Fantastic Plausibility

by Longcat

Summary

When convention and science offer us no answers, might we not finally turn to the fantastic as a plausibility...

FBI Special Agent Sam Winchester is promoted and re-assigned to work with FBI Special Agent Gabriel Milton. The two of them deal with the unsolved and weird cases known only as the X-Files.
The halls should have been buzzing with activity and they very well could have been, Sam Winchester’s mind had cleared to a single focus. His footsteps carried him across the complex on their own volition, following trails that had been walked thousands of times before. He had finally been reassigned, it was something he had wanted for a while now, something he believed he had deserved. He had worked hard to be where he was today; long hours at the office, extra projects when they came, and he volunteered for additional trainings whenever possible. So why was he now nervous about the prospect of being reassigned? Was it the section he was being assigned to?

His feet stopped and his vision came to focus on a brass nameplate on a heavy wood door. ‘Assistant Director Singer’. He couldn’t turn around now, couldn’t hide behind a screen, he had to face his supervisor. He could always try to turn down the offer and return to the small offices he had left with his tail between his legs. Sam sighed heavily, gathering his composure before he brought a fist down on the door, loudly knocking and announcing his presence. There was no way he could let this opportunity pass him up, it was impossible to tell when and if another opportunity would come by.

Turning the knob and opening the door, he ducked his head as he stepped through the door frame. It wasn’t as if he would have hit the top of the door, in fact the doors were impressively large, and it was more out of habit from working in an older building with small entrances. The assistant director was seated in a large plush chair behind an imposing desk, files and paperwork filed in a haphazard fashion. He finished signing a document with a flourish of his pen before looking up at Sam. Sam hadn’t met the man before, only spoken with him via emails and phone calls, but his face matched the same gruff tone he took over the phone.

“Winchester?” he nodded towards the seat opposite his desk, “Take a seat, boy.”

“Thank you Assistant Director Singer, but I would rather remain standing, if that’s all right by you.” Sam clasped his hands in front of his waist, standing behind the offered chair instead of sitting.

“Suit yourself.” The assistant director grabbed at a file near the edge of his desk. He opened it and casually leafed through the papers, occasionally looking up at the young man standing across from...
him. “Top of your class at Quantico. Studied pre-law at Stanford and graduated with distinctions. Superior rating at your last posting, with excellent recommendations. Samuel-“

“Sam, sir. Just Sam.”

“Sam…” He continued after being briefly interrupted. “You are clearly a capable person and one of the brightest minds to walk through my doors in some years. You could be near anything you wanted, you have the drive and smarts to do it. So why did you choose the FBI? And don’t give me none of that ‘wanted to help folks’ crap.”

“Well, it seemed the right thing at the time. And it’s sort of the family business. My father wasn’t an agent but he worked close enough with many of them over the years as a sheriff. And my brother’s been with the bureau for several years now.” Sam shifted slightly in place, he never really put much thought into why he did what he did. Just that he did the best he could at what he did. His dad wasn’t home enough to raise two boys, and their mother had died when he was very young, leaving him to be raised by his older brother. He looked up to and admired his brother a great deal and when he saw him become an agent and heard some of the work he did, Sam knew he was going to follow.

“Ah, yes. Now I recognize the name. Dean Winchester must be your brother.” He flipped through the files to see if he had missed the connection earlier. When he brought in Dean he remembered working with their father, but somehow it didn’t click as easily when faced with the younger Winchester.

“Yes, sir.”

“He’s a good kid, bit head strong and stubborn as hell, but good agent. You’ll also be seeing more of him now that you’re both working out of the same headquarters.” Assistant Director Singer looked at him carefully before leaning forward in his chair. “But don’t think I’ll be assigning you two on any of the same cases. I ain’t stupid. Dean is brash and bullheaded enough when he ain’t got family to look out for, he’ll be worse if he does.”

Sam could only nod in agreement. He knew how his brother was. Having been raised by him, he knew just how protective Dean could be, especially when Sam was in trouble. He didn’t think he would be able to work at his best if he was with his brother either, as he could be just as protective of his older brother.

“No.” Singer shuffled the paperwork around and back into the folder, closing Sam’s file and nudging his chair back. “Your assignment is with one of our, uh, less conventional sectors. It’s a small team, two people really, well just you and your new partner. Before we go meet him, I’ve got to ask you one question.”

Sam shifted uncomfortably back and forth, what question would be so important that it could delay the meeting of his new partner, or possibly prevent him from meeting his new partner all together. Sam’s mind started to go wild with possible worst-case-scenarios.

“Do you believe in the supernatural?”

The question was unexpected and derailed Sam’s train of thought, opening and closing his mouth a few times before he was able to compose himself and respond with a question of his own. “Like black cats, broken mirrors?” he chuckled, “I mean I know it’s a bad idea to open an umbrella indoors because of safety issues-“

“No boy. Like vampires, bigfoot, or aliens.” He interrupted carefully watching his body language during his response.
“Well, I suppose there is always the possibility of their existence, but it is far more likely that these kinds of stories have deep roots in social and cultural histories. There is a logical and scientific explanation for most everything and I would personally be more apt to search for one of those before entertaining the idea of supernatural happenings.” Sam answered, he wasn’t sure what this had to do with FBI business but he could understand how thoughts of the fanciful could hinder any possible investigations.

“Alright. I think you and I will get along fine so long as you keep up that kind of attitude. You deviate from that and we might start having issues. Now let’s go meet your new partner.” He stood up and moved out from behind his desk. Sam followed him out of the office door and down the same hall he had walked earlier.

Now he was able to take in the sounds of a busy office, people bustled across halls and through open concept work areas. People were passing files and other documented between departments, in their hands or larger boxes of files on library trolley carts. Phones were ringing and large computer screens flickered with maps and databases of more information. A couple of work areas had large whiteboards and cork boards with pinned documents and multiple theories on their perspective cases.

They passed both closed and open doors as they made their way down the maze of hallways. Sam made mental note of where certain file rooms and evidence lock-ups were located in case he needed them in the future. He knew he was going to need a map of the building for the first week or so he worked. Eventually he would figure out where things were located, but until then he didn’t relish the idea of getting lost.

The maze ended with them standing and staring at the elevators. ‘Out-of-Order’ a sign hung across the open doors of the open elevator shaft.

“Balls.” The assistant director cursed at the inconvenience. “Looks like we’re taking the stairs, come on then.” He led them to the stairs primarily used for fire emergencies and began their descent.

Three flights later they opened the door to the basement levels. The activity level was greatly reduced down here. They passed only a few closed office doors with weary eyed agents behind mountains of paperwork who barely looked up to see them walk by. Turning the corner of the hall Sam started to hear music. It started faintly but gradually got louder as they approached an open door with light streaming out into the darker hall. The two of them stopped at the same door.

“Dammit Gabriel! What have I said about disturbing the other agents with that racket of yours!?” He shouted into the room that could only be loosely called an office. Filing cabinets and bookshelves were covered in trinkets and things in jars. Every other surface had files and books open on them.

“BOBBY!” The agent cheerfully spun around from the board he was studying and turned the music down, not all the way, but low enough that Sam was able to hear his own thoughts again. He had a huge grin on his face as he made his way across the room to two men in his doorway. He stood a couple inches shorter than the assistant director but nearly a half-foot shorter than Sam. But he carried a confidence about him that made his seem larger than life.

“Good to see you in my corner of the basement, isn’t that why you moved me down here in the first place? To keep me out of the hair of your other ‘precious’ agents. And speaking of hair!” He stepped between them and circled around Sam looking him over. “Who is this giant Fabio?”

“Agent Milton.” Bobby Singer must have gotten his initial temper back in control as his voice was steady and more of a professional level. “This is Agent Samuel Winchester—“ "Sam" He interrupted with the correction.
“He’s been assigned as your new partner, effective immediately. A desk and cabinet will be moved down within the week for his use, please make space or they will displace your files in making space themselves. And Gabriel,” His tone changed to something less formal, almost pleading. “Don’t fuck this up. I need the write up from your last investigation first thing tomorrow morning, and with no mention of shapeshifters or werewolves. You already have your next case, it should have been sent down earlier today.”

“Yeah, sure thing boss.” He turned and sauntered back into his office picking up a red file and waving it at the men behind him. “Got it right here, nearly done too.”

Bobby shook his head before patting Sam on the shoulder with encouragement, leaving the younger agent staring into the cluttered office. Posters hung on the walls that weren’t blocked with bookshelves. He glanced at the heavy books and some of the titles stood out to him, there was an impressive spread of subjects from religion to physics to biographies. Sam was unable to comprehend what kinds of cases they dealt with based on the information in front of him. He still hadn’t taken a step into the offices when the shorter agent spun around dramatically, spreading his arms out wide.

“Mi casa es su casa.” He announced before dropping his arms and running a hand through his sandy hair. “Guess I’ll have to add ‘clearing out a space for your desk’ to my ever growing to-do list. There’s more I’d like to add to that list, but maybe later.” He said with a wiggle of his eyebrows before spinning back to his desk, missing the flustered look that danced across Sam’s face. Moving aside a few books and a couple of open evidence photos, he pulled out a thin folder. Shaking crumbs off the folder and onto the ground to join whatever other things had been forgotten to the dark floors before handing the file across to Sam. Sam tried to not think of the insects and other critters that, in good probability, lived in the cluttered room.

“Sambo. Here’s the file for our next case, our first case together! We should preserve this moment for posterity.” Gabriel smiled as he casually used a nickname for his new partner. With no response from the taller agent he sat back in his chair. “Read through, or don’t, but be ready to head out tomorrow. We can discuss details of the case and any ideas or theories we have on the drive to the site. It’ll be a long trip, so we can play twenty questions and get to know each other better over that. So it’s up to you now. Pick where you want your desk so I can start clearing a path. Then you can either head out for the rest of the day or you can help move some of my mess. I don’t blame you if you just want to skip out for the rest of the day, it’s not an option we get often.”

“Actually if you don’t mind, I can help for a bit and head out around noon. That gives me about two hours to help with whatever you need and still have enough time to get myself settled in.” He looked around the office sizing up spaces mentally planning a room layout for optimized spaces. Trying to fit in a desk of comparable size to what he imagined was Gabriel’s desk under the pile of papers, in the spaces available.

“Whatsoever I need? Don’t give me that kind of power Sam-a-lam. I’ll get ideas.” He grinned with mischief before giving his chair a spin. “Alright, pick a spot first and we’ll go from there.”

Sam pointed to the spot next to one of the bookshelves. There was currently a filing cabinet and a stack of boxes there but it would be the best spot for a desk while maintaining enough room for the existing shelving and would create a small nook for himself. Gabriel nodded at his choice and started to make room amidst his own mess to receive the file boxes. He turned the music back up and started humming along. Sam found himself nodding along to the music as he worked in silence, occasionally looking at the titles of the files or the books as he moved them.

“Portrait of Dorian Grey?” He asked as he lifted a book out of the bottom drawer of the cabinet. Sam
hadn’t seen too many fiction pieces in the library collections, especially not many in this condition. So far every book in Gabriel’s collection had been in great condition, some having worn pages, but none of them showed any folds, creases, or dents. This book was clearly missing pages and had dozens of dog-ears folding pages over.

“Oh yeah.” Gabriel looked up from his piles, which had quickly taken on a surprising amount of organization in the short time they had been working. “That was from a particularly interesting case that caught my attention. A collection of grotesque paintings were found in the hidden space of a warehouse that was going to be demolished. One of the demolition workers recognized one of the subjects to vaguely resemble an old and estranged family member.”

“And this required the attention of the FBI?” Sam asked, unsure how the discovery of hidden art needed the resources provided for a full case.

“It didn’t. Not at first. But when the family member turned up dead and the painting changed to a classic portrait. That was when they let me take the case.” Gabriel grinned across the room, remembering the details of the case as if he had solved it last week.

“So you figured you had a Basil Hallward on your hands?”

“Oh so you know the story!” Gabriel clapped his hands in delight. “Not many people do you know. Just have the basic idea from films and references.” He stood up and walked over to Sam’s side of the room, plucking the old book gently out of his hands. He carefully flipped through a few sections, not letting any pages dislodge themselves.

“But yes, something like that. This book was later found in the home of another of the subjects of the grotesque paintings. Turned into something of a serial killings, each portrait changed to reveal a new death as it occurred, with the exception of the last one. Same one to whom the house where the book was found belonged. Most of the officers on the case refused to accept that the paintings had ever been in their original monstrous states.” He flipped the book in his hands running his fingers over the worn grooves and marks of the battered book.

“A body per painting, most of the bodies belonged to individuals well past their prime. Eighty, ninety, a hundred years old. Unusual on its own, but with the addition of the paintings a truly bizarre case. Unless you recognized what was going on. None of the victims were linked except through the paintings. None of them had wills or left any money or belongings to anyone other than family. Tricky case, that was.”

“Did you solve it? Catch the murderer?” Sam clarified his question, he didn’t realize how enraptured he had been in Gabriel’s story telling until he nearly leaned out of his chair.

“Of course I did!” A twinkle lit up his eyes as a smile crossed his face. “The murderer is still in high security and isolation as per my suggestion and probably not aging either. The final painting is also in a secure location and has either been forgotten, gods I hope so, or has observations posted on it.”

“That can’t be possible though.” Sam finally brought up his skepticism of the ideas put forward by Gabriel. “Even in Wilde’s story, it was Dorian’s wish that changed his fate with the painting. He wasn’t able to chain anyone else’s fate to their paintings. And that was fiction. It’s not something that’s remotely possible in the real world.” Sam took a breath before continuing.

“There are certain cases of serial killers becoming obsessed with their victims, stalking them for years before going through with the final act, so it’s not unheard of for a killer to photograph or paint their targets. This kind of deep seated obsession often evolves into possessive and violent behavior towards the object of their affection.”
“As far as the paintings there is the possibility of transferred observation. The sight of similar works of portraiture sitting in such close proximity to something that had similar stylizing but of a vastly different subject matter does lend to the idea of the brain marrying the images in memory. However, I’m very impressed that you were able to solve the case on the little evidence available. That lends great credibility to your talents as a profiler and detective.” Sam looked at him with slight awe, from what he had heard in the story there wasn’t much solid information to go on. And yet Gabriel had not only solved the case but had captured the perpetrator. He was looking forward to learning from his new partner, so long as he could keep the fanciful separate from the facts. He understood Assistant Director Singer’s question now after hearing Gabriel’s telling of the case. Had he read the files he was certain it wouldn’t have the same flair to it.

