you weren't moving it was because you couldn't anymore. In fact, Cass could see the tight-shirted men going around to pick up the unconscious partiers and for just a brief moment he had a rush of fond nostalgia. This place was a mess. The kind of mess that Jesse and Tulip both should have loved.

He clapped Tulip hard on the shoulder. "All you need is a little liquid courage, luv."

"That is not what I said."

"Maybe somethin' a little stronger."
"You're digging yourself in real deep, Cassidy."

For all that though Tulip did move when the time came, letting Cass drag her towards the middle of the room, though she still seemed to resist him the whole way. It was an act—a damn good one—but an act none-the-less. Jesse didn't need a lifetime of experience learning Tulip's body language to know that: it was in the fact that she went at all.

_She doesn't dance_, he thought. Tulip never had. Jesse thought she never would. It was just one of those quirky little things about her, maybe something self-conscious or fearful. Not that it mattered. Whatever held her back before was oozing away now and Jesse watched, mesmerized, as Cass did a goofy turn, coaxing a laugh, sidled closer, and rested his hands commandingly on Tulip's hips.

After a moment of hesitation they began to sway.

_She's dancing_, he thought now and Jesse saw the Tulip that had kissed Cass so convincingly the other night. The one whose acting skills had been as flimsy as they were tonight.

They had kissed. They were dancing.

_And you never managed that._

Chapter End Notes

OTP Prompt: "Imagine your OTP going to a dance club. Person A is reluctant to dance but Person B eventually forces them to and they both end up having a great time."

But what about Person C? :(

Chapter 256

Chapter Notes

An anon asked for more in the Julip + baby universe (Chapter 173) so here's some Uncle Cass :D

Cass had honestly believed that nothing was scarier than a pregnant Tulip (a horror story he intended to write down someday and outsell Stephen King with), but then, of course, came the time when teeny tiny Christina was outside the womb and vulnerable to all sorts of evils.

Including him. Apparently.

"I know how to watch a bloody infant, alright? I'm over a hundred years old!"

That argument didn't sway Tulip, especially considering that Cass' voice got Christina crying again. He grimaced and made frantic cooing noises at her in Tulip's arms.

"Okay," he said, far more quietly. "That right there was a mistake, but I do know what I'm doing. Don't I? Don't I, my precious little pea?"

Tulip rolled her eyes at Cass' baby-talk. Even moreso when it actually succeeded in calming Christina down. "What is it with you and food names anyhow?"

"They're inherently perfect."

"Uh huh. Look, all I really know about you, Cassidy, is that you drink, you smoke, you fuck things up, and you've got a French son who kinda hates you. Now why the hell would I leave my precious baby in your hands?"

"I'd say the real question is whether the two of us are actually all that different, eh Tulip? Minus the French son, of course." Cass let the staring contest go on for another moment. Christina squirmed and babbled. "Or maybe what I should be askin' is whether or not you really want some time alone with Jesse..."
"Alright, alright," and Tulip practically shoved Christina into Cass' arms. From the hotel doorway Jesse cackled, raising his cigarette in a toast. Cass hasn't even realized the asshole was there, but now he started swaying his hips, crooking fingers at Tulip and doing everything possible to embarrass her. She gazed heavenward as if she might find strength there.

"It had to be him," she muttered. "Out of all the goddamn men on God's green Earth..."

"Hey Tulip! We making another baby tonight or what?"

Cass winced as Jesse had to make a sudden beeline into the room, Tulip's wrathful fingers just a foot or so behind. The door slammed shut behind them, the 'Do Not Disturb' sign slid out from underneath, and Cass resigned to take these impressionable baby ears as far away from the show as possible.

"They like to break things," Cass cooed down at Christina. "Your parents are kinky bastards, sweetie pie. Yes they are, oh yes they are, c'mon now..."

There wasn't exactly anywhere to go though. Drugstore. Dirt road. Bar. Dirt. Creepy pit off in the distance. More dirt. What a spoiled little thing Christina was the day they'd found a McDonald's with a playground in it. Still, she didn't seem to mind much, especially at this age when car keys and stupid facial expressions were the height of entertainment. So Cass nestled Christina in the crook of his arm and just walked her between the motel sign and the old beer can planted by the side of the road. All the while he talked.

"—havin' just celebrated your first New Years. Gonna be a full year old soon, huh? Whaddya think about that? Feelin' all wise and mature? God fuckin' knows you'll be the most mature outta all of us, no doubt..."

Cass brushed back her wisps of hair to get a good look at Christina's eyes. They were brown, just like her Mama's. Cute button nose and red cheeks that put an apple to shame. One day not too far off she'd be one hell of a looker and oh, Cass couldn't wait to teach her how to sever some asshole's balls.

"You're a lucky little tyke, you know that?" he whispered. "We don't have much to offer you in the way of fancy shit, but you've got somethin' a whole lot of other tykes don't: stupid adoration." Cass split into a grin as Christina smiled and gurgled up at him. "That's right. We'd do anything for you. Your Mom, Dad, and your Uncle Cass. The world can fuckin' burn far as we care, so long as you're
good to go."

Cass started wandering back down towards the sign. Best to give Tulip and Jesse another hour. At least.

As he did he bent to whisper near Christina's cheek.

"Wanna know a secret, little pea? I've known—_had_—a lot of kids in my life. But I'm pretty sure that you're my favorite..."
Chapter 257

Chapter Notes

For the prompt: Julip + good old-fashioned bed sharing~

Jesse was cursing as he tried to maneuver open the door, one hand dragging his suitcase while the other carried an already-full laundry basket. He realized why it was so difficult when he got in far enough to find the small mountain of luggage blocking his doorway.

"Oh Christ," he whispered. "It's a girl."

Annville High wasn't anything like the seminary school his father had wanted him to attend: small, liberal, and sporting all sorts of new-fangled policies, including co-ed dorms. There'd been emails sent early in the summer, shitty "Get to know your roommate!" things that Jesse had deleted without opening. Looking back, maybe he should have at least bothered to learn his roommate's name. Or gender.

There was someone moving inside. Jesse was sweating as he heaved his way in and it had nothing at all to do with the effort of lugging his stuff.

*Please be ugly, please be ugly, please be the most horrendous girl I've ever seen in my life—*

"Holy fuck."

She whirled, eyebrows up at the profanity, and Jesus, Mary, Joseph, she wasn't ugly by anyone's definition. Jesse managed to tear his eyes away from curves and a low-cut halter just long enough to see the plaque reading "Tulip" on her desk. Either that was her name or she just really liked flowers... and somehow Jesse didn't think she was the flower-liking type.

Tulip huffed a laugh. "You've got a mouth on you. Alright. Jesse, ain't it? Look, Jesse, I'm no more a fan of this room sharing business than you are, so you just keep to your side and I'll keep the hell to mine. Don't touch my stuff, don't fucking touch me," Tulip laid a hand delicately on a can of pepper spray, "and put a freaking sock on the door or something if you're bringing anyone back. That's a sock plus warning me ahead of time. No dirty plates or food left about—I'm not having our room infested with bugs and shit—keep your things neat, use Febrez if you've gotta, and if you forget to turn your alarm off on the weekends I will chuck it out the window." She paused. "Got any questions?"

"Yeah," Jesse said slowly. He took in the explosion of clothes that was Tulip unpacking. The two desks (one already claimed), and the small window she'd referenced. Jesse raised his finger and pursed his lips, feeling an awful sense of dread overtake him.

"Where the hell is the second bed?"

***

The second bed, it seemed, was still on its way.

"—Ikea," Jesse was saying, throwing up his hands as Cass roared with laughter. "Some idiot senior
breaks the bed last year, they don't bother getting a new one before the start of the semester, and they've got to give us that shit? What exactly am I paying this school for?"

Cass kicked his legs out into the hallway, back to the wall, shoulder against Jesse's as he wiped tears from his eyes. "You're not payin' a bloody thing, Jesse. Your rich daddy is. Hey, I know, how about you call him with an update? Bit of complain' to ease the soul. Remind him why you wanted to go here so fuckin' badly..." Cass snickered at Jesse's glare. "Oh fuck, tell him—tell him—tell him your roommate's a girl."

Jesse buried his face in his hands. "He can never know."

"Please, God, let me hear that conversation."

"...I will if you let me sleep in your room."

Cass went from comic to disgusted in a heartbeat. "Fuck that. These rooms are small enough as it is. Besides," he stretched again, linking hands behind his head. "I've got that Fiore bloke as a roomie. Gonna be hittin' that allll night."

Jesse was up and stumbling away, that horrible image clinging to the front of his mind. Cass' laugh sounded away behind him.

***

"You get the floor."