Gabriel smiled at him, quietly tucking the copy of ‘Dorian Grey’ into the bookshelf directly behind his desk. Quickly looking at his computer screen he let a small sigh out. “Well thank you for the help, I’m sorry I distracted us both with stories about old cases. It’s nearly noon and I’ve got to finish my report before the day’s end. I’ll see you bright and early tomorrow. Enjoy your lunch!”

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The warmth of the sun hit his shoulders as he stepped outside of the official building. He didn’t need to worry about getting his exercise in for the day after finding out about the status of the elevator, it was down for maintenance at least until the end of the week. Not that he was worried about it. He was already assigned a case that would have him traveling out of town for however long it took, or until they were called back. Thinking on it, Sam checked his shoulder bag making sure the sensitive documents were still there. He understood why they didn’t just move all files over to digital, too many servers had been breached by outside sources, and some secrets were meant to be that. But most of the cases that he had seen or had a hand on in the past were nothing that required this level of security and secrecy.

“Sammy!” His name was called out as he walked in and out of the shade of the overhead trees lining the road. He looked up and shook his head at the image in front of him. A fellow agent just shorter than himself, waving a plate with a half-eaten slice of pie on it at him. He couldn’t help but chuckle as he got closer.

“Good, you got my message. Glad to see you again! And I hear that you’re going to be stationed here at HQ too!” Sam got pulled into a full body hug, a wide grin sweeping across his face as his older brother released his grip. “Too bad they’ve got you working with Mad Milton. I’ve already heard, you’d be surprised at how much the suits gossip.” Dean clasped his hand on his brother’s shoulder before leading him to the table where his own partner was sitting. The café was exactly as he remembered it from his only visit when his brother was first accepted to the main headquarters. Small plastic tables that had clearly seen better days and once colorful umbrellas that cast shade on the faces of the many agents that favored the place. There were more secrets congregated in this small corner café than there were in all of the Catholic Church, and some of those were the same secrets. Looking around, Sam recognized a few of the faces sitting at the tables, some he knew he had seen earlier in the day, and others he remembered from Quantico.

“He doesn’t seem too bad, you know? A bit exuberant and excitable, but he seems really intelligent.” He said as they made their way through the crowded area. Sam knew about the rumors of Agent Milton, but he didn’t think he would have to defend his new partner this early into his partnership. But he was speaking the truth, from what he had seen of the books in his shelves Gabriel
was very well read and the stories about his skills in profiling were well known.

“Typical Sammy, you really will believe in the best of anyone won’t you?” Dean said as he pulled out his chair and sat next to another man, Sam assumed it was his partner. “Do you know what kind of cases he gets? The ones that are dead ends, the ones where there is barely a case, the ones were the eyewitnesses claim Bigfoot or aliens. There’s a reason they call it the X-Files. These are files that got the big red ‘X’ over their case cover.” Sam recognized the look Dean was giving him as the look he got when he was in over his head, or about to get into some kind of trouble that he couldn’t help him out of.

“However Sam is not wrong with his first impressions of Agent Gabriel.” The agent to Dean’s right spoke up, he stared unblinking at Sam and he felt as if those blue eyes were boring into his skull and digging up his deepest secrets. “He is exceptionally intelligent, has an awe-some skill of profiling, and is an overall incredible field agent, if not a bit unorthodox in his mannerisms and techniques.”

Dean rolled his eyes and waved his hand, motioning at the agent in the tan trench coat. “Sammy this is my partner, Castiel Novak.”

“Cas is fine. I apologize for not introducing myself when you first came over. But I did not feel it my place to interrupt a conversation between brothers. Again I am sorry as I feel as if we are already on a first name basis if just from the stories your brother shares, if you would prefer I call you Agent Winchester I can comply.” This agent had an odd manner of speaking, Sam felt as if English was not his first language but he could not detect any sort of accent or the use of any phrases or idioms that would help reveal a place of origin. His brother’s partner was a complete mystery to him.

“Sam is fine, and it’s nice to meet you as well Cas. And it’s my turn to apologize, as I know next to nothing about you.” He glared at his brother as he offered his hand but ended up retracting after Cas didn’t reach out for the expected handshake. Sam awkwardly wiped his hand on his jacket and took his seat at the small table. He caught the eye of a server and made a motion that he hoped conveyed his request for a coffee to match the other two mugs on the table. The two empty plates were both in front of Dean and he could figure out with little skill that Cas did not get to eat his own slice of pie.

“He, uh, doesn’t really mention work whenever we got the chance to talk.” That was a huge lie, Dean loved talking about the cases he was working even if he wasn’t supposed to; he enjoyed gloating about how he got to work the big cases with the big-bads while his little brother was in some back woods Podunk office pushing paperwork. Dean just never talked about the people, especially those he worked with, at least not since Agent LaFitte.

“No. I would suppose not. Most people would not understand the intricacies of our work, however it surprises me that he would make no mention to a family member in the same line of work. You of all people should understand what exactly is that we do.” He tilted his head quizzically, barely reacting to the movement of the waiter as he brought over Sam’s coffee. Sam was trying to get used to the singular stare that this agent had, he could see it working wonders in an interrogation room, because he was already slightly unsettled by it just sitting in a friendly environment.

“He does Cas, I just try to keep him out of my business. He gets enough of the case work in his own that he doesn’t need to be listening me prattle on and on about doing the same kinds of things. Besides, you’ve met and now the two of you can participate in some of that ‘old fashion’ conversing that you’re so keen on. And can you quit it with the ‘Eye of Ra’ thing you’ve got going? Its weirding me out and I’m used to it, I can’t imagine how Sammy’s even dealing with it.” Dean grimaced at the unspoken staring contest that his partner was holding. Sam quietly thanked his brother for intervening before launching into conversation with Cas.

“So what’s it like working with my brother? I’ve heard horror stories about him and his work and I
want to know if any of it is true.” He smiled at the chance to rib in on his brother. He never really got to hear many stories about his brother, only whispers behind water coolers. Most agents knew better than to talk shit about another agent to their family, they weren’t that stupid. That’s how complaints got lodged and careers ruined on petty words.

“I have not encountered any horror that was not case related.” Cas tilted his head again, knotting his eyebrows together as if he was unsure of the phrasing Sam had used. “We are very good at splitting the work, I am not the best at questioning victims or witnesses. Some think that my people skills are something I need to work on. However Dean excels at gaining their trust quickly and sometimes their phone numbers too.”

“And I bet he’s still using that old ‘Female Body Inspector’ gag card he got out of the back of a magazine instead of using the real deal when he’s out at the bars.” Sam laughed at the thought of it earning a small smile from Cas, and a slap to the back of his head from Dean. He rubbed at the spot quickly shooting his brother a high-quality bitch face out of annoyance.

“First off, I got that at a novelty shop. And second…” Dean signaled to the waitress for the check, now a bit peeved that it seemed that his brother and partner were going to be ganging up on him. Unable to come up with a second point he surrendered with a “Bitch.”

“Whatsoever, Jerk.” The K caught the back of his throat and Sam grinned at Dean. He was glad to be back with family and he was finally starting to feel right about this promotion and re-assignment. Giving his brother a couple bucks for the coffee he got up, said his good byes and started down the streets. He had plenty of time to get back to his apartment and start to unpack some of the boxes he moved with him before he had to pack a travel bag for his first case at his new position.

He needed to at least glance through the files before packing so he had an idea of what he needed first, then he could read through it in detail from the comfort of a half-made bed. He added sheets to his mental shopping list as he unlocked his bare apartment. His first case at his new promotion, he was getting first case jitters all over again. Gabriel’s words rang out in his mind, ‘We should preserve this moment for posterity.’
Coffee makers don't lie

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Light shined brightly across his face. He groaned and tried to roll over gripping the pillow in attempt to block the light with it. Sounds of something crunching under his body caused him to jerk back, all plans of falling back to sleep abandoned. Sitting up Sam gave the sun a death glare, he added curtains to his mental shopping list, right under bed sheets. Looking over to find the source of the crunching noise, Sam was reminded of his case, the file wrinkled and papers bent in odd ways where he had fallen asleep on them.

“Craaaaap,” he moaned, reaching for his phone on the bed side table he was surprised to find that it wasn’t there. He glimpsed at the floor before thinking to reach behind the bed for the charge cord. Following it back into the bed he found the phone tucked between crime scene photos, picking it up the screen came to life. ’6:32 AM’ the time read over one of the standard background images. He had never changed it, why should he, he didn’t have anything in his life that was worth memorializing on his phone to be seen every day. Dean’s phone probably had a picture of that old classic car he was always tinkering with.

Sam rolled out of bed, his feet touching the plush new carpets that the apartments had installed before his move in. Stretching his arms over his head, he shuffled across his room into the small kitchen. Looking around the bare room, boxes half unpacked from where he tried to find plates and silverware for his dinner last night. He scrunched his face up as he took a deep breath, the place still smelled of fresh paint and cleaning chemicals, which was something he could fix. The coffee maker was one of the few things he had actually kept track of during the packing and the move; filters, coffee grounds, sugar all in the same box as the coffee maker. He didn’t have milk or creamer but he would survive this morning. The heavy scents of coffee started to permeate the small apartment as it brewed.

He had nearly an hour before he was required to be at work. He had time to actually make a breakfast, if he had any food, his mental shopping list was only getting longer. Dean had offered to let him stay with him until his apartment was together, and Sam thought about it, but had decided against it. He had moved out of his brother’s care as soon as he was capable, moving away to college and then later to training at Quantico. This was the first time they were assigned anywhere near each other, while it was good to be near family he didn’t want to fall back into their strange co-dependent ways that they had when they were younger. Sam smiled and shook his head at the childhood memories as he stepped into the shower and letting the warm water wash over him.

Toweling his hair dry he returned to his room, finding a clean suit in an open box. Sam dressed in the empty silence of his apartment, staring at the paperwork spread across his bed as he buttoned up his shirt. He started gathering all the documents for the case back together, turning them over and looking at each briefly before putting them away. He cringed at the state he had put them in after falling asleep on them.

The case seemed simple enough, he wasn’t sure why they were being called in on it, especially after hearing from Dean what kinds of cases he would usually get. Grave desecration, grave robbing, corpse mutilation. It was all rather grisly but it wasn’t something that he thought required FBI investigation. He shook his head as he re-assembled the file and placed it on the top of his small travel bag. Gabriel had suggested that they talk over the details of the case while they traveled.

A knocking sound brought him out of his thoughts. Stepping around some boxes he made his way to
his door. Sam peered through the peep hole before unlocking and throwing it open, walking away with little interest, returning to the kitchen.

“Sammy, I figured you were still living out of boxes, but seriously? All you have unpacked is the coffee maker?” Dean pushed his way into the small apartment, looking around and casting judgement on the state of things. Most boxes didn’t show any signs of being looked at after they had been moved in, and very few had been opened. He would have figured that at least the TV would have been set up, or the impressive stereo system he knew his brother had. Dean might have had a mild case of envy over the stereo system.

“Hey, at least I have my priorities straight.” Sam shot back, grabbing the filter and emptying it out into a small trash bag. He knew he wasn’t going to be coming home and needed to clean up before he left, didn’t want to come back to anything molding in an empty apartment. He poured himself more coffee topping off his own mug he waved the carafe at his brother. “You want any before I toss the rest down the sink?”

“I’m gonna get you one of those individual cup makers as my house warming gift to you. No one should have to waste coffee, that’s practically a crime.” Dean grumbled as he opened the top of his travel mug so Sam could pour the remaining coffee in. He took a sip before placing the lid back on. “I’m taking you out for breakfast. Mad Milton can wait, it’s not like they’d give you a case this soon anyways… Oh, they did. Didn’t they?” He said when he saw the look on his brother’s face.

Sam shrugged his shoulders apologetically, “Actually yeah.” He stepped back into his room to grab his things, his travel bag in hand and the case file sticking up out of the pocket. He locked the door behind them as he tried to juggle his items, Dean rescued him by taking his coffee before he dropped it.

“Thank you.” He said taking his coffee back. The two of them made their way down the streets, bumping elbows with people off to work in various parts of the capitol. Sam tried to see if he could recognize any of them as people from the bureau. They walked to the same café they met at yesterday for lunch, getting seats surprisingly close to the one they had before. “We’ve got a case a couple of states over and we’re probably going to be leaving when we both get into the offices. I wouldn’t be surprised if Agent Gabriel was already there, his office looks like he spends most of his time there.”

“You read through it yet?” Dean questioned looking at the folder. He didn’t want to talk about the crazy basement agents, there was a reason those agents were down there. Dean was more interested in what they had given as a first case.

“Bits and pieces, it really seems like a simple case. Not exactly sure why they’re calling us in on it. They probably just gave it to us so I’d have an easy first case. Something that I couldn’t screw up too bad.” Sam grumbled kicking at the ground beneath them, he hated the feeling of being treated like a rookie. He had proven himself over and over again, both at the academy and in the few cases he had been given when he was at the small satellite office. Yet he always felt as if other agents looked at him like he wasn’t skilled enough since he rarely got the chance for field work. He was lost in his own thoughts and didn’t catch Dean grabbing the case file out of the pocket of his bag.

“At least I have my priorities straight.” Sam shot back, grabbing the filter and emptying it out into a small trash bag. He knew he wasn’t going to be coming home and needed to clean up before he left, didn’t want to come back to anything molding in an empty apartment. He poured himself more coffee topping off his own mug he waved the carafe at his brother. “You want any before I toss the rest down the sink?”

“I’m gonna get you one of those individual cup makers as my house warming gift to you. No one should have to waste coffee, that’s practically a crime.” Dean grumbled as he opened the top of his travel mug so Sam could pour the remaining coffee in. He took a sip before placing the lid back on. “I’m taking you out for breakfast. Mad Milton can wait, it’s not like they’d give you a case this soon anyways… Oh, they did. Didn’t they?” He said when he saw the look on his brother’s face.

Sam shrugged his shoulders apologetically, “Actually yeah.” He stepped back into his room to grab his things, his travel bag in hand and the case file sticking up out of the pocket. He locked the door behind them as he tried to juggle his items, Dean rescued him by taking his coffee before he dropped it.

“Thank you.” He said taking his coffee back. The two of them made their way down the streets, bumping elbows with people off to work in various parts of the capitol. Sam tried to see if he could recognize any of them as people from the bureau. They walked to the same café they met at yesterday for lunch, getting seats surprisingly close to the one they had before. “We’ve got a case a couple of states over and we’re probably going to be leaving when we both get into the offices. I wouldn’t be surprised if Agent Gabriel was already there, his office looks like he spends most of his time there.”