Tulip had said it as if she was shocked it needed saying at all—as if it was just common sense that she would get the only bed currently available. Hell, maybe that would have been the case years ago with chivalry and shit, but now? Jesse had every intention of telling her to stuff it...

...except she'd glared, crossed her arms, and somehow Jesse had found himself on the floor at lights out.

"Profuse apologies my ass," he muttered, remembering the Dorm Head's simpering speech from earlier. Jesse punched his sweatshirt into a better ball—no pillow because it was supposed to come with the bed—and tried to turn over without hitting more of Tulip's unpacked luggage. He'd had a shitty, cold shower earlier, cafeteria food that felt like it was crawling back up his throat, and now this. Honestly, Jesse was almost regretting following Cass here and giving up seminary.

Almost.

Tulip was still.. wow.

Despite being regulated to the floor, Jesse couldn't help but like the girl. It wasn't just that she was hot (though she was that, certainly) but the fact that she was the kind of no-bullshit person he thought he could suffer through four years with. He'd seen all sorts of awesome band tees and crime novels falling out of her suitcase. At dinner she had sat with the shy Emily girl, suddenly looking more open and caring than he would have ever guessed. He heard her telling DeBlanc that she'd filched M&Ms to put on her pancakes tomorrow morning. She was just cool.

Huh. Maybe a little too cool. Literally.

Jesse propped himself up on his elbow to see that, yep, Tulip's whole frame was shivering in the moonlight. Back to him, she was just a tight, quivering ball of blankets, black hair sticking out at the top. Jesse had barely noticed the temperature. He really only cared about gruesomely hot summers,
not cool September nights.

Another thing this school has to answer for: shit heating, he thought.

Jesse hesitated only a second before standing. He went as noisily as he could, stepping on the squeaky floorboard he’d found earlier and (accidentally) running into another bag. Tulip had gone deadly still as he slid atop the covers and onto the bed. Jesse carefully draped an arm around her middle.

There was peace. Than a crack! against his nose and Jesse was thrown off the bed.

"The fuck!"

"Told you not to touch me," Tulip growled, sitting up. She rubbed the back of her head where she’d reared and hit him. "You some sort of rapist or something?"

"What? No!"

"Keep your voice down, you're gonna get us in trouble."

Jesse ground his teeth. She’d hit him. He would have washed his hands of this, marched down the hall and invaded Cass' room—sex or no sex—except that Tulip was just... sitting there and something told Jesse that if she really thought he was a danger he’d be dealing with far worse than a sore nose. He slowly reached up again, resetting his forearms on the bed's edge.

"Bed is big," he said, tentative. "Not, you know, big, but big enough for two I'd say."

Tulip remained quiet.

"You seem kinda cold. I'm pretty warm. The floor feels like something the Spanish Inquisition invented." For the first time Tulip cracked a smile and Jesse slapped the mattress in triumph. "C'mon. I think I'm making a pretty good case here."

Silence still. Tulip looked him over once, agonizingly slow, and Jesse felt a spark run down the length of his spine.

"You're still missing something," she said.

Jesse floundered a moment. "Um... please?"

Tulip snorted. "Close enough. Newsflash, Custer: don't crawl into a woman's bed without asking first. Don't care how fucking noble your intentions are."

"Ha. Noted."

Jesse slung himself onto the bed again, this time getting to go under the covers. Tulip still rolled to face the other wall, but she didn't stiffen as he fit himself alongside her: knees hooked in knees and one arm up around her head. He lightly traced the edges of her hair and thought, stupidly, that he should get this girl something. Maybe she did like flowers.

"Go to sleep, idiot," Tulip muttered. Jesse let out one explosive laugh before doing just that.

Anything his roomie wanted.

***
"Jesse Custer?"

The kid was definitely the hall monitor type, pompous without being more than a year older than Jesse. He looked officially at his clipboard. "I've been told that your room still needs a second bed? They're delivering it now. You'll need to clear out your stuff so that we can move in the pieces and assemble it."

Jesse blinked. He thought about how they'd just finished unpacking all their shit. He thought about Tulip's back pressed against his chest.

"Sorry," he said blandly. "Must have the wrong dorm."

He shut the door in the kid's face and Tulip, watching, smiled.
Chapter 258

Chapter Notes

I wanted to post this yesterday for my birthday, but I got distracted by apple cider margaritas. As I told the Preacher group chat: go find and/or make those. You need them in your life.

"I don't understand," DeBlanc said. "Why do you want to celebrate being that much closer to the end of your mortal existence?"

There was a moment of silence before Tulip barked out a laugh. "Well, can't speak for everyone, but I for one welcome entrance into the Void."

DeBlanc stared as Cass made a strangled sound in the back of his throat.

"I see..." (Even though he didn’t.) “And you. You don't die. At least not easily. What's the point?"

"Listen mate, it's less about 'Wooo I'm that much closer to death' and more 'Wooo I survived another 365 days on this fucked up, floating ball." Cass spread his hands to take in their crappy motel room. "Feat like that deserves a bit of recognition."

DeBlanc still didn't look convinced, but before he could question them further Fiore barged back into the room, arms loaded up with mounds of chips, candy bars, and soda.

"I spent all our cash," he said, depositing everything onto the nearest bed. "The last vending machine wouldn't take my bill so I kicked it until everything fell out."

"That's my man," Cass said, thumping Fiore proudly on the back. "Just like I taught you."

Tulip began stacking everything with careful precision: a chocolate base and chip-bag body, all of it held together by the soda cans. DeBlanc looked upon the monstrosity with a casual, confused air.
"We need something to burn," Cass said eagerly, rubbing his hands together.

Tulip tugged open the nightstand and pulled out a bible. "Flammable," she said, bouncing on her heels.

"Now wait!" DeBlanc said. "You can't go burning *that*!"

"Why not? You're a demon. You don't care."

"I'm a demon with an angel boyfriend. I most certainly do care."

"I don't care," Fiore announced. He shrugged at DeBlanc's look. "No one even knows where the boss is right now. What's he gonna care if one of their little commodities gets lost? Could have happened anyway. What if there was a fire?"

"Or a flood," Cass said.

"Or an earthquake," Tulip added.

Fiore nodded. "Right. Exactly. Beside, half of that junk is wrong anyhow."

"...Oh," DeBlanc said. "Fine." He waved for Cass to get on with it and he obliged, taking out his lighter and setting the edge of the bible aflame. He set it carefully atop two coke cans.

"Now," Tulip said. "Don't let it burn the chocolate—"

"I'm not."

"—because I'm gonna eat that later. Don't yell surprise or nothing—"

"I'm not!"
"—because Jesse will freak and shoot us all. Aw damn. Nice job, assholes. That is one good looking cake."

The bible was really smoking now, flames sneaking down to blacken the tops of the Cheetos and Doritos bags. DeBlanc opened a window as Fiore jumped to his feet.

"I hear him. He’s coming."

"That's what your mom said last night."

"Shut up, Cassidy."

They started up a disgustingly off-tune rendition of "Happy Birthday" that was loud enough to wake the neighbors and made worse by the fact that Fiore and DeBlanc were just learning the words. Still. Down the hall Jesse smiled at the music, shook his head, and picked up the pace.
Jesse knew this sensation well: the weight of a body pinning his to the floor, a hand clenched, ironclad, into the front of his shirt. Everything from the knee in his stomach to the stench of another's sweat—it was familiar. He knew that as soon as he looked he'd see the barrel of a gun pointed just an inch or so from the bridge of his nose. Jesse understood that any words he heard would be a threat. Rinse and repeat.

Except that this attacker...

Tulip's hands were shaking as she pressed the muzzle flat against Jesse's forehead. No one else would have spotted it, but he did. He could feel the wound tightness in her limbs.

"You took their fucking child?" she hissed.

"Tulip. Tulip. C'mon now, luv, you are missing some real fuckin' important context here..."

Cass dithered behind her, arms reaching to try and pull her away before panicking and snapping back. Off to the side Fiore and DeBlanc looked on in shock. They were such smug, pretentious assholes. If Jesse hadn't known for sure that the gun Tulip held was loaded, he would have found their fish-like expressions amusing.

Instead he held perfectly still. "You're not gonna shoot me," he said, bland as white rice.

The gun pressed harder into his skin. "Really? That's your response here? You're digging yourself in real deep, Jesse Custer."

"You care?"

"Of course I care."

"Well then you're not gonna shoot me. Get off, Tulip."

Jesse wormed his leg up between hers, grabbed hold of Tulip's wrist, and flipped them so that she was the one now nestled against the church's floor. It was a move that only worked because a part of Tulip wanted it to. She scowled, jamming the gun back into her jeans and shoving him off her chest. They scrambled and backed away, Cass looking like they'd just averted a bomb going off.

"Okay," he said slowly. "I appreciate your wild sides, I honestly do, but the two of you have gotta get the whole fuckin' picture before you go threatenin' to shoot one another!"
"Who did I threaten to shoot?" Jesse snapped at the same time that Tulip spread her arms wide and yelled, "What picture, Cassidy? Jesse took their child!"

She pointed fiercely at DeBlanc and Fiore who now appeared sheepish in the extreme. Alright. That was amusing. Fiore muttered something too low for them to hear and turned away, eyes drawn to the ceiling in a comical display of aversion. It was DeBlanc who took the hesitant step forward, removing his hat and placing it protectively over his chest.

"Ms. O'hare..."

"Tulip. Do I look like a blasted 'Ms.' to you?"

DeBlanc swallowed. "Tulip. We contacted you because we know you're... close with this preacher. Jesse. It is true that he has our child... though it would perhaps be more accurate to say that our child chose him."

"Huh?" Tulip peered at the four of them, most of that anger giving way to confusion. "Hold up now. You made it sound like this kid of yours is an infant. How the hell does a baby choose someone? And who the fuck would choose Jesse?"

"I'm right here," Jesse said, but no one listened.

Cass raised his hand. "Yeah. Fascinating. But I'm more interested in how two blokes make a kid together in the first place. Can clones make babies?"

"Clone—?" Fiore gapped for a moment. "I'm an angel, you twit, and we don't adhere to your idiotic gender binaries."

"A what," Tulip said.

DeBlanc laid a hand on his arm. "His question is still valid though. Certainly no one in heaven knows how our union resulted in... procreation." He turned to the group. "It's just one more reason why you must return them. There are many who would do anything to seize the child of an angel and a demon."

"A what."

"Oh wow. Okay. That explains a whole lot of stuff. Did you know about this?" Cass asked. Jesse had his fingers pressed hard into the bridge of his nose, nodding sadly.

"Yeah. Had a whole damn conversation about it last night in the diner. I was going to tell you but then someone," Jesse glared at DeBlanc, "had to go and tell my girlfriend, who recently lost a child, that I went and stole someone else's."

DeBlanc blanched. "We didn't realize. We only wanted you to give them back."

"Well I can't! I've tried!"

"How come there's no word for that?" Cass murmured. "A woman who loses a child? We've got 'orphan' and 'widow,' but nothin' else that I know of. Huh. Just doesn't seem right."

"Enough," Tulip spit, interrupting them all. With the jerky movements of someone that was at the end of their rope, she reclaimed the gun and pointed it somewhere in the middle of their circle, essentially threatening them all. "You are treating this like a joke, but you know—you know, Jesse—that it's not." He bowed his head at that. Acknowledging for once that no, it wasn't a joking matter.
"Now who is going to explain what the hell is going on here?"

Cass made short work of that, slotting together all the pieces they’d gathered thus far: angels and demons (not clones), God going missing, Genesis’ creation, unfathomable power now rooted in their very own Jesse—who watched the proceedings with a vaguely bored expression. He didn't even flinch when Tulip raised the gun this time. Really, she was just using it for emphasis at this point.

"So this 'baby'..." she said slowly.

"Is probably the most powerful thing in existence," Jesse confirmed. "And it's currently nestled somewhere between my soul and my ribs."

"That doesn't mean we don't love them any less," Fiore snapped and there was a moment of silence as the group tried to decide if that was in reference to Genesis’ power or the fact that it had chosen Jesse. Probably the latter.

He took a firm step forward. DeBlanc and Fiore held their ground. Jesse smiled.

"So what do you want, huh?" he demanded. "Getting Cass all riled up. Trying to turn Tulip against me. She pistol whipped me earlier." Tulip shrugged to show she really didn't regret that part.

"You've tried luring this thing—"

"This child," DeBlanc said.

Jesse inclined his head. "—child out of me with songs and magic and who knows what else. It didn't work. So what exactly do you want me to do about it?"

"Haven't tried the chainsaw yet," Fiore muttered and DeBlanc had to shoot out a protective arm to keep him and Cass apart.

"Easy, love," he said. "To be frank, Jesse, I'm not sure how we should go about this, but we have to do something. At the very least I’d appreciate it if you—"

"Why don't you order it?"

All of them turned to Tulip, staring. She shrugged again and pretended to shoot Jesse straight in the middle of his chest. "It's all-powerful, right? So just use that power and, I don't know, tell it to come out for a second."

Fiore spluttered. "That is the most idiotic thing I've ever—"

"Genesis, c'mere."

And they did.

The flash of light blinded them all momentarily, filling the church and worrying poor Mrs. Hinderson miles down the road, wondering what in the name of loving Jesus that was supposed to be. As she went back to walking Pepper and resigned not to stick her nose where it might get snapped off, DeBlanc was pushing groggily back to his feet, one hand supporting Fiore while his other had latched onto Tulip’s arm. Cass was on Fiore’s other side, his stunned expression no doubt a reflection of everyone else’s.

"Oh my," DeBlanc whispered.

They'd never seen Genesis before. Not really. Not since the brief, confusing moment of their
creation. And they weren't quite seeing them now either. How did you see something that wasn't a
thing, but the absence of things—everything by virtue of being nothing at all? There was light, yes,
but at the same time they were a void. DeBlanc knew at once that he couldn't look on his child for
long, not without a vessel to act as a buffer. Still, he reached for them.

He felt Fiore doing the same. For a moment it was only the two of them in that church, fingers
curving around the edges of their child. DeBlanc felt heat, ice, the thrum of electricity, and—
—and then they snapped back into Jesse.

He bent like a bow, stumbled, and only kept his feet by grabbing hold of the nearest pew. Jesse
heaved like he'd just run a marathon, but he looked as rapturous as the rest of them.

"Don't see how it's any different," he finally whispered when no one else would speak. "You two
taking human form. Genesis possessing me. It's all necessary. Like child, like parents right?"

DeBlanc nodded. The pain against his wrist was Fiore's hand. The sting on his cheek was a tear.

"Well," Fiore huffed, wiping inconspicuously at his own eyes. "That may be the case, but don't think
for a second that I'm letting you run off with my child alone."

Jesse froze. "...No."

"Yes."

And it began over again, Fiore, Jesse, and DeBlanc launched into full-blown bickering about who
got to tag along on what adventures, their tone completely at odds with the miracle they'd just
witnessed. Cass shook himself like a dog, giving Jesse a lopsided grin and suggesting that he should
make Genesis pay rent. Tulip sighed, tossed Jesse the gun, and made it very clear that this
was not the kind of child they'd agreed to raise. Jesse waved the gun under Fiore's nose who just
batted it away.

And somewhere inside Jesse, Genesis hummed with what might be termed happiness.

When they left the church, for all their arguing, they were heading down the same path.
"Everyone ready?" Cass asked, voice somber as he moved the cards from hand to hand. Jesse let out an appreciate whistle at the display, but Tulip merely scoffed.

"To kick your ass?" she asked. "Please. I was born ready for that."

"I wasn't born," DeBlanc countered, shrugging at their expressions. "If we're basing the outcome of this game on experience or knowledge, then there's little doubt that I will emerge the victor."

Fiore popped a chip into his mouth with a loud crunch. "Also 'cause I'll help you cheat."

"Yes. That too."

Cass looked scandalized. "You can't cheat."

"Don't listen to him. You can absolutely cheat." Jesse slammed his hand down hard on the motel bed.

Fiore nodded. "Not much fun without cheating."

"It's plenty fun without cheating!"

"Just deal," Tulip said and the game was underway.

They were quite the group overall: a preacher, a black woman, and (if you believed in such things) three supernatural entities, all trying to make it through the same road trip alive. Sharing everything from a car to cheap-ass bathrooms tended to leave one on the grouchy side and thus many had made assumptions about that hard looking group. That they cursed (yes). Drank like fishes (absolutely). Were violent (obviously). They engaged in dangerous, high-stakes games like Russian Roulette and Poker.

...well, sometimes.

"Yes," Tulip whispered when Fiore put down a yellow two. He hesitated, narrowed his eyes, and pulled the card back off the pile. He leaned to look at DeBlanc's hand before throwing down a green seven instead.

Across the circle Tulip raised a hand slowly to poke at his chest. "You're gonna pay for that."

Fiore shrugged.

"Uno," Jesse cackled, slamming a green reverse onto the bed.

"Dammit." Another card for Tulip. Contemplation from Cass. He finally put another reverse down before slipping an unknown card into Tulip's hands.

She literally screeched with happiness as she played it. Jesse drew four cards with a curse.