“You read through it yet?” Dean questioned looking at the folder. He didn’t want to talk about the crazy basement agents, there was a reason those agents were down there. Dean was more interested in what they had given as a first case.

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“No they’re not.” Dean said as he thumbed over a couple of different pictures, making faces at the disturbing images. “Besides, I think Cas already took a look at this case. He must have been the one who sent it through Singer to go to you guys.” He muttered, handing the file back before leaning back in his seat. Dean smiled at the waitress when she stopped to take their orders. Sam politely ordered his meal before turning and giving his brother a serious bitch face, stuffing the files back into
his bag.

“So this case wasn’t good enough for one Winchester send it to the other? The one who works with
the crazy files?” Sam bitched at his brother, already frustrated that he felt the case was a test case for
him in his new position. Now his brother was rubbing in the fact that it wasn’t even worth his own
time and had passed it over.

“Woah! Nothing like that Sammy. Cas spoke with one of the victims family members and passed the
case on. It wasn’t my call.” Dean waved his hands in defense nearly bumping the waitress as their
breakfast sandwiches being placed in front of them. “He chooses our cases.”

“You guys get to choose?” Sam looked at him incredulously. Being able to choose cases instead of
just taking them as they came was nearly unheard of at least it was in the smaller offices. This was
his first time working in something bigger than a public library. He took up his own breakfast
looking at the veggies and surprised at their freshness.

“Yeah?” Dean managed around a bite. “Cas and I have a team, we can delegate cases to other agents
in our group. You’re part of a team too, of, uh two agents. Sorry man.”

Sam just shook his head taking another bite of his food, of course that’s how his luck would play out.
But at least it was something he was used to and not just something new to be waved at him only to
be taken out of his reach. Not being able to turn down cases, just taking them as they came was
familiar. A thought shot across his mind, didn’t Gabriel say yesterday that he got to request the
Dorian Grey case? Maybe there was some more to this than he was understanding, but he still had
time to learn.

“I don’t remember seeing Castiel’s interview or report in the file.” He said, finishing off his own
sandwich with a gulp of his coffee, putting money down on the table for their bill. Sam mentally
went through the documents he scanned through last night, none of them were filed by his brother’s
partner. He was going to have to go through them again, he was starting to look forward to the long
car ride with Gabriel if it meant talking over the details and hearing another person’s take on them.

“Sam, call me when you get back. We need to get you some food for that place of yours.” Dean
called out as they started heading in different directions near headquarters. Dean went to the main
entrance, pulling his ID card out from inside his jacket, Sam could see the light flashing off the
plastic holder. He shook his head as he made his way to one of the side entrances. Pulling his own
identification out, he showed it to the guard as he made his way inside.

The hall ways were just as busy as he remembered them from yesterday. Bulletin boards had more
photos and pieces of evidence as agents made headway on their own cases. Despite having only
taken the trip once before Sam found himself in front of the broken elevators, still out of order he
took the three flights of stairs down to the basement levels. These halls seemed darker and less
inviting than before. Cold concrete walls and harsh fluorescent lighting. Just about every door he
passed was closed, agents hunched behind their desks barely a flicker of life passing across their
faces. No one acknowledged his presence as he walked down to his new office. His shared office,
with a new partner, in a new building, in a new town. What was he doing? His anxiety suddenly
came back asking if this was really the right thing to do, questioning all his life choices up to this
moment.

A door flung open, bathing the hall in light and letting music escape into the doldrums. Sam smiled at
the situation in front of him, his anxiety melting away. If he was going to be working in a basement
at least he had the only office with character. He quickly tried to hide his smile as the shorter agent
flung himself into the hallway singing into pen.
“He’s handling the money, he’s serving the food! He knows about your party. He’s calling you, DUDE!” Gabriel belted out the lyrics dramatically into his pretend microphone, he winked at Sam before continuing with a wiggle of his hips. “Now do you believe, in the one big sign? The double wide shine, on the boot heels of your prime.”

Sam laughed at his new partner’s antics. He had never worked with an agent who had fun with their work that wasn’t a sociopath. This was something new, and something he could see himself getting used to. He shook his head and stepped around into the office, and stopped in his place.

“To your liking?” Gabriel nudged him into their office, moving across to his space to turn his music down. The office had been cleaned and organized over the space of the night, a desk had been moved into the space he had picked out yesterday. The bookshelves and the filing cabinets were shuffled to make room and create organization. Gabriel’s posters and trinkets were still up and around mostly on what was now his side of the room, but one bookshelf was left empty for his own use.

“I left that one for whatever you wanted to bring into our cozy corner of the basement. I didn’t know if you wanted to bring any plants down here to liven up the place, but they would have to be shade tolerant since we don’t get any natural light, but I’m going to apologize now, keeping plants alive really isn’t a strong suit of mine. I can easily lose track of time.” He circled around pointing to the empty shelving, keeping his eyes on his partner.

Sam didn’t know what to think of it all. How could he have gotten everything moved on his own in just one day? And not just the files but the furniture as well. This was a project that should have taken two people the better part of a weekend, especially the re-organizing of the bookshelves after they were moved.

“Earth to Sam?” Gabriel waved a hand in front of his face. Slight worry and concern on his own, Sam had just gone blank. It was impossible to read him or his reaction to the surprise that had been put together for him.

“Yeah. Yeah! I’m good. This is good. I mean it’s great! Thanks Gabriel.” Sam managed to find his voice after staring at the changed office. He smiled, looking around the room yet again. “I didn’t expect to see this, that’s all. At least not this soon, I thought we’d be working on it after this case.”

“RIGHT! The Case.” Gabriel clapped his hands and pointed at Sam, pulling himself from a daze. “We should get going, it’s a long drive.” He pulled a bag out from behind his desk and jangled a set of keys.

“Don’t tell me you almost forgot about our first case, you were the one who said we should preserve the moment for posterity?” Sam couldn’t help himself, there was something about the man that he just wanted to tease and joke with him. He gripped his own bag tighter as they walked down the corridor to the stair well.

“You were listening to me! Oh Samsquatch we are going to get along fine!” A twinkle lit up in his eyes as he hung off the stair rail leaning backwards to look at his partner. The smile Sam responded with caused him to smile harder. Gabriel led them up the stairs up to the car park where he opened the trunk to a Lincoln town car.

It was an older vehicle and it appeared to be part of the government fleet, but there were a few things that stood out. The flying spaghetti monster sticker on the bumper was one, the fuzzy dice on the rearview mirror was another. He put his bag in the trunk alongside Gabriel’s and double checked his pockets for his wallet and badge before grabbing his case file and taking shotgun. The car started up and the sudden blast of loud music had Sam grabbing at his ears, his knee jerking up and
connecting into the dashboard.

“Some magic they found. Something far better I’m told. Yeah, Poppies Yeah!”

Gabriel quickly leaned across the car grabbing at the volume dial, turning it all the way down. Pulling himself back into the driver’s seat by the steering wheel, he sheepishly shrugged at Sam. A flush tinted his whole face in embarrassment as they sat in silence before Gabriel muttered. “Sorry about that. The knob must have been bumped.”

“First Cake now Marcy Playground?” Sam was still holding his head but he grinned up at Gabriel, looking at him through the hair fallen around his face. He hadn’t heard this much of the best of the nineties since his college years. Dropping his hands he rubbed at his knee, still sore from colliding with the glove compartment, the pain quickly disappearing.

“Well read, whip smart, good taste in music? Next thing you’ll be telling me is that you’re single.” Gabriel quickly shed the look of embarrassment and replaced it with a cheeky smile and waggle of his eyebrows. With the flirting it was Sam’s turn to face away from his partner, blush spreading across his face.

Jerking the shift stick down Gabriel put the car in reverse and then with another shift he slammed the gas pedal causing the car to lunge forward with a squeal of the tires. Sam grabbed for the armrest on the door to steady himself, unprepared for Gabriel’s brand of driving. Leaving the parking garage behind them they made their way to the highway, their trip to the site of their first case on its way.

Gabriel had turned the music back on, but kept the volume low so they were still able to hear each other over it. They passed through the city limits, leaving the taxis and bland business buildings behind. Large family homes scattered the landscape with pockets of forest spotted between. Eventually the small communities melted back and they were left with a stretch of uninterrupted trees as the hills slowly grew into mountains.

The landscape was soothing to watch go by as Sam listened to Gabriel talk about some places of interest in and around the city. He must have visited everyplace at least twice the way he was able to talk about some of them. Sam wouldn’t be surprised if he found that Gabriel knew the layout of Washington with his eyes closed.

“Get a chance to see what we’re headed into yet?” Gabriel asked finally bringing their talks to their upcoming case.

“Yeah, I took a look at it last night before I fell askeep.” Sam said earning a sideways glance from Gabriel.

“Really? That’s how you get nightmares Kiddo.”

“I’ve seen worse, besides, it’s just grave robbing and desecration.” He said thinking back to some of the files that had crossed his desk. Or even some of the cases and accidents he saw as a kid when his dad would take him to work because he couldn’t find someone to watch him. The face Gabriel was making made him reconsider his comments though. “Right?”

“If only it was that easy. Sure there are graves being dug up and bodies going missing, all these are recent burials too. Or were.” Gabriel tilted his head, thinking about the right way to phrase the tense of the situation. “Are? Were? Anyways, not all the bodies are being found, the ones that are. Well there isn’t much left to them when they are found, some of the bones are exhibiting teeth marks.”

“I saw that in the coroner’s report on the first body recovered. But this town is located in an area
where large predators are common. They have a large, almost bordering on troublesome population of black bears, as well as both coyotes and coydogs in the area.” Sam explained with a shrug, “Those teeth marks could have come from the body being left out in exposed areas where it could have been found by any of the animals in the immediate area.”

Gabriel seemed to accept the theory for a short while before talking again. “Alright, so there are bears and dogs. But those don’t explain why some of the bodies have been seen up and moving around town at night. There have been multiple eye witnesses including some of the family members of the recently deceased.”

“We have to take into account the mental state of family members during times of extreme grief and stress. These are people who had to bury a loved one only for their grief and healing period interrupted by something so disturbing as an exhumation. They aren’t experiencing the closure they need to move on so their minds are attempting to fill in the blanks.” Sam didn’t buy the idea of people seeing their dead loved ones lurking around town. He had some ideas of his own and went on to explain.

“Pareidolia is a phenomenon that’s well documented where faces and human shapes are perceived by the mind. This is especially common in people who are experiencing large amounts of stress or are excessively tired.”

“One of your ‘psychological manifestations’ punched through a double paned window and grabbed his eighty-year-old wife leaving bruises on her arms. Tricks of the mind can’t do that. There’s something bigger going on here.” Gabriel said before laying on the horn and pulling the wheel tight to the left as a truck sped past them, a feat in itself considering the speed they were traveling at.

“So you have a theory then?” Sam asked, pursing his lips together, hand gripping the armrest tightly after the near accident. They had been going over case details and he had been talking about his theories, but hadn’t heard what his partner was thinking. He said there was something bigger going on, but he still didn’t see how grave robbing made a FBI case.

“Hells yeah I do. Ghouls.” This was where Sam was glad he wasn’t the one driving or he would have hit the breaks in the middle of the highway. Gabriel’s style of driving reminded him of Dean’s, so far he had only experienced two speeds, fast and faster. There was no change in pace when Sam spun to stare at him.

“Ghouls? As in, the living dead?” Sam couldn’t believe the idea that his partner was offering, it was impossible. “That’s impossible, ghouls aren’t real. The ideas of undead aren’t new, but they’re all just stories.”

“Stories that span across continents and cultures. You can’t tell me that there isn’t something there when multiple cultures come up with the same stories. All folk stories are based on something.” Gabriel countered. “So far this case is sharing all the classical signs of ghouls. Graves dug up and bodies consumed only for the likeness of the body to reappear and cause disturbances. I bet you dollars to donuts that if we ask around there is probably something that was brought back from the Middle East. Also we’re probably going to find that there have been robbery and theft reports of specifically gold items.”

“If that’s true then we should also be on the lookout for reports of hyena’s running around in the woods.” It was a bit heavy on the sarcasm but Sam really didn’t think that this was even an idea worth entertaining. If it bothered Gabriel he didn’t show any signs of it, instead his eyes lit up and he turned to face Sam with a huge smile.

“Sammich! You’re a genius! Why didn’t I think of that? Of course they can shift into hyenas! How
did I forget that?” Gabriel started fidgeting in his seat, drumming his fingers along the steering wheel as he started rattling on taking Sam’s sarcastic comment completely into his theory. Sam was starting to regret having taken any anthropology classes back in college.

“Once we get into town we need to start asking around, asking the locals, especially any hunting clubs, if there have been any unusual animal sightings in the area. Any unusual tracks or signs or even sounds. I’m hoping it’s just the one since we’ve only got reports of bodies going missing one at a time. Chances are they’re, it, “ he corrected himself before continuing, speaking rapid pace, “is going to be sticking close to any active graveyards, ghouls usually don’t wander too far from a reliable food source unless it runs dry. We should also set up a time line on the deaths and disappearances to establish any pattern to know when it needs to feed next and hopefully we can catch it before it does the deed.”

“How are you so sure we’re not just facing a twisted individual who wants to bring back the role of a resurrectionist?” Sam interrupted him before he could completely invest in his crazy idea of a member of the living dead terrorizing a small rural town. Especially a variety from half a world away. He needed to keep them on track to solve the case, he realized, Gabriel was easily swept up into the fantastic and he could see where the unfortunate nickname of Mad Milton came from while he rambled on.

“Simple. The bodies aren’t being sold. They’re being eaten.” Gabriel said with some finality, dropping the discussion. Sam was left with silence to think about the details of the case and time to mull over the possibility of something else happening. None of his training had prepared him for the theories and thoughts of otherworldly beings being responsible for anything other than the plots of movies and stories to scare children.

Chapter End Notes

Songs are: Comfort Eagle by CAKE and Poppies by Marcy Playground
As they came into the small mountain town they were met with a rush of emergency vehicles speeding in front of them as they were stopped at an intersection. Sam shared a look with Gabriel before they turned the car and sped through the red light to follow them. They followed the vehicles through a small residential area leading to the outskirts of the town, a small church caught Sam’s attention as they passed by. Something about their discussion earlier had made his think about places where a person could hide and still be close enough to the epicenter of the crimes.