"What happened to no cheating, Cass?" he grumbled.

"Well if everyone else is doin' it,"

DeBlanc smiled. "Not one for fighting peer pressure?"
"Fuck no. Go fish."

"Wrong game, dumbass." Fiore put two blues down instead of one and no one dared stop him.

"Is it though? Is it really?"

"I hate every one of you," Tulip said. She dithered a moment. "Alright. There we go."

Jesse peered at the play. "You need a nine, Tulip. That's a six."

"No it's not."

"...yes. Yes it is. That line literally tells which way it goes."

"Line? I don't know what line you speak of. Do you see a line, Cass?"

"Can't say I do, luv," and a yellow three went down to hide what was definitely not a six.

"C'mon what is this, gang up on Jesse night?"

Silence from the group. Tulip looked across at Fiore and DeBlanc. They exchanged glances with Cass. Another heartbeat and then all four of them were sporting identical, terrible grins.

Jesse closed his eyes. "Fuck."

The thing about UNO—cheating UNO—is that it can get real brutal, real fast. One minute Jesse had a relatively decent hand of four cards. The next he had such a damn wide fan of them that some were dropping back into his lap.

"You—are—all—such—assholes—" he said, punctuating each word with a flap of the cards. Fiore merely licked his fingers before taking DeBlanc's second to last card and neatly placing it atop the now massive pile.

Cass slammed a four down a millisecond later. "Neither of you said 'UNO'!"

"Fuck!"

"Ha-ha weep all you want, little shite, just take two cards while you do it. Both of you, there's a good man,"

"Who's next?" Tulip asked casually, throwing down a five. "Trust me when I say I'm gonna win this thing and whoever helps me will be justly rewarded."

Cass pretended to think it over. "When you say 'rewarded'...?"

"I mean I've got the last Hershey bar stashed away. And yeah, vending machine downstairs is out."

"I'm in!" and he slammed closer until he was bumping Tulip's shoulder.

Fiore sniffed. "If you think I would abandon DeBlanc for candy—"

"I'm also the only one with decent cash left. You know, if you'd like a burger in the near future."

"Traitor," DeBlanc whispered as Fiore sheepishly took on three of Tulip's cards.

"As my daddy used to say, it ain't over 'till it's over. I got your back, DeBlanc. If only because I hate these three just a little more than you right now."
DeBlanc inclined his head. "Greatly appreciated, Jesse. Though you do know, of course, that as soon as we take them out..."

"You'll turn on me? Same, same."

"Wonderful. Just so we're on the same page."

"You idiots are welcome to try." Tulip reached to grab the motel's stationary pad, tearing off pieces and scribbling with her pen. "Gonna need a hell of a lot more cards," she muttered, numbering each and adding a color written at the top. A few had things like 'Draw six' or 'switch hands with the person to your left' on them. Cass let out a low whistle at the 'double skip' card.

"Are we perhaps too cruel," he whispered, gazing off into the distance with a hand over his chest. "Why the competition? Isn't the real winner the one who has the most fun along the way?"

"No!" came the chorus and Tulip started things off with a red and blue pot.

The things about cheating UNO is that is also goes on a long, long time...

... Long enough even for a certain Saint to catch up.

At the end of the night—after they were twenty miles East of that hotel room, covered in poor Cass' blood and minus one UNO deck—each member of the unholy quintet insisted up and down that they had won.

Of course they would. And there's only one way to settle that sort of dispute.

Jesse smiled kindly at the terrified cashier. “Just the three UNO packs. Lady over there’s got the money.”

You play another game.
Chapter 261

It was rare for Jesse to have time alone. Not that he didn’t love his family. He’d killed for those bastards, but they were still bastards, what with Tulip complaining, Cass talking shit, and Christiana endlessly screaming up a storm. Jesse shook his head fondly, but he still took his damn time while doing the shopping.

Problem was, there were only so many aisles to explore in a roadside corner store. Jesse spent a good ten minutes pretending to debate between products, really just listening to the crap music and smelling the cheap hotdogs warming in their case. When he couldn’t delay any longer he began loading up with a chipper swing to his hips, whistling an old tune of his daddy’s to complement the stereo. By the time he made it to the counter Jesse was lost behind the mound of consumerism in his arms.

“Morning,” he said.

The man running the store just grunted in response. He was a pretty generic guy, with a beer gut and a stained pair of jeans. Only thing worth mentioning about him were his blue, blue eyes which, when Jesse tried to look, skittered away to his shopping.

Alright. So he wasn’t much for conversation. That was fine.

Fine until the guy sneered down at the purchases. He had surprisingly white teeth.

“The fuck you want all this for?” he muttered, more to himself than Jesse. “Bunch of pussy-loving junk…”

Jesse stared down at what he’d collected with a rather shocked air. He’d gotten candy (so much candy), disinfectant wipes, hair-ties, stationary with flowers on the border, a stick of scented deodorant, Cherry Coke, and two large packets of pads. Things got a little clearer when the guy picked up the pads between thumb and forefinger, as if wary of contamination. He even gave the scented deodorant a wide berth.

You’ve got to be kidding me, Jesse thought, torn between laughing at the guy and diving into a very real rant. Jesse wanted to ask who stocked all this stuff if he was too afraid to even touch it? If the asshole had ever been with an actual human being and please, pray tell, how well did that go? As he watched the stationary pass over the scanner Jesse was this close to listing all the territory that came with having a girlfriend post-pregnancy—those pads aren’t just for regular periods, friend—and only stopped himself because that was petty. Fun, but petty. And Jesse had a family to get back to. Break time was over.

He would have left it at that. Jesse was reaching for his wallet when the cashier saw his old clerical collar and muttered, "Outta be ashamed," as if Jesse wouldn’t hear.

Alright.

"Left my cash in the car," Jesse said. He smiled amiably and made sure the lie came across like truth. He even knocked a fist against his head: dumb-dumb Jesse. "I'll be back in just a sec."

The man grunted. "Yeah, whatever. Not taking any of this if you don't pay."

"Oh, of course."
Jesse wandered back out to the car, taking his time and whistling that same, jaunty tune. Tulip lowered the window at his approach. She had Christina up against her neck and a fearsome scowl on her face. The poor women in his life. Jesse knew just how to cheer them up.

"Where's the loot?" Cass asked, head sticking out from the backseat. Tulip's expression confirmed that she'd like to know that as well. Jesse held up a hand to forestall a second question.

"I think you two should go shopping with me," he said, voice so innocent that Tulip narrowed her eyes. "You are just gonna love the cashier."

The thing about driving cross-country looking for God was that for stretches it got boring as hell. They all needed something to do, a way to stretch their legs, and—as Tulip whispered in little Christina's ear—it was never too early to start an education. There was just so much to learn about misogynistic men and how to get back at them! Why, just look at Daddy over there, smashing up the man's chip aisle. Pay close attention to Uncle Cass too, he's a master of intimidation. See how he gets real close while slamming him up against the wall? And look, darling, Mommy's gonna show you how to disengage those cameras...

So much to learn on a fun, family outing. Jesse was grinning by the time they were done, the cashier staring agape at them from his soiled floor. It was a good look on him. Even better when Jesse tore open a box of tampons and sprinkled them into his lap.

He threw in some money too.

"Told you I'd pay," Jesse said. He took Christina and fit her onto his hip, taking that tiny wrist and flapping it up and down.

"Say 'bye-bye' now, sweetheart. We're done here."
Chapter 262

Prompt: "Ok preacher story time. The trio is trying to get fiore and deblanc to tell them how they got together and it's all fluffy and shit with them talking about there how much they love each other and there unholy ball of energy child and Cass is in the back on the motel bed silently sobbing because he is the random drunk girl of the friend group and he's too drunk to handle this kind of emotion"

As said on tumblr, this might be one of my more ridiculous drabbles lol

Given their usual choice of entertainment Jesse had learned quick that angels and demons couldn't get drunk. A pity, but not all that surprising. Apparently their corporal bodies existed somewhere between "can experience sensation" but "can't react passively." So breathing wasn't really a thing. Or getting hammered. That control was what allowed them to reform endlessly after their 'deaths'—a skill Jesse was more than happy to keep on the table.

They would have left things at that... except Cass had to go out and find himself a damn warlock.

"This is glorious," DeBlanc slurred, tipping more of the cheap beer down his throat until he could crush the empty can. Bottles were strewn along the motel bed, each containing a few drops of the stupidly expensive elixir. They'd been told that the little pink bottle would get anything in this reality wasted, and for the amount they'd paid they could keep the party going for a couple of months at least.

...they'd blown threw it in two days.

Jesse shook his head. People were always underestimating them.

Fiore pointed a sharp finger up near DeBlanc's forehead. It turned into a flat hand that pet him carefully. "You're glorious," he corrected. "Do you know what—what it was like? Seeing you in the flames?"

Something about that statement colored DeBlanc’s cheeks and Tulip cackled, passing him another beer. DeBlanc took it automatically. It was Cass who finally pulled himself up from the floor and planted his face in the duvet. In the tradition of tonight's unconventional drinking, Cass had taken a long pull from Tulip's neck about an hour ago. Though he'd barely had any of the drinks himself, apparently consuming the blood of someone else who was drunk was enough to keep the world spinning. Cass lifted his head.

Jesse choked. "Oh my god are you crying?"

Cass nodded, looking vaguely ashamed. "They're just so beautiful, Padre," he muttered, voice cracking at the end. "Look at 'em! Defying heaven and hell to be together. That's true love, it is, don't let 'em tell you otherwise. Oh fuck, oh fuck me don't do that. Don't do that I can't take it."

Fiore had started nodding enthusiastically, curling against DeBlanc's side with a dopey grin on his face that none of them had seen before. DeBlanc was a little busy muttering something down into his
hair, the sort of something that might be cute nonsense... or the lead up to something else. Jesse loved the bastards, but he wasn't about to stick around if they were gonna get handsy.

"Why am I the only one sober," he muttered. Jesse jumped when Tulip crawled forward to press an unlabeled bottle (never a good sign) against his lips. With a roll of his eyes Jesse took long pulls as she cheered.

It segued into a terrible rendition of "Summer Nights"—Tell me more, tell me more!—and Fiore obliged, waving his hands in emphasis. One of them smacked Tulip's arm.

"—etherial," he was saying. "I was like... like... like a heaven paper-pusher. And I never went out and I never did anything and then I got sent to the boarder for an errand—an errand, can you believe?—and I just, I saw him..."

"I saw you too," DeBlanc said, grinning the same grin. He pressed a messy kiss on the side of Fiore's head. "You were so bright, dear."

"So many shadows," Fiore murmured. "I'd never known shadows before—"

A loud smack interrupted them. Cass was face down again, but his hands were extended across the covers, making desperate grabby motions like he wanted to literally take their feelings and squeeze them because it was too fucking much.

"Meh Waywee," he said, voice indistinct.

Jesse chuckled, grabbing him by the hair to pull Cass' head up. Fucking christ but he was still sniffling. "What was that now?"

"The baby," Cass wailed. He made more, indistinct gestures. "It's light and dark."

He might have written it off as more drunk nonsense, but after a moment of thought Jesse realized he was right. Genesis, from what little they'd seen, was the perfect mixture of dark and light, seeming to exist as both indefinitely. Nodding, Jesse put a hand a little reverently against the center of his chest.

He shouldn't have done that.

"You're so precious to us," DeBlanc said, crawling forward to stare at that spot. Jesse pulled back in alarm. "You know that we love you, right? We love you so very much."

"Now wait a minute," Jesse began, but DeBlanc was already grabbing hold of his shirt. Jesse toppled forward with a yelp. "Dammit, DeBlanc, I'm not your kid!"

He only hummed, seemingly not hearing him. Tulip sputtered at the face Jesse made as DeBlanc pulled him into a fierce hug. Fucking hell but the guy was strong.

"No, Fiore, no—"

Fiore didn't listen anymore than DeBlanc had. He curled up against Jesse's side and began humming something that sounded alarmingly like a lullaby. Jesse was about to beg Tulip for help but she was already draping herself over the three of them, giggling.

"Cassidy," Jesse said.

Cass just shook his head. "You gotta go with it, Padre," he said, voice somber, nodding sagely. Jesse let out a disgusted sigh as Cass took the last available spot along his back.
He couldn't move. Jesse was a human burrito.

"I hate you all," he said.

DeBlanc nodded against Jesse's hair. "We love you too."

Only one arm was free. Jesse snuck it around Fiore to grab another bottle. Something told him he was going to need it.
Chapter 263

Chapter Notes

Prompt: "Ok but like fiore trying to hide his Ganesh days from deblanc cause he's a little embarrassed and like the others keep trying to bring it up to mess with him and fiore just shuts them down or changes the subject really quickly. Then he comes back to the hotel room to find the others showing Deblanc pics and videos of his Ganesh days and fiore dies a little"

“If you tell him, I will kill you.”

Cass just grinned under Fiore’s arm, his back pressed against their latest car and Fiore’s knee inching towards his groin. The whole spiel might have been intimidating if Cass hadn’t played chubby bunny with this man; if he didn’t know he was currently rocking kitty underwear under those jeans. Cass slowly raised a hand and laid it gently over Fiore’s wrist.

“You’ve gotta step up your game,” he whispered, stroking the skin there. “I’ve spent many years mastering the art of being scary and lovable, grasshopper. I can teach you.”

Fiore’s eyes narrowed. “Do you remember the chainsaw?”

“I remember you failing to use it. Repeatedly. Kinda suspicious, dontcha think?”

With a curse Fiore whirled away, dropping the tough guy act to run hands through his hair. Tulip looked on and shook her head as if to say that was the saddest damn site she’d ever seen.

It probably was.

Jesse popped open a tin of Altoids, dumping a third of them straight into his mouth. “What are you so worried about anyway?” he asked, mumbling around the minty goodness. “The fuck does it matter if DeBlanc knows you—”
"Shh!" Fiore hissed. He pointed fiercely at DeBlanc in the corner store window, paying for their lunch.

Tulip spread her hands. "He can't hear us, dumbass."

"He might."

"FIORE IS THE AMAZING GANESH!" Cass hollered. "There. See? Not even a blink. Those windows are surprisingly thick. I can tell you that from experience, I—ow, ow Fiore! Now stop it, you bloody madman!"

As Cass tried save his own hide Jesse and Tulip exchanged one of those silent conversations only available to the oldest of friends.

*Maybe he's embarrassed,* one look said.

*Ashamed,* said another.

*Kinda silly, huh?*

*Fucking ridiculous.*

*We should really just leave them to their business.*

Another look. A thorough acknowledgement that yeah fucking right, like *that* would ever happen.

By the time Fiore and Cass had finished their tussle Jesse and Tulip were long gone. They stood, Fiore in a headlock, staring dumbly at the empty parking lot... then Fiore looked back at the convenience store.

DeBlanc was gone too.
"...You're all dead."

"If you say so, mate."

***

You can only get so far on foot. Then again, this particular duo was known for achieving the impossible. By the time they caught up Jesse, DeBlanc, and Tulip were a damn mile down the dirt road, hanging out in a ditch like that was a thing that normal people did together. DeBlanc had given Tulip his coat to sit on and the three of them were huddled close, clustered around Jesse's phone. They really only found them because of all the damn giggling.

"Here's a variation on his outfit," Jesse was saying, grinning as DeBlanc choked and slapped a hand over his mouth. "I really dig the turban, don't you?"

DeBlanc drew in a massive breath, sounding like he'd been laughing a long, long time. "Oh yes."

Tulip leaned her head in her hand, pressed against DeBlanc's shoulder. "I personally like the robes. He's got great legs."

"You think? I'm a bigger fan of the arms."

"Hmm, true. Also nice."

It went on for some time. Jesse would show them a picture from one of Fiore's performances—both advertisements and pics he'd taken himself—and point out a quality he liked, wherein DeBlanc agreed whole-heartedly, with such enthusiasm that it sent Fiore's cheeks aflame. Sequestered in their own light teasing, they didn't notice Cass and Fiore's arrival. Except... Tulip absolutely looked up and dropped them a wink.

Fiore just stood dumbly though, seemingly unable to process the scene. Cass pressed a hand against his head like a man checking for fever because Fiore honestly looked like he was going to blow an embarrassed fuse.
DeBlanc's back was to Fiore. They could just make out the picture he was looking at now—a poster wherein Fiore posed dramatically for the camera: hands on his hips, gazing off into the distance, an impressive display of fireworks going off in the background. It was disgustingly cheesy, but DeBlanc traced his finger down the screen with tenderness.

Now Jesse was looking their way. He grinned. "Hey, DeBlanc. Just between the three of us... wouldn't it be something if Fiore could get ahold of those old clothes? You know..."

"Just so you have a little something to spice up your time together," Tulip finished, nudge-nudge-nudging him in the ribs.

Whatever DeBlanc might have said to that was drowned out from the thump! behind him. He turned, finding Fiore on his knees and his face hidden deep in his arms. Cass reached out a foot and probed the blog of eternal shame.

"Aww, poor asshole," Cass said. "Looks like we killed you."