The high speed procession filtered into a community of trailers and double-wides. Plastic chairs and toys scattered across several yards, faces peered out behind curtains. They stopped at the edge of the complex where a couple other police cars were waiting, some officers were starting to rope off the scene while others were taking pictures. Gabriel pulled in behind one of the other cars, parking the vehicle before getting out. Sam followed him, surprised at how quick the smaller agent could move.

“Who are you two?” The officer asked holding a hand out, blocking their way to the crime scene. Sam looked behind the officer to see if he could observe anything going on at the scene, reaching into his inside pocket he felt for his identification.

“FBI. I’m Special Agent Winchester and this is Special Agent Milton.” Sam pulled his badge out to show the guy as Gabriel pushed past both of them getting closer to the scene. The officer protested weakly unable to stop the shorter agent’s intended path into the heart of the action. Sam shook his head at his new partner and turned his attention back to the officer who was trying to do his job of establishing a perimeter.

“Sorry about my partner, he’s an action first kind of agent.” Sam shrugged his apology, he didn’t know if these people had ever interacted with someone from the bureau before but he knew from working with a small division how testy local police could get if they felt that their authority was being questioned or stepped over. From the way the officer stepped down after the apology he figured that was the case here. “We were called in as additional help for your situation here. We’re here to help whatever investigation you already have in place, not here to take your work from you. Is there anything that your team has been able to put together since the last– GABRIEL!”

Sam shouted as he watched his partner climb into a tree at the far edge of the crime scene. His sudden outburst startled the officer whose hand immediately dropped to his weapon on his hip. Seeing the other agent in a full suit climbing out on a branch high up in a tree was not what he was expecting, so he didn’t put up any resistance when Sam pushed past him. Coming up to the base of the tree, Sam looked up to watch Gabriel scanning around from his new height.

“Don’t like it when someone is taller than you? Hey Samtron?” Gabriel asked without even looking down to his partner. He continued to look around before he stopped, pointed at something and scrambled back down the tree. He clapped his hand on Sam’s back letting his hand linger against him before he walked off at a brisk pace.

Sam couldn’t stand the cryptic actions his partner was taking, he was here as a second agent, he wasn’t going to be left out. Stalking off after him, Sam noticed that they had left the fresh crime scene behind them, police officers still buzzing about. Looking around he tried to find just what it was that Gabriel could have seen from his earlier perch. He spotted something that seemed out of place in the field. Kneeling down he grazed his fingers over a patch of grass, looking at the residue left on his fingertips.

“What is this stuff? Ash?” Sam asked standing back up, looking around to see if there was any sign
of a recent fire anywhere. Not seeing any fire pits or burn barrels in any of the adjacent yards, he
started looking further. Not a single one of the houses had outdoor burn sites, for all he knew it
wasn’t permitted in this community. A couple of the houses had stove stacks coming out of the roofs,
but none would account for the small patches out here.

“Not ash. Although I’m pleased that you noticed it. You see the pattern they make?” Gabriel pointed
out a couple other patches of the strange substance. The patches lead from the edge of the woods
right up to where the police were working and disappearing among the activity. Just the one trail
leading either two or away from their crime scene, he wasn’t able to discern any direction to the
marks.

“They almost look like they’re paced out like foot prints.” Sam offered, he didn’t know what could
have made something like this. It was weird but it was a piece of evidence. Something that the local
police weren’t doing anything with, if they had even noticed it. “So what is it Gabriel?”

“Grave dust.” He said very simply as if the answer was not just the obvious one but a simple one,
earning a glare from Sam.

“We are nowhere near the graveyard. I saw the church almost five miles back before we turned into
this neighborhood.” Sam sounded frustrated already. He wasn’t sure if it was from not stopping to
eat anywhere during the long trip, the trip itself, or Gabriel’s insistence of this being a crime with a
supernatural perpetrator. Whatever it was his patience was already running thin.

Gabriel stooped down collecting some in a bag he followed the trail of it back to the crime scene.
Again he pushed right past an officer ready to prevent his presence in the area. Sam once again had
to step in and flash his badge vouching for his unusual partner. The officer from before gave him a
weak wave before the chief stormed over. Gabriel was poking the remains of the surprisingly fresh
body with his pen.

“I’m going to assume that you two are the agents that the bureau sent us? Either that or I’m going to
have to arrest and lock up your buddy here for disturbing an active crime scene and, is he poking Ms.
Callum’s remains? That alone is grounds enough to remove him from here.” The chief made a face at
what Gabriel was doing. This was his town and these were his people, even if they were dead in
their own yard he still felt a sense of duty owed to them.

“Agent Winchester, Agent Milton” He pointed at himself followed by a gesture to the agent in the
thick of the crime scene. Sam was getting tired of pulling his badge out already. He had seen other
agents hang them on lanyards or chains, it was mentally added to his every growing shopping list.
Showing it to the police chief he tucked it back into his pocket, honestly hoping that was the last time
he needed to do that today.

“Yes, and I have to apologize for my partner. Agent Milton likes to jump into cases before talking
with the local forces.” He loudly emphasized Gabriel’s name in hopes that it would catch his
attention to the social faux-pas he was committing by ignoring the officers at the scene and trampling
around like it was his own. He didn’t react, still examining the areas of torn flesh on the victim’s
arms. “He’s very passionate and driven when it comes to solving cases.” He finished lamely unable
to get his partner to apologize for himself.

“I’m Sherriff Bronson. Well I’m just glad that you guys are here to help us. This is the first victim
who wasn’t already dead. Up until now it’s just been a string of grave robbing and corpses showing
up a few days later.” He took his hat off to scratch at his head, these were his people but he wasn’t
any closer to finding the perpetrator. Now he had to deal with the escalation into murder. His officers
moved around them allowing the FBI agents to access the grounds. This was more than his quiet
town was used to and he was trying to do all he could to fix it.
“Sherriff, we read the files however we’d like to speak with some of the witnesses as well as some of your force so we can get a better idea how this situation is. It’s one thing to read the stories, but another entirely to hear the accounts.” Sam was trying to be as diplomatic as he could after the way Gabriel had been acting. He wanted the people to be on their side should things go sideways here. His dad had always told them to prepare for the worst and be surprised with the best. And it seemed with Agent Milton the unexpected surprised would be the norm.

“Sam, you good here? I’m good but I’d like to check out some of the other scenes and talk with some of the witnesses.” Gabriel joined back with his partner, wiping his pen off on the hem of his pants before tucking it back into his pocket. He looked around as if he was seeing the officers for the first time, watching as they reworked the scene where he had moved through. Sam barely repressed a groan and rolled his eyes, letting his head go with it.

“Gabriel, this is the Sheriff. He says that-“ He started talking before he was cut off, he took a deep breath and set his face in stone to prevent it from contorting into what Dean would have called his ‘bitch-face’.

“This is their first death? We’re looking at either an escalation or an opportunistic killer. I don’t like the idea of either, Samwell.” Gabriel looked between this partner and the sheriff with a grimace and open hands. He had to bring up all possibilities before he could commit to a theory, although the best theory he had wasn’t being taken seriously by his own partner. He still had time to explain and possibly sway him.

“You really think it could be a different person who killed Ms. Callum?” Bronson flipped his hat over in his hands, looking up at the two agents. The implications of what he was saying as huge. He had lived in his town for his whole life, he thought he knew his people well enough. “The worst we ever had before this was the occasional hunting accident or brawl down at the tavern. Agents. I can’t accept the idea that there are multiple people in this town that could be capable of this. Solve this, please. You have our full cooperation.”

“We’ll meet you down at the offices first thing in the morning. We, uh, actually haven’t checked into our motel. We saw the vehicles and followed them here.” Sam looked back at the car, he didn’t know when the motel required them to check in but he also wasn’t sure what time it currently was either. They had deviated from their planned schedule when they were cut off by the procession of emergency vehicles and hadn’t gotten the chance to start back on it yet.

“That’s fine, I’m gonna need to cancel our afternoon meeting anyways, with this,” the sheriff waved his hand at the scene around them. He had his job to get done and there wasn’t any pressing need for the agents to still be on scene. They still needed to document all the evidence and deal with the autopsy of an otherwise happy individual, “going on as it is. I’ll be busy for a while. I can get one of the boys to stop by and drop off today’s paperwork for you when it’s done.”

“Thank you Sheriff Bronson. We’ll be on our way and will call your department with the location we’ll be staying at.” Sam was glad for the dismissal, it would give him time to think over some of the things he had seen and heard. As well as time to talk with his partner.

“No need. We only have the one motel in town. I know where to find you guys if we need to.” He said taking Sam’s hand in a strong handshake, nodding politely to Gabriel he turned back to oversee the work of his people. Directing the coroners through the tape and the evidence collection. Sam looked back to see that no one was paying any attention to the mysterious sooty marks in the grass, he was reluctant to call them footprints.

Gabriel was quick to get back to the driver’s seat of his town car, leaving Sam to observe the scene for a few moments on his own. He watched as the remains of Ms. Callum were wrapped into a body
back and carried into the back of a hearse, he wouldn’t be surprised to find that the coroner and the undertaker were the same person. The startup of the car’s engine brought his attention back to his own situation where he and his partner were probably on a timeline to get checked into their rooms. Tucking his hands into his pocket, Sam turned his back on the crime scene and stepped into the passenger seat of the car.

“So what did you think?” Gabriel asked, the car hadn’t moved and he hadn’t reached for the shift either. Leaving the two of them sitting in the vehicle just outside a crime scene. Giving his partner time to think over the details of the newest grisly addition to their case. He was surprised when Sam turned on him in an outburst.

“I think you’re an ass, Gabriel. You didn’t even try to acknowledge any of the officers working at the scene. I know the FBI is this big entity that gets called in for either big cases or whatever the hell it is here, but we still should treat the local force with respect. These are real people with a real problem on their hands, you heard the sheriff they have never, never, had something like this before! We got there and you just stormed in pushing past people to get closer to the scene, I had to introduce you. Twice! You acted as if this was your scene and everyone else be damned!” Sam was out of breath when he finished, his face flushed when he realized how he had just gone off on his partner on their first day in the field together. With the built up frustration at his partner let out he started to feel bad about having done so. He didn’t have much time to observe how he worked the scene but the way he had walked past people stood out to him.

“I had a full conversation with Carlos, one of the guys gathering evidence. And with… yeah, I’m sorry about that. I’ll apologize to David tomorrow, I just got pulled into things and might have lost sense of what was going on around me. I can get almost single minded on things sometimes.” Gabriel said sheepishly, ducking his head in shame hoping that was enough of an apology. He put the car into gear and drove them out of the small neighborhood. They were about to pull back onto the road that brought them out there when Sam sat up to his full height.

“Gabriel… Who is David?”

“Oh, uh. Sheriff David Bronson?” Gabriel winced at his slip up, he knew his new partner was smart and he was able to tell that he was just as observant, but he wasn’t expecting him to be that observing. “His name was on some of the evidence bags?” he offered hoping it would be enough to placate the tall agent. He didn’t want to find out what it would be like to be caught up in a lie when Agent Winchester was the one unravelling it.

It seemed to be enough for the younger agent, because he sat back in his seat and started picking at a loose thread on his sleeve cuff. The silence was deafening between them, Gabriel finally giving in and turning the music on. The same CD they had listened to on the second half of the trip was still going. He turned it off not even half-way through the song, no longer interested in it. They didn’t have to sit in the quiet for too long, the town was small and the motel was in view. Pulling into a spot Gabriel was quick to check the in, meeting Sam back at the car with just one set of keys. Sam must have pulled a face at the sight of the single key because Gabriel chose that point to say something.

“Sorry Kiddo, the bureau only springs for two rooms when the agents aren’t the same gender. Looks like you’re stuck with me. Help grab the bags and we can set up a thought board on one of the walls. I’ve got tacks somewhere in my bag and with two copies of the case file we should be good.” He unlocked the trunk and grabbed his own bag allowing Sam the room to do the same. He had parked just in front of their shared room which made the transition easy and quick. Opening the door, Sam was glad to see two beds as well as a couch and a small kitchenette. His stomach rumbled, reminding him that they hadn’t stopped for any food during their trip, and that their little detour to an unexpected crime scene had only delayed that longer.
“Can we break for food first? I’m sorry I snapped earlier, it’s probably because I haven’t eaten since breakfast.” Sam asked as he tucked his suit jacket into the closet, turning around he quickly spun right back his face heating up. Gabriel was already two steps ahead of him and wasn’t wearing a shirt, his suit jacket, button up, and undershirt were all laying out across the bed. There was nothing hiding his soft form from view and it was not wholly unattractive to Sam. He could hear Gabriel moving around as he kept his attention firmly on that of his jacket, as if he had noticed that the loose fiber had created a run up his sleeve.

“Yeah sure, that sounds great. You head out without me. Keys are on my bed. Get me whatever you like, but no greens.” He said as he made his way into the bathroom, door closing behind him and lock clicking in place. Sam could hear the sounds of water as the shower was started, he had to will his mind into not thinking of his partner in the shower. He was annoying and rude and crazy and really smart and lively and handsome… and Sam was screwed. He had to stay professional.

He stripped out of the rest of his suit and pulled a plaid flannel over his head. The suit could get people to talk, but it also made them uneasy. He just wanted to go out to get food, not cause a scene. Among the business attire he had made sure to pack normal clothes, and he was really grateful for grabbing sweatpants now that he was aware of their sleeping arrangements.

The keys were right where Gabriel said they were, grabbing them he made his way out to the car. It started up easy enough and he was able to find a diner not too far from their motel. Looking over the menu he had no idea what Gabriel would like. He made eye contact with the lone waitress, she was leaning back against the counter and looked as if she wanted to be just about anywhere else. Clearing his throat he finally was able to get her attention.

“What’s the special?”

“It’s a Ruben melt with a side of fries or mashed. We also have a dessert special of chocolate cake.” Her voice had as much interest as her posture did. But the special sounded like a good choice, there wasn’t much healthy about a ruben, and Gabriel had asked in a roundabout way for unhealthy.

“Ok. Yeah, I’ll have one of those, a grilled chicken salad, and two slices of the cake.” An offering of the opposite of something green sounded like the right choice at this time. “And two coffees.” He added almost as an afterthought. During the wait for the food he managed a new high score of snake on his phone.