It was true enough. Jesse and Tulip began cracking up as DeBlanc rushed forward, babbling something about how he'd seen video and it was wonderful and why are you so upset?? Fiore just curled into a tighter ball, Cass barely able to catch something about welcoming the void.

Now it was a three-person conversation. As DeBlanc tried to drag Fiore to his feet Tulip, Jesse, and Cass exchanged glances. As one their gaze turned back towards the roads they'd traveled—towards Mumbai Sky Tower.

It was an acceptable pit-stop. Give Fiore some time. Soon enough he and DeBlanc were going to want those old costumes—just a little thing to brighten their days.
"I really don't think that DeBlanc translates to the 'bride' in this situation."

"Shut it, Jesse, you don't go fuckin' with tradition, alright?"

Cass dithered around their motel room, seeming to realize that a crap budget and sketchy wedding plans didn't lend themselves to beautiful mementos. DeBlanc already had an old ring he'd found back in Oklahoma that he'd taken to wearing on his pinky, and the grey suit he wore was stolen while brand spanking new. Two down then, two to go.

Cass threw up his hands. "What the fuck is blue in this place?"

Jesse kicked the cheap duvet with blue flowers on it.

"What's he gonna do, Padre? Wear it as a cape?"

Instead of answering Jesse bent and grabbed the duvet's corner. Pulling out his army knife he cut one of the flowers out and (under Cass' mildly impressed look) folded it to act as a pocket square. DeBlanc touched the addition gently.

"I might cry," he whispered, staring at Jesse like he'd never seen him before.

"Ah christ, please don't."

It was true enough that their relationship had changed drastically over the last year. From, "I'll happily carve you up with a chainsaw" to "best man at my pretty much shotgun wedding" in just a few short months. Funny how life worked out that way.

Jesse grimaced as DeBlanc pulled him in for a hug, craning his neck and head as far away as he could manage. Cass cackled and snapped a picture with his (also stolen) cellphone and Jesse reluctantly gave DeBlanc the two expected thumps on the back.

"Alright, alright, enough of that. Here," he fished for a moment and came out with a silver lighter. "It was my daddy's. This can be the borrowed bit, so be sure to give it back the second the night is over, got it?"

"Got it," DeBlanc murmured as Jesse slid the lighter into his inside pocket. There was another sniffing sound behind him and Jesse raised his eyes to the heavens.

"Fucking hell, Cass, not you too."

"I'm just a goddamn sucker for weddings, Padre, I'm sorry."

DeBlanc nodded—as if this wasn't his wedding—and wrung his hands nervously in front of his tie.
"So...why do I need something blue again?"

Jesse closed his eyes. "Yep, I'm done. Cass, see to your 'bride.' Gotta hope that Tulip is at least faring a little better..."

***

Tulip was not, in fact, faring better.

"Drink," she commanded, and tipped the bottle higher so that more of the wine poured straight down Fiore's throat. Normally Tulip wouldn't be quite this gentle in her force-feeding, but she needed to ensure that none of it got on his suit.

"Better?" Fiore asked, finally coming up for air.

Tulip considered. "No. You still look like shit, but now it's just shit with red cheeks and a crazy sheen to his eyes." It wasn't really what someone wanted to hear on their wedding night.

Fiore couldn't deny it though. He stood in front of the motel mirror, staring at his own reflexion and wondering where exactly his logic had gone askew. He'd served a demanding and capricious god for eons. Had committed a sin never even conceived of before—and then ran off with that sin to Earth, of all places. He'd joined a band of what had to be the most disgusting collection of humans in mankind's existence and actually found himself enjoying their company. Fiore was, by Cass' own insistence, a complete and utter badass.

So why was this moment making him shake with nerves?

"I look dead," he whispered, staring at his pale complexion and sunken eyes. Fiore whipped his head to look at Tulip. "Am I dead? I think I might be dead."

Instead of answering Tulip got a surprisingly serious look on her face... which was never a good sign. She considered another minute, then said, "Strip."

"Tulip, I know that you believe sex can ameliorate any situation, but—"

"Did I say sex, you arrogant ass? No, I said strip. Now."

Ah. You didn't argue with that tone, so Fiore did as he was told and started shucking off shoes, pants, jacket, and shirt. When he was down to just his underwear Tulip shooed him away from the clothes and towards the motel bed.

"What are you—?"

Tulip took out her gun and shot Fiore point blank in the face.

"Ugh, what a mess," she muttered, carefully stepping away from the growing pool of blood. In Tulip's peripheral vision was a flash and then Fiore stepped out of the bathroom, mouth hanging open in annoyance.

"Can you not! On my wedding night."

Tulip waved the gun dismissively. "Quit your bellyaching. The redo was the right way to go. Look, you're the picture of perfect health. Now get back in those clothes. Fast before you start thinking and sweating again."

Oh.
Fiore hurried forward, thinking (oh no) all the while that he'd been right in his choice of a bride's maid.

Tulip's level-head might be the only thing that got him through this.

*And, Fiore thought, smiling just a little, I do truly want to get through this.*
"You're sure about this last bit?"

Tulip held the offending article between thumb and forefinger, radiating distaste. She only caved when Fiore's glare rocketed up two levels and he made a sound that might have been a growl or might have been a whimper, depending on how much leeway she was willing to give him. Tulip was honestly surprised he had the ability to focus on her at all right now, but apparently a goddamn Hellboy bowtie was worth it.

"At least it's red," she muttered, fixing it against his grey suit. Fiore was trembling under her hands and that didn't cease when Tulip finally pulled back, tweaking the finished product. Okay. It could actually be worse. Sure he looked stupid as hell, but she could understand why he wanted a good devil with him today of all days.

"You ready for this?" Tulip asked, shaking him a little. Fiore gulped like he was about to vomit down the front of her dress. "Atta boy," and Tulip shoved him into the living room.

The thing about fast-paced weddings on a shoe-string budgets was that you had to get creative. Stealing the suits, rings, and flowers had been easy enough, but stealing people was always a bit harder—though admittedly, not too hard. They'd stopped in the first town they came to, first watering hole they found, first guy who looked like he would talk easy, and found out where the nearest clergyman was. A few well-aimed threats lead them to the home of Jonathan Beyer, priest of this here shit-show, and he was unceromiously dragged out of bed while Fiore and DeBlanc were kept in separate rooms.

Cass had leaned against Jesse's arm as Tulip talked to the terrified priest, tapping it thoughtfully. "Why don't you just marry 'em, Padre?" he'd asked.

Jesse smiled, raising Cass' fingers up to his chest. "Kinda weird to get married by your own kid, don't you think?"

"Pretty sure 'weird' is our motto at this point."

Fair enough.

Poor Jonathan thought so, now standing in full garb next to the coffee table his mother had given him and the old TV he rarely watched. He was still barefoot and spouting bedhead, though wide-awake thanks to the gun Jesse had casually pointed his way. They didn't really think it was necessary, but he wasn't willing to take any chances. Not tonight.

Not when two of his friends' happiness was on the line.

"Ahem."

Cass danced out of the kitchen, DeBlanc following at a more sedate space behind him, a small
bouquet of cheap, grocery store flowers clutched between his hands. At the same moment Fiore came stumbling out thanks to Tulip's shove, clenching an identical bouquet until the stems starting leaking. He got a little breathless when he saw DeBlanc and Tulip had to give him another, lighter shove to keep him moving forward. DeBlanc seemed to be hyperventilating just a little.

They met in the middle of the room, parallel to a rather atrocious, brown couch. As Cass and Tulip took up either side Jesse snuck around so that he was behind Jonathan, the gun resting lightly against the small of his back.


"G-good evening. We are gathered here today to unite these two individuals in marriage, under God —"

A sharp jab had Jonathan squeaking and going unnaturally still. He snuck a glance behind him at Jesse. "Um... not God? No. No. Uh then, we're gathered here today to unite these two men in marriage, um, in the light of their friends..."

DeBlanc and Fiore hardly seemed to notice. In fact, if asked later what the random human man had said to them that night, they wouldn't be able to recall. The formality of marriage didn't mean much to them, it was just the act of doing something, anything concrete to solidify their devotion. A ceremony and rings were as good an option as any. So they moved quickly through the words, unheard, inching closer to one another until finally what did get through their little bubble was,

"You may kiss the—ahem. I mean, you can just, uh, kiss."

They did, in a manner so gentle that Cass made a dying noise and even Tulip smothered a smile. Jonathan let out a nervous huff of laughter and turned to beg that they leave his home now (what a strange burglary), only to find the gun still firmly pressed against his spine. Actually, it felt firmer now and he wondered what in the world he'd done to upset these people this time. It felt a little like the gun was shaking.