“Here you go. One special, one cluck salad, and two slices of cake. Have a good night.” Everything she said was just so bland, Sam wondered if there wasn’t a way to inject personality into someone because she was in dire need of one. She would have fit right in with the other basement agents, the ones in their paper tomb offices.

“Dinner is served.” Sam announced backing into the room attempting to keep things balanced, he could hear music playing again but couldn’t pin-point the source. Handing off one of the coffees he took in the changes that Gabriel had made during his brief outing, including changing into sleepwear.

“How do you manage to get these kinds of things done so fast?” He asked looking at the wall that now had a web of clues and evidence laid across it.

“Magic.” Gabriel answered with an eyebrow wiggle and a smirk. “Or in this case the Violent Femmes.” he picked up his phone and wiggled it, showing it to be the source of the music. He placed his coffee on the end table before he flopped back on his bed. Reaching out with grabby hands he waited impatiently for Sam to divide the food. Styrofoam securely in his hands he cracked the lid and a huge smile spread across his face.

“Samden! You care.” He said pulling the thick greasy sandwich out of the box. Dipping a corner
into the mashed potato he attempted to take a bite of the monstrous thing. Getting most of the meal on his face wasn’t a surprise given the size of it but the amount he managed was a feat. Sam tossed him a handful of napkins from the bottom of the bag to help out.

“Ok. What’s with the goofy nicknames?” Sam laughed as he asked. His partner had called him Sam a grand total of twice since they had met. It was something silly, he knew, but it didn’t bother him the way it should have. Nicknames were something given to kids and he had long ago outgrown kid names. His brother was the only one he allowed to call him Sammy and he wasn’t exactly pleased with that, but there wasn’t much he could do about that. But this list of nicknames, and Gabriel hadn’t repeated one yet, was amusing to him, another thing that made him smile.

“If you don’t like them I can knock it off. I just figured Samuel was too serious and you don’t seem like you’d let just anybody call you Sammy.” Gabriel idly spun the fork between his fingers. He really didn’t have a solid reason for the litany of nicknames that he came up with other than that he liked the guy. And he wasn’t ready to admit that to anyone.

“You know most people settle for just Sam.” He had a twinkle to his eyes that said he wasn’t too upset by this, just curious. Sam wanted to know if he was playing a game, trying to get him to crack or something. Other agents had tried to get a rise out of him before, and Gabriel nearly had done just that earlier today completely by accident.

“Now where’s the fun in that?!” He laughed, caught slightly off guard by the playful tone of Sam’s voice. It was that twinkle that encouraged him to continue the banter. He knew it was also an unspoken permission that he was allowed to continue with the nicknames and he took it as a challenge. Now he was going to have to come up with a bunch more so he didn’t repeat.

“I could have gone with Sam Bunyan seeing as you’re dressed the part.” Gabriel said as the new nickname bubbled to the top of his mind. He wasn’t lying either, between the plaid and jeans and his incredible height, the guy could have doubled as the folk character. “Just need a beard and a big blue cow.”

“I think Babe was an ox. Should I even ask about the red shorts?” If his outfit was going to be called into question than he wasn’t going to prevent his eyes from looking any longer. The shorts at one point were probably athletic shorts but

“They’re comfy. And I run hot so it was these or nothing, and I had the feeling that the bureau would do something like this and stick us in the same room. Not that I’m complaining, you’ve been great company so far. Even got me a great dinner when I was super vague about it.” He leaned back into the pillows, crossing his legs and getting comfortable in the bed. Moving the aforementioned dinner off the bed and into the trashcan that sat between the end tables separating them.

“Oh! That reminds me.” Sam spun around to find the bag he had brought in with their dinners in it. “If you have the room, I got us desert from the diner. They said it was one of their specials.” He pulled out the two plastic containers of the cake, handing one across the gap.

Gabriel sat up and looked at him with such awe and respect. It was as if he had just produced their killer in cuffs with a big bow on their head. The plastic fork cut easily into the moist cake and he brought a bite up to his lips. The sound he made next was profane bordering on pornographic. His eyes fluttered closed, the moan interrupted only by his tongue swiping across his lower lip, taking in any frosting he had missed.

Sam watched as the cake disappeared, Gabriel’s throat bobbing with each swallow. His thoughts drifted dangerously unable to tear his eyes away from the scene. He started coughing, having swallowed a piece of his own cake and it getting stuck half-way. It pulled him from his staring as his
eyes started watering from the coughing fit. At least the redness of his face could be explained as a result of his fit.

“Chief, you all right there?” Gabriel asked concerned lacing his features, ignoring the last bite of his cake. His fork hovering in place as he watched his partner nearly choke on their dessert as if he was torn between helping and finishing his cake.

“Yeah.” He grimaced through another few coughs. “Must have gone down the wrong tube. You can have the rest. I’m gonna hit the shower now.” He pushed the remainder of the cake away from him and closer to Gabriel. He stood up, covering his mouth he coughed again, making his way past his bed and closer to the bathroom. Locking the door behind him he turned on the sink first, shucking the plastic wrapping and filling one of the cups sitting to the side of the sink. He gulped the small cup down quickly, helping to ease the lodged cake out of place.

Sam let the shower warm up slightly before stepping under the water. It was a typical motel shower in that the pressure was like hot needles hitting his skin. Grimacing at the feeling he lathered up the soap scrubbing at his skin as if he could scrub away the thoughts he was having about his partner. He needed to squash this stupid crush of his before it got out of control or it was going to be very difficult to continue working in this new position. The last thing Sam wanted now was to be sent back to his old station, demoted and working behind a desk, not when he had just gotten a taste of the big leagues. He wanted to explore more of it and not just experience it second hand through Dean’s stories. Right now the X-files was his ticket and he couldn’t let something like a crush ruin things for him.

He groaned when it dawned on him that there wasn’t any shampoo or conditioner in the bathroom. Not even one of those cheap two-in-one monstrosities that hotels seemed to keep around. Resigned to his fate of a bad hair day in the morning, Sam just let the water rinse through his hair. Stepping out he dried off as best he could with the thin motel towels before hanging them over the curtain rod. If it wasn’t one thing it was another, he had forgotten his sweatpants in his bag out on the bed. Taking a towel down and wrapping it around his waist he snuck out into the shared room.

The gods were kind to him when he saw Gabriel’s form bundled up under the covers of his bed, back towards him. Grabbing his sleep pants out of his bag along with a white undershirt Sam returned to the bathroom where he finished changing. He folded his clothes and placed them back in his bag before dropping it on the floor in climbing into bed. Forcing the pillows up as far as they could go, he just barely fit on the bed, heels touching the edge, he knew he wasn’t going to be getting the best sleep. Eyes scanned the wall, bits and pieces of their case spread across it, not getting them any closer to solving it. Maybe in the morning somethings would be clearer, at least he hoped so as he attempted to fall asleep.
His alarm woke him with a soft chirping, the feel of the scratchy linens and sensation of his feet hanging off the edge of the bed had him confused before he remembered where he was. He opened his eyes to a still dark motel room, soft breathing from the other bed let him know that his partner was still asleep. Sam nodded at no one in particular, grateful that his alarm hadn’t woken them both up. That simple motion of his head had him realizing just how dry his throat was. Licking his lips to try to bring any moisture back he swung his legs out of the bed, the cool air of the room a stark contrast to the warmth of his bed.

His feet touched the ground and he shuffled into the bathroom carefully clicking the light on after he had closed the door behind him. He filled and drained the same small cup from last night, the water had a chalky feel to it and didn’t quench his thirst at all. Splashing some water on his face to help him wake up he changed into something to go jogging in. Sam put his clothes back on his bed and looked over to the other bed, thinking about whether he should leave a note or not. Gabriel looked like he had tried to fight his bed last night; the blanket was bunched up in one corner, pillows were far enough away from each other that they could have filed for divorce, Gabriel himself was tangled in the sheets but was otherwise dead to the world. Shaking his head, Sam tacked a sticky note to their wall.

‘Out for a run. –Sam’

Closing the door behind him, he was glad for the cooler morning air. Doing a couple of stretches to warm up he bounced up and down before heading off. His morning jogs were something that he enjoyed, they gave him time on his own to think about anything without distraction. He was able to think about the details of the case without focusing on anything else, the rhythmic sound and movement of his jog kept the mind clear. Yesterday was the first actual death, up until then it had just been dead bodies. Several dead bodies, actually, each one was a relatively new burial too only having been buried for a few months at most. None of the older graves had been disturbed and if he thought about it this small town probably had some old stones in the graveyard, he could check later.

It was the other things about the case that didn’t add up to him. He really needed to see more information in order to start forming a potential profile. Gabriel had taken the pieces and put together a profile, but Sam wasn’t sure that the man was being serious or was just making light of the fact that they still didn’t have any solid leads on motive. Sure the teeth marks on not just the corpses but on this new body were something, but from the pictures he couldn’t tell exactly what could have caused them, and they hadn’t sent off for a forensic study of them yet. He was coming back to the same thing, he needed more information.

They were supposed to meet the sheriff at the station this morning so they could get briefed on the full scale of the crimes at hand. He would have access to the full records on not just the crimes connected to the case, but any other reports that might have come in. If he was lucky he would be able to find something that they might have missed. He had seen how they had missed the ash, or dust, or whatever the substance was from the last scene.

Something that he might have missed himself if his partner hadn’t insisted in his own way, to look at the whole scene from a different angle. The way Gabriel just jumped into the scene wasn’t because
he didn’t want to deal with the officers present, but so that he could see it form himself, in his own way. It was to avoid the taint of bias, to be able to take a look at everything in a new way. He was able to see and find new evidence because of his actions, and followed up with words, instead of the other way around. The way he was used to doing things. Maybe climbing into a tree was an extreme way of showing him, but Sam was starting to think that maybe he was a genius in his methods. He probably wouldn’t have changed his own methods if he just been told, by seeing how he needed to ‘look at things differently’ in an action he was more inclined to change. Was that what Gabriel was trying to achieve?

Sam stopped his jog, his thoughts were traveling too far from script. He didn’t need to think of anything other than the case at hand, that could start to get him into trouble. Looking around he realized that he also needed to turn around, he didn’t know where he was or how far he had run. Turning around he started jogging again, he didn’t get too far before he heard a car coming up behind him slowly. Sam moved further onto the shoulder waving for the car to move around him. It didn’t pass him but he could hear the window roll down and with the sound of music drifting from the vehicle he couldn’t help his smile.

“Hey you!” was called out in sync with the music coming from the car following him, the soft crunch of the tires on the roadside gravel being muffled by the song. “Up in the sky, learning to fly. Tell me how high, do you think you’ll go? Before you start faaaaalling? Hey you!”

Sam finally turned around to face his partner singing at him from behind the wheel of the car. Shaking his head, he couldn’t hide the grin on his face. He made his way to the passenger door and it opened easily for him. He was glad to see that his partner had an extra coffee in the cup holder, he reached over for it.

“Good morning to you Samshine! Yes you may help yourself to the coffee that your partner so amazingly got for you. And you’re welcome for that and the early morning pick up, by the way.” Gabriel said with a smile as Sam gulped down the coffee. He had turned the music down some, it was still loud enough to hear the lyrics but not loud enough that people outside could hear. Humming along to the words instead of belting them out loud, Sam was able to tell that Gabriel wasn’t upset with his momentary lapse in manners.

“Thank you Gabriel. So I take it you found my note?” He asked even though the fact that he was picked up had already given him his answer.

“Yeah, right in the middle of our other notes, couldn’t miss it. But would it kill you to take your cell phone with you next time you decide to go for a run in a town with a killer on the loose?” Gabriel waved his hand at the area around them as if to indicate that their killer could be anywhere waiting for them. They had just gotten to town and as new faces they were more likely to draw attention, either good or bad. “’K? I don’t need to be worrying about my new partner.” He looked over at him, removing his eyes from the road only to drive in the point with a serious look.

“Yeah, yeah sure. Sorry I left it behind, did the alarm go off again? I didn’t mean to wake you up with it.” He looked down, ashamed that he had forgotten his phone. What was he thinking? Gabriel was right there was a killer on the loose, and he had spent most of the day driving yesterday, he was probably tired and wanted to sleep in a bit.

“Nah, my own alarm went off. But we’ve got a case that just escalated with a murder, I’d just hate to see your handsome face on the slab next. Well, got to get you back to get changed before we head over to station. Unless you want to show up in that?” He tilted his head indicating the clothes he had gone jogging in when he caught the confused look Sam had in the corner of his vision. He continued thinking out loud to distance his own thoughts from the worry he had experienced when he woke up
to an empty room. “Where was that diner you went to last night? If it’s between the motel and the station we could stop there for some breakfast on the way. Think they’ll serve more of that cake if I ask?”

“What? Right! You’re right. I should change,” Sam had almost forgotten that he wasn’t in his suit. He had already equated sitting shotgun in Gabriel’s car with work, it was a little strange how easy he had slipped into that mindset. This was his third day working with him and he already felt like this was going to be it, he guessed that’s how you knew when partners were a good match. “Yeah, I think they were. And really? Cake for breakfast?”

“Why not? We’re chasing a killer now, never know when your last slice of cake is going to be.” He said with a smile and a wiggle to his eyebrow. The lighthearted remark had a dark undertone to it. They had high risk jobs and couldn’t forget it.

He unlocked the door and when Gabriel didn’t follow, content to sit in the car and sing along to his music while he waited, Sam shucked his jogging pants and threw them on the bed. He didn’t know what to expect today but something about what Gabriel had said made him want to expect the worst. He strapped an ankle holster on as well as fitting his hip holster onto his belt, both were standard issue but he preferred not to have them. He took a deep sigh as his fingers tied the knot for his tie on muscle memory, the gun might be something he’d have to get more used to now that he was going to be out in the field more often. Finished dressing he locked the door behind him and returned back to the car.

Gabriel only nodded to him as he slipped the vehicle into reverse and took them back out of the motel’s parking lot. A few minutes later they had pulled into the lot of the same diner Sam had visited the previous night. They walked in together and both sat down at the bar counter that ran the length of the building. A few locals were seated in booths opposite them, Sam scanned their faces briefly before turning his attention to the waitress. This older woman was cheerful about taking their order and had a bounce to her step as she turned back to deliver the order to the kitchen.

“You ordered for me?” Sam asked, unable to get his order in before the woman had walked off. Gabriel just grinned back at him as he stirred four packets of sugar into his newest cup of coffee.

She returned with a stack of chocolate chip pancakes and an omelet stuffed with mixed veggies. The omelet was placed in front of Sam, and several different kinds of syrup went to Gabriel. Sam watched in mixed horror and fascination as he started pouring all of them out and let them bleed together, soaking into the already sugary pancakes.

“They said that they don’t serve cake for breakfast. I thought that was a shame. So I ordered breakfast cakes.” Gabriel said as if it was the most ordinary thing cutting into the soggy breakfast food. Sam could feel his teeth hurting just watching the amounts of sugar his partner was taking in. “It’s all a matter of how you look at it. If they had just given me the cake I would have been just as happy, it still would have had eggs, butter, and flour. Breakfast staples, honestly. I’m still even getting chocolate this way, but also probably three times as much calories and easily that much more sugar.”

“That’s because of all the syrups you added!” Sam couldn’t help interrupt his narration of his breakfast. The pool of syrup was honestly grossing him out, it took everything in him to ignore it while he finished off his own food.

“Samster, they had five different flavors of syrup! I couldn’t not try each one!” Gabriel looked taken aback at the idea.

“You’re not supposed to try them all at the same time.” He pushed away from the counter, leaving
money to cover their bill. He couldn’t argue with the train wreck that was going on, no stopping his reasoning. “If you're done, I think the chief might be waiting for us.”

“Fine. I don’t think the peach syrup mixed too well with the others anyways.” Gabriel said as he stood up and followed Sam out to the car.

They pulled into the station and Sam was surprised to see how slow things were moving inside. Every experience he had working with or near police the stations had always been awash with what seemed to be carefully choreographed chaos. Here things seemed to be moving like motes in sunlight. He finally saw where they were keeping the investigation open, there was a mobile whiteboard with names and dates and various things circled or crossed out. Sam was drawn to it, he wanted to see where their planning was going after seeing where his and Gabriel’s were, and to see if there was anything that they didn’t have in their packets.

“Agents Milton and Winchester. Thanks for coming in on this one.” The voice of chief Bronson rang out across the station. He waved them into his office and pulled the blinds shut as they entered. “I don’t want this getting out, but Agent Milton I was thinking about what you said to me earlier. And I asked some of the guys and you wouldn’t believe it but you were right, there have been some strange things that the guys had seen or heard during hunting trips.”

Sam looked over at his partner, when did he have time to talk about strange sightings from the hunting community? He didn’t remember him talking with the other man during their visit to the crime scene yesterday, maybe it was this morning when he was on his run. Sam was caught up in his thoughts that he nearly missed the wink from his partner.

“Thank you for asking around for us David, that was at my partner’s suggestion. He didn’t think the bite marks in the evidence images fit any of the known animals in the area. His initial thoughts were a new age resurrectionist.” Gabriel was interrupted as he was trying to pass the praise to his younger partner.

“A what?”

“A resurrectionist was a person who was paid to rob graves, this practice continued as recently as the 19th century. They would often sell the bodies to medical schools, where they were able to use the body for potential research value.” Sam stepped in ready to explain some of his theories as to what was going on. “Now I wasn’t suggesting that these bodies were being exhumed for sale, but the initial similarities struck me. I had some questions as to the state of the bodies when they were found, in regards to the state of the organs.”

“So you think someone is stealing organs to what sell?” Bronson was having trouble following Sam’s theory.

“No, not to sell, although I did think that at first. From the bite marks my thought was for food. The bite marks seemed to be too large for most of the predators in the area, I wanted to go over records for any exotic animal ownership, sales, or escapes for the surrounding area.” Sam wasn’t a hundred percent on his new theory but it was something, and it was certainly better than Gabriel’s idea of the undead. Being put on the spot by his partner wasn’t something he was expecting but he rolled with it. He might as well go for broke and include Gabriel’s suggestion of recent imports. “That includes any oversea shipments of anything larger than a dog crate.”

“Alright agents, I’ll get you as much of that information as I can. We can work with that theory, did you have a profile for our suspect?” The sheriff looked at them both expectantly. Sam turned his attention to Gabriel, not having one himself.
“Actually, yes. With Sam’s theory as well as the evidence at hand I can say we’re looking for a single individual. Male in his mid to late thirties. They either have a connection with large animals, wanting to keep or train possibly dangerous animals. Come from a possible military or religious background, something with a very rigid home structure, and trips, either missionary work or military action, overseas. This person is unstable, their mind has been under a great deal of stress lately possibly even suffering from PTSD.” Gabriel was very serious going into his built description of their suspect. Everything coming from the combination of the evidence present as well as his own understanding of the situation.

“They are most likely suffering disassociation as a result of the extreme stress and are reacting as a result. I would consider this person a threat to not just others but to themselves. They have escalated, the time between incidents has shortened and the brutality of the crimes have increased as well. However I don’t think we will see another incident like yesterday’s for another few days. So we have ourselves, hopefully, some time to find and apprehend this person.”

Both Sam and the sheriff were staring at Gabriel with awe. Sam was struck at not only how complete his profile was but also his ability to articulate the whole thing. He sounded every bit the FBI agent in that moment, and his presence was again much taller than his appearance.

“Shit.” Was Sheriff Bronson’s first word after hearing the whole profile, “Agents we might have some problem because you just identified our first victim. Rex Carlisle, came back from another tour of Yemen a few months ago and hadn’t been acting the same. We all just figured he was shell shocked from all the fighting, until we found the note in his house and then later the remains.”

“None of that was in the files we received.” Sam confronted the sheriff at the new information coming to them. He was a little upset that they would leave not just a crime, but a whole victim out of the report when requesting assistance from them. They could have solved it easier with that information and Gabriel wouldn’t have gone and made a profile that didn’t fit their killer but their first unknown victim.

“We didn’t think of him as the first, his note was a hunting trip note that just didn’t read right. We thought he went off to kill himself deep in the woods ‘way from the rest of us. His body was found so chewed to hell we could only identify it by the wallet in his pocket.” He sat heavily in the chair behind him, the color drained from his face. “Even the part about him wanting to own a bear. He would often talk about finding a den during the winter so he could take a cub away and raise it on his own. Do you think that it wasn’t him we found?”

“There is the possibility, and we can’t dismiss that.” Gabriel said offering sympathy to the man, it sounded as if he was friendly with this person at some point in his life. Not only was this a tragic crime being committed in an otherwise sleepy town, but he had just named their number one suspect as someone they thought was dead. “We might need to exhume the body to run additional checks for a positive ID. Until then my partner and I will want to check out Mr. Carlisle’s last place of residence.”

“Yeah, I can get one of the boys to show you there. Do you think he finally got that bear he wanted?” the sheriff seemed lost, looking off into a space behind Sam’s knees.

“We can only hope that’s the case here, sheriff.” Sam offered before he followed Gabriel and one of the younger officers out of the office and through the station doors. Getting into the car, they followed the officer along some of the same roads they used yesterday. Passing the old church Sam thought he saw something moving around to the back of the building, he narrowed his eyes and filed the thought away.

The house was tucked away on a dirt road not too far from the neighborhood they visited yesterday,
overgrown bushes reached out and scratched at the cars as they made their way back down the road. Darkened upstairs windows stared out at them like judging eyes, they stepped out of the car in synchronicity as if it was something they had been doing for years. They walked in sync to the front door of the abandoned house.

“Hey Sambaccca. Use that ridiculous height of yours to see into the window on the door. I’ll go around and see if any of the shorter windows are uncovered, or if any will open.” He clapped his hand across Sam’s shoulder before walking off the porch, unlatching the safety strap on his pistol as he slipped around the corner. Sam shook his head in amusement as he watched his partner walk off.

The small arched window at the top of the door was the only one without closed shades, all others along the front of the house were either blocked off with shades or curtains. Sam tiptoed to peer into the house, it seemed empty, but he was expecting to see a light coat of dust covering the inside. Instead it seemed like it was still in use, dirt tracked throughout, but nothing indicating the use of the front door, at least not recently. Something caught his eye, towards the back of the house he saw movement; he instinctively reached for the gun at his side and rolled to the side of the door. The door swung open and Sam had his gun pointed at his partner.

“Geeze! Put that away!” Gabriel grabbed at his chest, startled to find his partner aiming to shoot. He realized that it probably wasn’t the best idea to be sneaking around a suspect’s house without warning his partner of his actions before he did them, the gun close to his face was enough of a reminder. “And here I thought we were getting along. Get in here, the back door was unlocked, this place isn’t as abandoned as they seem to think.”

“I could see that.” Sam said masking his jumpiness with sarcasm. Putting his pistol away he was once again reminded why he didn’t like having the thing, almost shooting the older agent would have been one hell of a way to start his first week. That would have been a one hell of a thing to try explaining to Singer. “There’s fresh dirt tracks inside, and none of them are from the front door.”

“Yeah they all come from the back door, should have let you know it was open.” He said as way of apology. “The question is whose are they?” Gabriel pointed at the clear footsteps going back where he came from. There were two distinct sets of tracks, and one of them was clearly from a large animal. “Sammax you might be right about the animal being the key. Look at these.”

“Those are big. I’m not really great at identifying animal tracks, but they look more like dog tracks. I don’t think they’re bear.” Sam knelt down to get a closer look at the tracks, they were close to the size of his palm. They moved around the house never going too far away from the footsteps, although at times they overlapped.

“Dog or hyena? Or are you willing to say that my idea of a shapeshifting undead isn’t too far-fetched and we’ve got ourselves an honest to goodness ghoul here?” Gabriel asked with a grin, waving his hand around at the room. “It really makes sense, our guy visited the home range of the ghouls. Comes back, goes missing, and bodies start to disappear from the cemetery. With bite marks nonetheless. Strange animal sightings along with the visits from the recently deceased after their bodies had been dug back up and eaten? All the signs are there.”

Sam rolled his eyes as he moved through the house, listening to Gabriel’s crazy ideas again. They would make sense if ghouls were real, and only then. But until fairy tales came true he still needed proof and evidence solidly cemented in reality. Bookshelves stood abandoned, dust lining the tops of books. A couch looked as if it had lost a battle with a tractor sat facing the back of the house and the kitchen, stuffing poking through the dirty upholstery.

An old wooden desk was covered in newspapers, fliers, and other bits of mail. Several cups with varying amounts of water sat on top of the papers. Eyeing something at the corner of the desk Sam
picked up a stack of papers, the top one read like a government document, full of jargon and acronyms. It looked like a standard form for discharge. Under that was a shipping manifest form.

“Looks like Rex was able to bring something over when he returned.” He waved the papers, getting his partner’s attention. “Live animal transport. It would seem that your theory has just been shot down. Not only are ghouls not real, but the idea of a guy coming home from a war with a hungry, whatever it was he shipped, that needs more food than he can provide would fake his own death and dig up fresh corpses to continue feeding it. Hunting can only go so far in a community that has people who regularly hunt, they would notice the drop in game, and I bet you if we asked they have.”

“Alright, so your theory stands up better in the light of day. But we still need to find out where he is and exactly what he got shipped over.” Gabriel was easy to accept the more realistic theory of his partner. Something that made Sam narrow his eyes in suspicion, he had never met someone who was able to drop their own theories when they believed in them with such conviction. “But just remember that in order to kill a ghoul, it’s either decapitation or severe head trauma.”

And there it was, Sam knew that he wasn’t going to give up on it that easily, he seemed to fully believe that this was a case of the undead. Taking the new evidence and placing it into a bag he pulled from inside his jacket, he looked around some more at the house. The footsteps led between the upstairs and the backdoor, and didn’t really wander too far from that path. Gabriel had come from the back door, so he started up the stairs. The worn steps creaked under his weight all the way to the top, the muddy tracks disappeared up here and he was left to checking each room individually.

Most rooms were left with furniture and the layer of dust said that they hadn’t seen any use in years. A few pictures hung on the walls were covered under cloth or were turned against the wall, as if someone didn’t want to look at them but didn’t want to get rid of them either. Everything was pointing to someone who had great shame and sorrow and was hiding from both. He opened the last door and quickly turned away from the scene inside, closing the door as he did.

“Gabriel! Upstairs!” He called out into the house. Hearing the footsteps before he saw his partner bound around the corner of the hallway. Gabriel had a look of worry painted across his face that let up slightly when he saw Sam at the end of the hall. Nodding his head towards the room he was standing in front of Sam waited for Gabriel to be standing next to him before he opened the door. Bones littered the floor, many of them splintered and half eaten. Few of them still had some flesh attached. A pile of animal hides was piled in one corner near a busted crate, some of the hides showed teeth marks and tears, but most of them were in decent condition. A small table near the far wall had several different knives spread across it, a plate with some half eaten meat shared the space. Something was still living in here.

“Gross, the smell is awful in here.” Gabriel complained, covering his mouth and nose with a hand. He stepped into the room and started to look around at the different piles. Not finding anything that they couldn’t already see from the door, he retreated back to Sam’s side. “Alright, let’s get going. There’s enough here to call in Bronson and have him take over. Whoever has been living here isn’t here right now. They’ll probably want to set up shifts for stakeouts, and I hate doing those without snacks.”

The two of them backed out of the house returning to the car. They found the evidence they needed and Sam agreed with him about the need for food if they were indeed going to be setting up for a stakeout. They pulled back onto the paved road, dust following behind them. They sat in silence as they drove, Sam was still trying to process everything they had just discovered, Gabriel in his own thoughts. He watched as they passed by tracts of woods and a few other dirt roads tucking up into the trees. The church steeple poked above the tree line as they got closer, Sam watched the white of
the building flicker between branches. Shadowy movement caught his eye yet again as they passed it, a nagging feeling at the back of his mind said that it couldn’t wait this time. They needed to stop now.

“Gabriel!” He shouted, startling his partner who grabbed at the wheel, jerking the vehicle to the side of the road.

“What the hell kid?! You trying to kill us?” his eyes wide in panic as he looked around for the cause of Sam’s outburst. He was expecting to see a deer bounding deeper into the woods or something else similar. What he wasn’t expecting was the slam of a car door and seeing his own partner running across the road and back towards the church.

Chapter End Notes

Song is: Up in the Sky by Oasis
Gabriel hated running, he hated the way it slammed into his knees, he hated the way it sucked the air out of his lungs, and he hated the burning in his legs. Yet he was running after his tall and lanky partner who had shouted and taken off. The old white church came into his view, it looked like it wasn’t in use. There were no cars in the gravel lot, and the building was small enough that there weren’t any living quarters. Passing the front of the building he quickly glimpsed a board that directed any visitors to the soup kitchen behind the fire department. He slowed enough to read the sign and heard voices from inside the building; one voice was talking low while the other let out a twisted laughter. From the corner of his eye the flash of a suited individual disappearing behind the back of the building caused him to pick up speed again to catch up.