It wasn't anger though. In another moment Jonathan too realized that the light in the room had changed, yellow lamps giving way to something with a whiter, purer, tint. Jesse's grasp on the gun had tightened because that light was emanating from the center of his chest, a happy little pulse that filled him with a pleasure that wasn't his own.

DeBlanc and Fiore were too absorbed in one another to notice. Jesse lowered his weapon—letting poor Jonathan collapse on the coffee table—and smoothed a hand from neck to stomach, basking in the heat there. It might take a moment, but the two newly married lovebirds would look up eventually.

Jesse could give them Genesis' congratulations when they did.
Chapter 266

This was so very beneath him.

Fiore moved through the clouds with what might be termed an angry step, though of course that couldn't be the case since angels didn't display such emotions. No, he only appeared to be pissed beyond belief and those he passed only seemed to hurry along so as not to ignite his ire. Everything was about appearances up in heaven and Fiore was very, very adaptable.

He kicked a small puff of whiteness; he gripped the clipboard until his knuckles ached.

"Check the boarder," Fiore muttered, not caring anymore who heard. "Oh yes, certainly, it's not as if that's a job for the grunts around here..."

It was true that Fiore wasn't at the top of Heaven's food chain. He certainly wasn't a Seraphim in the Lord's inner circle, not a chosen son like Gabriel, a guard like the Cherubims, and he didn't fight in the Great War alongside the archangels. Yes, it was true that Fiore hadn't been given shape-shifting abilities; or a patronage; or even a single, eternal duty; and his wings (such as they were) weren't the most impressive... but still! It wasn't as if he was like those other angels. The ones who didn't have wings at all.

It was degrading in the extreme. Fiore had a his clipboard to record any necessary events, but beneath the paper was a thin booklet that, he'd learned recently, was called a 'comic book.' Those angels that traveled between Heaven and Earth often snuck back human artifacts, showing them off like trophies of a kill. They'd leave them though, strewn about like trash, perfect for pilfering if you were... interested. Fiore had grown quite fond of their bright colors and simplistic stories. In fact, he had every intention of reading the illicit literature for as long as he could. It certainly beat such a menial assignment.

"Absurd," he said, but this time there was no one to hear him. Fiore had long passed through the primary gates and into the nether below, supposedly endless if one were to follow it either left or right. Because of that Fiore did no such thing, instead tracing the faint path straight and until he was too far to hear his fellow angels' din, or even Heaven's bells.

It was, he realized quite suddenly, rather discomforting—which was another absurd response because what did angels have to fear? No. Wait. When did discomfort become fear?

Maybe right around the time the pure whiteness around him turned to gray. Then black... then something that was somehow deeper.

The boarder between Heaven and Hell.

Every angel knew what it was, instinctually, but only those who fought or patrolled the divide ever got to see it. Checking the boarder for demons sneaking through was considered a tedious job, though one with a fair amount of risk too. After all, what was an angel like Fiore meant to do if he did find a demon? Fight it off? Push it back? Ha! That would be a sight to see. Oh, he'd try. For the glory of his Creator he'd do everything within his power. It's just that his power wasn't very much at all. Fiore was the sweet one among his colleagues. Supposedly. He wasn't like the human's little literary heroes. He wasn't—

Strong.

The word came to him, unbidden, as Fiore realized that the writhing mass at Heaven's edge wasn't
the collection of flames and soot that he'd originally assumed. Or it was, only this fire and brimstone was sentient.

"Oh," Fiore murmured, swaying a little. Over the centuries angels had begun modeling their appearance after God's favorite creation, but this demon—for it was a demon—seemed so very other. He was nearly indistinguishable from the smoke around him, but for a pair of red eyes and something like a snout beneath them. Only his wings were clearly distinguishable, spread far and wide so that Fiore felt small in comparison; insignificant. When they beat a wave of heat washed over him and, may the Lord help him, it felt rather similar to His blessing.

Fiore closed his eyes against the onslaught and trembled. What was he meant to do in the face of this?

"Patrol?"

...What?

Fiore's eyes flew back open as he realized the demon was speaking. Well, okay, of course it could speak, but somehow having an entity three times your height that towered and roared made a simple question like "Patrol?" feel out of synch. Slowly, his own wings pressed tight against his back, Fiore nodded. He raised his clipboard as evidence—and the comic book tumbled out.

He didn't notice. Fiore's gaze was fixated on how the corporal smoke began to shrink, becoming something smaller, compact, but no less impressive.

Beautiful, even. There were arms and legs, a chest and... a smile? Flame literally flickered about the demon's body, reds and blues that quickly rose the temperature of their little bubble, though they did not burn him as they should. Nor did they touch the identical clipboard he had tucked beneath his arm. The demon tapped it with a claw, looking amused.

"Same. Awful gig, isn't it?"

*This is wrong,* Fiore thought. Though the demon stopped just at the edge of their boarder, Fiore felt like they had already breached the distance. When the demon stretched his arm out over the dividing line—smoke and charcoal tainting the whiteness of heaven—it seemed, somehow, inconsequential.

"Looks like I'm not the only one bored," he said, bending to pick up the comic. The demon flipped through it, careful of the thin pages along his claws. "A human story... what's it about?"

And with the knowledge of every law in Heaven bearing down on him, Fiore began to tell a story.
Chapter 267

Chapter Notes

"Prompt! So where are they spending the honeymoon? Mumbai Sky Tower? Deblanc getting in on the fun by executing fiore over and over, the other three front row seats in there splash ponchos? : D"

"He won't let us go," Fiore said while stomping out of the room. He looked like a five-year-old pouting and normally DeBlanc would have stared hard at that adorable expression, cataloguing every twitch and crease for memory's sake—

—but he was a little too focused on his husband's new ring.

_Husband._

"Since when is the preacher the boss of us?" he teased, though to be frank DeBlanc couldn't care less where they spent their honeymoon, provided that it was spent together. Jesse Custer seemed to have rather visceral opinions though.

An angry _thunk!_ sounded from the motel room that Fiore had vacated. Empty beer bottle thrown to the floor?

"For the last time, we're not heading back to that damn tower!" Jesse hollered. It sounded like the celebratory drinks had finally—_finally_—done a number on that man. Tulip gave a snort-giggle into the back of her arm. "If you assholes think I'm driving us back who knows how many miles just so these two can play dress up, then you—you—"

"Got another thing coming?" Cass finished from his place on the floor. There was silence from the bedroom until they got a faint, slurred, "Yeah."

Tulip chortled again.

This hotel was far nicer than anything they'd stayed at before (perks of an odd, though legitimate wedding. Money—or rather threats—were no object tonight) and as such they'd all congregated in the small living area outside of their rooms. All but Jesse. He seemed determined to get truly wasted for the first time in years and was content to bitch about their honeymoon plans.

To be fair, _it was_ a rather long drive back.

"Why you so eager to go back there anyhow?" Tulip said, lighting a cigarette. "I know we joked about you getting your old costume, but hell, we can stop at plenty of stores that'll do the trick. You know," she waved smoke about. “Halloween shit. It’s late October anyhow."

DeBlanc and Fiore exchanged glances, silently deciding whether they were going to voice the thoughts they'd worked through earlier that night. They'd already shared everything with these three though, so...

"I'd really like to kill him," DeBlanc admitted. He ducked his head with a blush and a smile.
Silence greeted his words. Ah. Right.

Fiore situated himself in DeBlanc's lap, long legs dangling over the chair’s arm. "Not like that," he grumbled, glaring at their rather horrified expressions. "Well... not actually exactly like that. You know we always come back." He waved a hand carelessly.

Tulip was still staring. "That doesn't explain why the sexiest thing you two can think of to do on your wedding night is kill one another."

DeBlanc shook his head. Everything felt mellow to him now. Jesse had quieted in the other room, the hotel was otherwise silent, and despite their reservations, Tulip and Cass had a languid air about them as they lounged in the seat across from the coffee table, Tulip slouched low and Cass leaning against her legs. Fiore was a warm, present weight that DeBlanc was happy to wrap his arms around.

"I don't want to die," he emphasized, voice soft to match the mood. "Only Fiore. You see, when we need a new, mortal body there is an incredibly brief moment where we must return to our homes to get it." DeBlanc brushed a hand through Fiore's hair, chuckling as he pressed into it and sighed like a cat. "It's nothing too noticeable. Nothing that would alert heaven to our location, anyway. But for just a flash of time you're back. Home. We only thought it would be fun to do that back on the stage. It's hardly a requirement." He continued his ministrations. "I know you'll always miss heaven, love, and I'm happy to give you those moments on tonight of all nights. As many as you'd like."