Gasping for breath he rounded the building to see Sam kicking down the back door, wood splintering out from where the handle was. He drew his own weapon and stepped into the doorway just in time to have the larger body of Sam collide with his. Knocking them both backwards and onto the ground, Gabriel clutched at his chest feeling as if he could puke. Before he could start dry heaving Sam was back up on his feet and running back into the building.

Pulling himself up and tentatively moving through the broken doors, he was ready for another body to be thrown into him. He winced at the sounds of heavy blows making contact on someone’s body, he couldn’t see who was fighting who. He could hear the low laughter building up from further in the building, it echoed against the old walls menacingly. Looking around he felt sick at the sight of more grave dust footprints similar to the muddy footprints back at the house. Two sets, human and animal.

Gabriel was caught up at the implications of two sets of tracks that he nearly missed the crash of a body thrown into the wooden pews if they hadn’t bashed into wall next to him. Leaning out the doorway he was able to see a man with sunken features and ashen skin stalking towards Sam’s prone body. It was unnerving to see the large man laying dazed against splintered wood, for someone to be able to not only manhandle him but to toss him with enough force was astounding. Gulping he knew there wasn’t much he could do to this guy with his partner still in the room. He needed to get them both out, or he needed to neutralize the situation, his fingers twitched as he was stuck trying to come to a decision.

He stood there thinking as the aggressor slowly stormed closer and closer to Sam. The other agent shaking his head as he stumbled to stand up, swaying slightly in place, his hand reaching down for his gun at his hip. His face twisted into perplexed confusion when it didn’t come into contact with anything. Gabriel panicked for a moment when we saw light glinting off the metal of the pistol mixed in with pieces of the broken pews at Sam’s feet. Hands wrapped around Sam’s throat, catching some of his long brown hair between dirty fingers. His fingers scrabbled at the other man’s grip, trying to loosen it and return the normal flow of air to his lungs.

“Sargent Carlisle! Let him go!” Gabriel shouted, the heads of both men turned to him, Sam’s face a mix of surprise and relief. Rex’s was just as blank as before, his eyes had no life behind them, a low growl rumbled from deep within him. Gabriel panicked for a moment when we saw light glinting off the metal of the pistol mixed in with pieces of the broken pews at Sam’s feet. Hands wrapped around Sam’s throat, catching some of his long brown hair between dirty fingers. His fingers scrabbled at the other man’s grip, trying to loosen it and return the normal flow of air to his lungs.

“No Sir! I cannot do that. This man must die for us to live, Sir.” The words came back in a syncopation that belonged to a soldier still in the field. “If I let him go, he will report our location to the enemy, Sir.”

“I will not repeat myself Sargent! This man is under United States protection and will remain so until
we get orders stating otherwise! So Sargent Carlisle, LET HIM GO!” Gabriel pulled himself to his full height, squared his shoulders off, and spoke loudly with command. It seemed that the other man was still in a war inside his head, and he was going to use that to his best advantage. It seemed to work because Rex dropped Sam and stood at full attention.

Sam fell to his knees grabbing at his throat as he coughed and took in a few ragged breaths. Looking up through watery eyes, Sam gasped and tried to call out to his partner, but nothing more than a couple of wheezes came through. He floundered until his hands pulled loose the small back up pistol from inside his pant leg. Pulling the trigger, a deafening bang went off, startling Gabriel causing him to jump and flail his arms in a panic. Rex dropped to the floor hands over his head, shouting commands to people that only existed in his own mind.

An angry growl reverberated through the building as it build up into a labored and wicked laughter. Heavy footsteps padded loudly behind Gabriel, gathering himself he slowly turned around to see the blood stained face of a large hyena. He started laughing, almost a mock of the animal’s call. A hand flew up to his mouth in attempt to cover the laughter, causing his body to tremble. The severity of the situation was momentarily lost to him.

Gabriel offered a hand out to Sam, carefully watching him as he attempted to slip his gun back near his ankle, his own neatly tucked back at his hip. Sam reached up once the weapon was secured, clasping his hand in the other’s he was surprised when the shorter agent pulled him up to his feet with ease. Gabriel looked him over, patting his arms and chest down before he felt that he was fine and for the most part uninjured.

“SO what was so funny back there?” Sam coughed out, bringing a hand up to rub at his neck.

“We need to get you to the shooting range, Kiddo. You missed the wild animal and shot Saint Michael square in the face!” He pointed back at the damaged painting hanging on the wall. A single hole was visible in the painting, knocked slightly askew from the impact. Light filtered in from the next room through the hole. Taking it all in Gabriel started to laugh softly again.
“And that’s what had you laughing as a killer and a wild animal had you trapped between them?” Sam croaked, his throat still sore from the abuse. Taking a seat in an unbattered pew he looked around at the mess he had been part of. Several pews had been destroyed in their fight, splintered wood strewn across the room. The amount of damage and the way he was picked up and thrown about, he was surprised at how strong Rex was. Sam wasn’t small by any means, and he wasn’t lite either, but he was tossed around like it was nothing.

“Bucko, if only you knew the half of it, you’d think it was hysterical too. What say we call up David and his boys?” Gabriel took a seat next to him pulling his cell phone out from his pocket. The call was quick and he didn’t go too much into details. Bronson and the local force would see the details of how the case unfolded soon enough. He swung his feet back and forth, occasionally sending a glance to the man next to him. “How’s the throat?” He would ask when he caught him rubbing at it again.

“Hurts, and I think I’m going to have a bruise.” His voice was raspy but was starting to get better the more he used it. He could feel the strain on it though and really just wanted something to drink to try soothing it.

They didn’t have to wait very long for both the sheriff’s car and an ambulance to arrive. Gabriel was right at Sam’s side, helping him into the back of the emergency vehicle making sure he was getting the attention he needed before stepping away to address Bronson’s questions. He didn’t enter back into the building, steering the sheriff instead to the front steps where they could sit while keeping the vehicles within his line of vision.

“Wasn’t sure what to make of your call when it came in. But with Rex right there in the middle of the church it’s gonna be a heck of a lot easier to get the paperwork for his exhumation now. They’re gonna want to know just who they buried in his grave.” David had his hat in his hands again, rubbing his fingers along the brim in what was becoming a nervous habit. He took a peek inside while the two FBI agents were being seen by the paramedics and it wasn’t what he was hoping for. At least the thing had come to a conclusion.

“Sorry it ended like it did, David. I wish we could have come to it a different way but…” Gabriel tried apologizing for the way things turned out. He wanted to offer condolences for the death of someone he assumed was at one point a friend of the Sheriff’s. The more he thought about it, the more he knew there wasn’t any other possible ending. He saw what he was facing and he knew what the outcome was destined to be.

“Don’t be. Rex never did come home from the war. I think part of me knew that. I could see it in his eyes.” He looked up at Gabriel, he didn’t see pity being cast back at him so he continued. “They didn’t have the same life in them when we were younger. Seemed dull and lifeless, like he was just going through the motions. He stayed there, when it was over for him, he stayed and only shadows and nightmares came back. I wish I had said something when I has seen it.”

“Actually…” Gabriel shifted in his seat, lifting his hand to run his fingers through his hair, causing it to flop softly to one side. “That’s something I might have left out in our brief little conversation earlier. There was more than just shadows that came back with him, and we really need to address that. How good is your team with animal control?”

Sheriff Bronson gave him a perplexed look before answering. “We don’t have an animal control group here. Most folks can take care of animal issues on their own.” He said patting the gun on his hip, the implications of the simple motion was clear. Issue animals never lived long enough to be an issue for long.

Gabriel sighed heavily, reaching into his pocket he took out his phone and started dialing. “Sorry
David, but this is going to require more than the ‘usual’ method.” He finger quoted putting emphasis on the phrase before someone picked up on the other line.

“Hey! Agent Gabriel Milton. Yeah, I know. Look, we’re going to need a team at our location ASAP for large animal capture and transport. Actually, it might still be loose in the area,” He tilted his hand back and forth, his gestures animated as if the person on the other line could see how he was talking. “But it’s definitely there. Yeah, that’s what we thought too, trafficking. That’s not a bad idea, actually. Thanks guys, owe you a bunch. And I’ll be sure to pass the heads up along.”

Hanging up he turned to face the sheriff. His own smile started to falter when he saw all the pent up energy and nerves that had built up in the officer during the phone call. The anxious foot tapping and the measured breathing gave way to the calm exterior he was presenting.

“Sooo… You’ll be relieved to hear that Rex wasn’t digging up graves for the bodies so he could eat them. Mostly, we think.” He added quietly. His face quickly lit up before he launched cheerfully back into his good news bad news routine. “Turns out that Agent Winchester’s theory was spot on! The whole thing about him digging up the bodies for food for animal? Couldn’t have asked for a better partner, still don’t know who he angered to get stuck with me though. But your suspect? Totally did get that large animal he always wanted!”

The color in Sheriff Bronson’s face drained at the news. He was starting to get up in a panic ready to start barking orders at his people, to try to get this new mystery man-eating animal. This kind of news would send the locals into a panic, especially the families with children and pets.

“Wait, wait! David, Sheriff Bronson. It’s not a bear. He uh, never got the bear cub he wanted, so you don’t have to worry about a hungry bear wandering your town.” Gabriel jumped up ready to stop the sheriff from staring something that wasn’t going to help the situation. In the process he didn’t manage to smooth over the sheriff’s worries.

“So what do I have on my hands then?” His fingers twitched near his radio, ready to say the word that would get all of his people ready in a moment’s notice.

Gabriel ran his fingers through his hair again, letting his hand rest on the back of his neck. “It, uh, looks like you guys have a hyena roaming the area. Good news though! Our guys should be here in the next few days to take care of it! Track, capture, and remove. The whole shebang!”

He flourished his hands while he spoke, trying to convince the other man that the issue wasn’t as big as it was. He didn’t want to cause mass hysteria in a small town. Sometimes it wasn’t worth trying to explain the unusual and this was one such case. It was a small town where nothing ever happened, except recently with their ghoul situation. It was almost over for them all too, they had just one more funeral to preform before the monsters were buried. The hyena would be taken care of and the sheriff could let his town know of the risks and let them start to heal.

“Agent Winchester should have all the evidence necessary to explain the presence of the animal. It was found in Carlisle’s residence along with other things. We were on our way to turn it over to you and your team when this whole thing when down.” Gabriel waved his hands at the building behind them and at the people moving around them securing the scene and taking pictures. “I really need to talk to him about jumping into a burning fire.”

“I suppose I owe you both a round of thanks. I don’t know if we’d ever had thought that someone we thought was dead wasn’t so dead.” He looked around taking in the activity of his people. They were going through everything thoroughly and he still had to tell them about the wild animal.

“That’s one way to put it.” Gabriel mumbled.
“What?”

“Oh nothing. We’re just equally relieved that this nightmare is nearly over for you and your town. Now I think you’d like to share what we talked about with your crew. And I would like to check in with my partner to see how he’s holding up. Was there anything else you needed from us?” Gabriel gave them both reasons to end their discussion. They had gone over most of the details of the case and anything else he knew he would be sending an abbreviated version of his write up. Maybe he’s send Sam’s depending on how it turned out compared to his or if he got it done first.

“You’re good. I can finish up here. Got to let the guys know to keep an eye on the woods. It’s gonna be hell explaining this to the parishioners though. They’re not gonna be happy to hear that they’ll be using the fire house until things get cleaned up and sorted through here.” Sheriff Bronson wiped his head before putting his hat back on. He turned and opened the doors at the top of the steps they had been resting on, stepping into the church he started quietly talking with his officers. Gabriel smiled knowing that things would slowly start returning to normal here, or as close to normal as they could after something like this happening. But humans were resilient and dealt well with tragedies, able to rebuild after them was a commendable ability.

Sam wasn’t seated in the back of the ambulance like he had expected, asking around one of the paramedics finally directed him back up the road. He walked quietly his footfall almost unheard as he took the road back to his car. Getting closer he could see the outline of the passenger seat reclined back, smiling softly to himself he opened his door and quietly closed it behind him. He made sure the volume was down on the radio before he started up the car and drove them back to their motel. The door closed behind him and he stepped into their room. His own belongings quickly sorted back into his bags he looked up at the wall that he had decorated with their files. Evidence linked together with string and sticky notes, he lifted a hand up fingers together when the door opened and Sam stepped in. Gabriel quickly reached out and started to pull out pins laying them on the table.

“Why didn’t you wake me?” Sam was rubbing at his throat again. Stumbling into the room and falling backwards onto his bed, covering his eyes with an arm draped across his face. He was tired, but he knew that they still had a long ride back to headquarters and Assistant Director Singer would probably want their reports within a few days’ time if not the same day. He wanted to talk with his partner about that before he started.

“Figured you could use the rest. The medics let you go that easy?” He asked pulling more things down from the wall. Tiny pin holes were left behind but with the wallpaper they were barely noticeable. A second pair of hands was pulling more down in the corner of his eye. Looking over he caught the younger agent smiling at him.

“They couldn’t keep me, it’s nothing worse than some of the things that happened when my brother and I were growing up.” Closing his eyes he remembered some of the messes he and Dean would find themselves in. A number of times their dad had to come pull them out of the lock up where one of the other officers would have tossed them for their own safety. Or had one of the deputies pick them up from the local clinic.

“What’s your brother do now?” Gabriel asked as he pulled the last of the photos off the wall, placing them on the open file.

“Dean? Oh he works for the bureau too. His partner was the one who passed this case off to us.” Sam said stepping back from the now blank wall. Seeing it empty was a good reminder that the case was finished on their end. Only travel and paperwork left to do. He was proud of how his first X-file case had gone.

“Oh! Cassie’s partner is your Dean? We should do a double date! Or better! A double case! Can you
imagine,” he grabbed Sam by the shoulder and panned his hand out in front of them. Dropping his voice and speaking dramatically. “Four agents drawn into one case by mysterious circumstances. One team was there first and won’t give it up, the other called in because this has now become… DUN DUH! An X-file!”

Sam rolled his eyes as he pulled out of his grasp. “That, Gabriel, is never going to happen. Mysterious circumstances or otherwise.” He moved over to put the rest of his items into his bags, tucking one of the now messy case files in with the other things.

“And why not?” Gabriel asked letting himself drop onto his own bed, rolling onto his side to watch his younger partner pack. He liked the idea of a date, he could take Mr. Tall-dark-and-handsome out to one of many restaurants back in DC, he just needed to know what he liked, and if he was included on that list.