Fiore had curled closer. He opened heavy-lidded eyes. "Only if I get to keep coming back to you."

"But of course."

They kissed and Tulip looked down at Cass. It was probably just her own alcohol intake, but the whole scene had her feeling just a little bit warm.

"Fuckin' beautiful," Cass said, raising his drink in a toast.

...Of course, it was drunk Jesse who ruined the moment.

"Who wants to tell 'em about erotic asphyxiation!" he hollered and yep.

That was a different mood all together.
"Is he for real right now?"

Tulip craned her neck to get a look at Cass in her rearview mirror, scowling as he let out another massive snore. He was slumped awkwardly in the backseat with one knee propped up and an arm slung up behind his head. He reminded her of idiot dogs and their chosen sleeping positions—how exactly did they reach unconsciousness in such impossible positions?

Jesse didn't seem concerned. He just kept playing with the window. "Makes sense," he said, toggling the switch with his thumb. "Guy's a vampire and all. Probably got used to sleeping during the day."

Jesse turned briefly to look. "He's not hurting us any."

"He's hurting my ears," Tulip shot back. She swerved the car hard to see if she could startle Cass awake. He slid into the window—head bouncing briefly against the glass—but didn't open his eyes. He snored louder.

Jesse grinned.

"Well," he said. "We're off to a good start here. Nothing like a long nap after you've done absolutely nothing at all. I wonder how long he'll stay asleep..."

Which was when Tulip spotted the blue and red lights behind them. The siren came on a second later. "Wanna bet on it?"

Jesse narrowed his eye, considering. He torqued fully in his seat this time, looking between Cass and the oncoming cops. He'd known Cass longer than Tulip had. He'd lived with the bastard, and if anyone could sleep through the end of the world, it was him.

"Fifty bucks says he's out for the whole ride," Jesse said, facing front and leaning his knee on the dash.

Tulip cast him a disgusted look. "You do remember my driving, right?"

"Uh huh."

"... Fifty it is then."

She slid on her sunglasses, cranked up the music, and floored the car hard enough to throw them all back in their seats. With tires squealing Tulip kicked them up past a hundred in a matter of seconds.

That should have been enough. In any logical world Cass would have startled awake and demanded to know what the hell was going on. Eyes on the lookout for debris or the lone pedestrian, Tulip strained her ears for the sound of him coming to. It didn't happen. When she was able to look again the cops were farther behind and Cass' drool was farther down his chin.
Jesse coolly examined his nails. "Want to call it quits?"

"Ah fuck you, Custer."

Going faster wasn't an option—her old Chevelle could only take so much—and if swerving didn't work the first time Tulip wasn't fool enough to think it would work now. She tried to hit all the bumps she thought wouldn't blow out their tires and though Jesse bounced high in his seat, Cass remained limp as a goddamn rag doll, just going with the fucked up flow. Tulip thought she'd hit the jackpot when she saw construction up ahead. Lots of gravel, nearly upending the car, finishing in a screeching halt that nearlt blew out her eardrums—Tulip threw the car in park and turned triumphantly.

Cass was still asleep.

"The one goddamn time I want him awake and talking." Tulip pulled down her shirt and dug out three bills from her bra, throwing them at Jesse as the cops surrounded them.

“Much appreciated.”

*Come out with your hands up!*

Two of them did, Jesse using his little voodoo trick to hold all the officers at bay. While he had them sing and get handsy Tulip glared down into the car's back window.

"I know one sure way to wake him up," she muttered.

"Don't worry about it," Jesse said as the shrieking started up behind him. All the cops watched, sickened, as Tulip dragged Cass out into the sun. She screamed the repercussions if he burned her skirt. He just screamed.

"Everything's *fine*."

For those with fifty more dollars in their pocket, it certainly was.
The thing about living in an actual apartment with walls and plumbing and shit was that it made Tulip want to decorate, of all things.

"I am working to become a relator," she said, stapling a cheap string of evergreen directly into the wood of their wall. "What? You don't think I picked up some tips along the way? People have got the shit decked out of their houses while trying to sell them, Jesse, especially during the holidays." Tulip reared back on the rickety chair she was standing on. "Is that straight?"

"Ain't nothing or no one in this house that's straight," Jesse muttered. He poured the rest of his beer down his throat.

"Yeah. Fair."

He knew what Tulip was doing. it wasn't hard to figure out when, out of all the years they'd known each other, she'd never once shown interest in this kind of festiveness. You didn't decorate the desert church in tinsel, and they'd never put holly in the car while out on a job. Stockings, trees, and fairy lights just weren't a part of their repertoire. Which meant that Tulip was pulling out all the stops now in a misguided attempt to cheer him up.

...It almost worked.

Jesse could admit that there was something soothing about seeing Tulip like this: domestic in her attempts if not in execution. Sure, the tree she'd picked up was a half dead monstrosity and the Christmas cookies she'd attempted tasted like stale ass, but there was an attempt being made all the
same. He could appreciate that much at least. And Jesse had to admit, dressed in a green sweater, hands on her hips as she surveyed her work, a tiny frown pulling at her lips, Tulip almost looked...

Motherly. She looked like a mom, dammit.

"C'mere," Jesse muttered, just this side of drunk. Tulip was the only thing besides a bottle that these hands were happy to hold nowadays and she knew it too. One moment she was halfway across the room and the next Jesse had a lap full of lady. Tulip hiked up her red skirt and settled in.

"Well, well, young Jesse Custer," she said, adopting a strangely high-pitched voice that had him snorting. "Have you been a good boy this year?"

Jesse tugged on her hair; pressed up just a bit. "Not in the least."

"That's what I like to hear."

"Oh? Doesn't that mean no treats from Santa?"

"I'm not Santa," Tulip whispered, leaning in to nip at his ear. "I'm the misses who has some very different views about who should be rewarded come year's end. Speaking of coming..." Tulip grinned and for the first time Jesse noticed that there was a red stain to her lips, like she'd been sucking on a lollipop. He could smell the cherry flavor now as Tulip palmed the front of his jeans. "Does little Jesse have something he'd like for Christmas?"

He knew the answer he was supposed to give. Any fool would, of course. Yet as Tulip bent to suck at the base of his neck Jesse found his eyes drawn to the sliver of her stomach that he could see, imagining it growing outwards with weight. They hadn't gotten to that the first time around and now it was an imagine he desperately needed to see. Here. Now. Not just in his dreams.

What he wanted for Christmas was a baby. Their baby.

Of course, the gift Tulip was angling for and the one Jesse prayed for each night amounted to the same.
So he mustered up a grin, pulling Tulip up to capture her lips instead. When he heard the little mewl that told him he was doing things right Jesse opened his eyes and caught sight of their lopsided decorations.

Perhaps they'd worked some kind of magic after all.

...and maybe there was more to come.
"I just don't understand your thinking," Cass said, swiping another fry off Tulip's plate. He waved it close enough that a spec of ketchup hit her cheek like blood. She left it there. "We've all seen so much shite—this week alone!—so how can you go doubting anything at this point, huh?"

Jesse hid a grin behind his hand. "He's got something like a point."

"Something," Tulip muttered.

"Thank you, Padre, thank you!" Cass was on a roll with the fry now. Half-cooked and flimsy it drooped between his fingers like... yeah. A something. "I mean I'm a goddamn vampire. That should'a thrown a wrench in your so-called logic ages ago! An' now we know about little Genesis over here. Freaky cowboy zombie guys tossin' us around like ragdolls. I just met the most hideous man on the face of this here Earth. I'm telling you, pure revulsion made human flesh. I never would've thought that was a thing, especially after knowing some of the bastards on my mom's side of the family, but here we are. An' now after all that you're sayin' you don't believe in a goddamn unicorn?"

Jesse shook his head.

" Fucking unbelievable."

"It's because it's good," Tulip said, then sucked lazily at her drink while the two of them stared. "What? I ain't wrong. All that shit Cass mentioned? The Saint and the Grail and lazy-ass vampires —"

"Hey!"
"Most of the shit is shit. Hell, you thought Genesis was all that, but look where it's landed us." Tulip shrugged. "I'm just saying. Nasty-ass dangerous stuff? I believe it. That makes some sense. But something pure? A fucking unicorn? Nu-uh. I gotta see something like that with my own two eyes. Then check it for wiring. Or batteries. Hell, for all we know unicorns are hungry as well as thirsty and would take a good bite out of our throats if we got too close."

There was silence for a moment as Jesse and Cass considered it.

"He did look kinda lean," Cass whispered.

"Well," Jesse said. He grinned around his burger. "Nothing for it then. You heard the lady. Guess we're gonna have to find you that unicorn."

Find her something like it, anyway.

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