“Because Assistant Director Singer basically told me so. Dean can be a bit of a loose cannon when it comes to those he cares about.” Sam finished packing and took a seat on his bed, he was ready to either turn in for the evening or head back whichever would be the course of action. It seemed that Gabriel was calling the shots as the senior agent.

“And you aren’t? Samnado, we have got to address you running into things. Because that stunt you pulled back there? It ain’t happening again.” He didn’t miss how the rejection wasn’t for the potential of a date but rather for a shared case. Gabriel was quick to point out the similarity in Sam’s actions, how he wasn’t so different from his brother with the self-sacrificing thing. Watching the twisting dejection in his face he dropped the subject. “Come on we should get going. It’ll be dark by the time we get back.”

He rolled off the bed, fingers clutching at his keys. Sam was quick to follow him out to the car. Leaving the town behind them they were ready to head back. The first half of the trip went in silence, Sam was the one to break it.

“How were you able to do that thing in the church? The mind trick thing.”

Gabriel shifted in his seat, “He was a former serviceman so I figured there still might have been some of that ticking around in his rotten brain. Ghouls don’t have too many thoughts rattling around up there. Mostly just strong urges and mental conditioning from when they were alive still. I used that and it worked, if it didn’t I would have shot him, even if you were too close.”

“You still think that was a ghoul?” Sam looked across the car ready to accuse his partner of lunacy, the passing lights of other cars started lighting up as the sun was setting. Golden lights flickering in through the windows casting shadows as they drove closer to their destination. They caught and reflected in his partner’s eyes making them seem as if they were full of honey. Sam forced himself to look back at the road ahead of them.

“And you don’t? Even after what you saw?” Gabriel knew that not every battle was a win, but he had thought that with this one the verdict was easy. His eyebrows scrunched together, unable to see how else this case looked. They had a dead and partially eaten bodies pointing to a hyena and what seemed to a person with extreme strength. The only thing they didn’t see was Carlisle eating the bodies and assuming their form.

“What I saw was a man who had lost his mind to war and was unable to cope with his new reality.” Sam responded, not everything was boogeymen and monsters. Most of the time it was simply a result of the brain dealing with something that it doesn’t understand. “Early accounts of witches were later linked with contaminated crops and mental illnesses, this was no different.”
The rest of the ride fell into small bouts of small talk and silence. Gabriel turned the music back on, the sounds of guitars and moody lyrics filled the void. Soon the city had engulfed them and they were back in familiar grounds. The crisscross of streets and the methodical changing of lights welcomed them.

Gabriel dropped Sam off in front of his apartment building after finding out that he had walked to work. Even with the streets appearing empty he wasn’t going to let his partner walk them alone in the dark. Saying their brief goodbyes, Sam waved to the car as it drove off in the direction of the Hoover building. Taking the steps two at a time he opened the door to his place. The place still seemed foreign, boxes still packed and very little taken out and made to feel like it was lived in.

He scanned over the boxes, reading the hastily written labels on their sides before finding the one he was looking for. Sliding a key through the tape he opened the box and began to lay out the contents on the table. A computer tower was placed on the ground under the table and once the chords were plugged in the monitor flickered to life, casting an eerie blue glow across the room. Sam briefly thought about setting up his stereo system on to allow music to drown out the insect like hum of the old computer, and the eventual clacking from the keyboard that would soon pick up once he set to work. Checking his phone for the time he decided that he wanted to stay in the good graces of his neighbors and kept the apartment quiet.

He walked across the room the kitchen to get himself a glass of water before he settled in front of the computer, when he spied a note tacked to the fridge door. Smiling at the nearly illegible writing he opened the door to see that there was a loaf of bread, peanut butter, and cheese sticks. He was going to have to talk to Dean when he got the chance about breaking and entering and leaving food behind. At least he wouldn’t go without something to eat that night.

Sam rubbed at his weary eyes staring at the soft glow of his computer screen as he attempted to write up a full report of what had happened over the past few days. It was to be the first of many reports that would test his will and his ability to convey the occurrences that unfolded during a case.

…It would take a suggestion of the absurd to turn the case around. While former sergeant Carlisle wasn’t an undead ghoul, he certainly wasn’t himself. Most likely suffering from mental breakdown as a result of untreated PTSD and possible drug abuse, he didn’t have complete grasp on reality as it was shown before his final moments in the church. The lifelong dream of owning and caring for a large predatory animal only fed into his personal paranoia, he saw the animal as both a deity like being that he had to answer to as well as something that required his care. While he did not possesses the unnatural ability to take on the shape of the dead, it would appear as so for the families who saw something familiar in the dark, their own brains filling in the blanks.

So in conclusion, while this case was not something from the paranormal or the supernatural. The facets of the case would make it seem as such, yet it is from this kind of thinking that we were able to transform this from a case of unsolved questions to one of answers and results. Sometimes it isn’t that we should find answers in the supernatural but see them as a starting point for potential solutions to issues at hand.

Sam hit the save button a couple of times to ensure that the report wouldn’t be lost to a sudden crash or his computer freezing. It was times like this that he saw the appeal in using a typewriter. There was no losing your work from a crash. Although he greatly appreciated the convenience of having a spell check built into it. Tomorrow he would have the whole thing printed off and turned in on Singer’s desk.
The bright light filtered in through curtain less windows waking him up again before his alarm. He needed a day where he could go out and actually buy the things he needed to make his new apartment more comfortable. They had gotten in late yesterday and he had stayed up to finish his report for Singer, so he was not in the mood for a morning jog. Instead he dragged himself to the kitchen to set up the coffee maker before making his way into his bathroom. Looking at himself in the mirror he cringed, there were definitely bruises along his neck from where he was grabbed, they weren’t as pronounced as he thought they would be but they were still there.

The shower was quick and he was glad to have both shampoo and conditioner again. He needed to be more thorough next time he packed for a case trip. Maybe there would be enough time that he would be able to start sorting through his boxes, he could hope. Stepping out of the shower he remembered he needed to get a hold of his brother. Shooting a quick text to Dean, letting him know he was awake and back at his apartment, Sam finished getting dressed and checked that he had transferred the file to a flash drive. He ran a hand over his face trying to rub away the exhaustion he was feeling, he didn’t do any driving so he could only imagine how his partner was feeling this morning. There was a chance that he might call out sick and he wouldn’t see him today.

Locking the door behind him he started the walk to work. If he wasn’t going to go for his morning jog he knew he had the walk to work and the stairs to look forward to. He didn’t expect the elevator to have been fixed, something told him that it wasn’t going to be fixed for a while, that just seemed the standard for government work. People bumped into him as they made their way across the busy streets, a few people would look up to see the towering agent walking with purpose unmoved by the jostling of the crowds.

Once inside the J. Edgar Hoover building, he received few stares. Most other agents were trained in on their own work and paid little attention to things outside of their own little bubbles. Only when they needed the assistance from the specialties offered by another division did they venture outside their casework. It wasn’t that different from the smaller satellite offices or even the police stations. A clerk wasn’t expected to perform an autopsy; specialists had their place and were generally appreciated by everyone.

Sam smiled and nodded to the few agents who did look up from their work as he walked past. He didn’t know who he might need help or assistance from in the future and he didn’t want to burn any bridges before crossing them. From how Dean reacted, he was sure there were other agents who looked down on him for working with Agent Milton and might try to make his job harder just for the sake of it. Turning the corner he wasn’t surprised to see that the elevators were still out of order.

“-I don’t care ‘bout that! Bang, bang a knock on the door, another big bag and you’re down on the floor. Oh no! What do we do? Don’t look now but I lost my shoe-”

What he wasn’t expecting was loud music to fill the halls as he approached his new basement office.
Stepping into the room and making his way to his side, he draped his coat on the back of his chair and booted up his computer ready to print off his report. Gabriel’s head was down on his desk, surrounded by a small ring of disposable coffee cups, the volume of the music didn’t seem to disturb his sleeping at all. His computer finally booted all the way up and he was able to get past the authentication page accessing his files, the soft clack of the keyboard was drowned out by the music. Unable to focus with the music so loud, Sam abandoned his work and moved into Gabriel’s space to adjust the volume.

He must have bumped the table because the computer flickered to life, several windows were open on the screen. Sam couldn’t help himself as he peered at the screen sneaking a look at whatever it was that Gabriel had open before he had fallen asleep at his desk. Several tabs were open to different catholic and evangelical websites, one such was a chat board for those who had experienced “encounters”. He leaned closer, over the sleeping body of his partner, to see if he could read any of the comment threads and bumped into the chair.

“Snrt! Whozah? Samuka? … ‘Z’at you?” He lifted his head from the table, his hair comically sticking up at an odd angle from the way he had been laying. His eyes fluttered as he tried to force them open, his head swaying looking around for his partner.

“Yeah it’s me, sorry if I woke you. Did you spend the night here?” Sam asked backing off and returning to his desk. Reviewing his report he double checked that he didn’t neglect anything. He knew there would be additional paperwork for both his sustained injury as well as shooting their suspect. Even if it was in defense there was always paperwork for those sorts of things. He wouldn’t be surprised if there was forms for the damage done, if there was one thing you could count on in the government it was there was always more paperwork.

“Hmmmm? Oh, yeah. Couldn’t sleep so I figured I would get a head start on the forms. Did up copies for you too. Just need to read over and sign them, then we can send everything up to Singer.” He said with a yawn as he pushed off his desk causing his wheely chair to skid across the floor just close enough to reach out with the files to Sam. “You want to go grab a coffee?”

Sam hit a key on his computer before reaching out to grab the offered forms. The printer came to life, jerkily churning out his report line by line. It was an old machine, probably something handed down from department to department until it made its final resting place in the basement offices. The report was a couple of pages in full detail, so the old machine would take a while to finish the job. With plenty of time Sam began to read through the forms Gabriel had filled out for him. He saw no mention of undead ghouls, although there was something said about inhuman strength and imminent threat of life. Signing off on the forms, he looked up to see his partner trying to balance a pen on his upper lip. Reaching over he pulled his finished report out of the printer and packed everything into one of the red folders.

“Samlax, you hear me?” Gabriel had gotten the pen to balance and was staring up at the ceiling. “Want to grab a coffee and maybe an early lunch?”

“The day just started, what would the others think if we just left now?” Sam cocked his head with a slight roll of his eyes. He didn’t want to be called out for skipping work this early into the job. He was the responsible one.

“Oh there goes Mad Milton and his incredibly tall and handsome new partner off to find the Loch Ness or something.” He mimicked the words that fell from the other agent’s lips with some personal alterations. Sitting up he caught the pen as it fell from its perch on his face. “Look I know exactly what the other agents think of me here. And honestly? I don’t care that they don’t care. Come on, what do you like? I know all the best haunts around here.”
Sam didn’t answer, he was still stuck on leaving work early, and it would be really early. He had been in the building for almost an hour if that. Most of the other agents would be taking their breaks hours from now, and he got the idea that Gabriel wouldn’t be returning to the offices after their lunch.

“Name your number. Italian? Indian? I know a great Jewish Deli. There’s Thai and even a Moroccan place. Oh, there’s this amazing Mexican bakery that makes tamales that are out of this world.” Gabriel licked his lips at the memory of the food stuffs. He had probably been to every food vendor in town, including some of the shadier hole-in-the-wall types. Any of the places he mentioned he would be up for eating at, there wasn’t much that he didn’t like, although there were a few places that would have better service.

Sam looked like he was about to object again to the idea of heading out early when his stomach loudly interrupted him with a grumble. He hung his head, trying to hide the embarrassed grin behind a curtain of hair. Gabriel stood up pumping his arm in victory.

“So where to? My treat.” He wiggled his eyebrows and grabbed his jacket off his chair. He took in the wrinkled state of the jacket and shook it couple of times until the creases seemed to lessen. He started to feed his arms into the sleeves when he paused and took it back off. “If you give me like ten minutes I can change into clothes that I haven’t slept in.”

Before he could respond, Gabriel gave him thumbs up and grabbed his bag off the floor and walked out of their office. He checked his phone first, seeing no new messages from his brother or receiving any notifications from his email. Logging back into his computer since it had timed out, he checked a few of the internal bulletin boards that some of the agents would occasionally request assistance on. He noticed that there was a new drive that he had access to for cases that had been labeled cold cases or destined for X-files. Going through some of them he was surprised to see that some of these cases had been placed in the drive some time ago and hadn’t been checked since their initial move.

Sam assumed this was a secure drive on a local server because of the security level some of these cases had. Cases on previously unseen strains of bacteria, on serial killers whose kills had spanned generations, on missing persons who were reported missing from several different locations around the same time but all appeared to be the same person. He quickly found himself lost in the details of several cases and didn’t notice that Gabriel had stepped back into the room until he said something.

“Hey, you’ll have plenty of time to look into the dead cases we get handed our way, for right now I’m taking you out for lunch. Did you decide on your preference?” He said it softly enough so not to startle him too much. Sam swept his vision over Gabriel, head to toes and back, his outfit didn’t seem that much different than what he had stepped out in earlier, a slightly different color shirt with less noticeable wrinkles. He knew he was staring, it was hard for him not to. Without the jacket or the tie, he looked less formal and it seemed to fit what he knew of his personality better.

“How’s the Mexican place again?” Sam asked trying to play his staring off as lost in thought, he stood up pulling his own jacket across the back of his chair. They walked together out of their office and Sam noticed that not a single agent looked up at them or watched as they left the building. He let Gabriel take the lead as they walked down side streets and crossed behind iconic locations.

The red white and green flags were strung across the sidewalk as they turned the corner. Smells of baked goods mixed with the aromas of simmering meats and onions, they didn’t combat each other but rather they complimented each other causing Sam’s stomach to grumble louder. Gabriel waved his hand to welcome him into the small restaurant. An older Hispanic woman ran out from behind the kitchen and gathered the agent into her embrace, kissing him on his forehead before releasing him with a warm smile.
“Ah mi querido Gabriel, honras a una anciana con tus visitas. ¡Venir, venir! I have just finished a big batch of chicken empanadas. I will bring some out nice and hot for you. Y para tu novio también.” She winked before quickly returning to the kitchen humming as she moved.

“Thank you Tia Florencia. Can you get us some of your amazing coffee too?” Gabriel returned the wink not before his face flushed up to his ears. Taking a seat at one of the tables against the wall, Gabriel motioned for Sam to join him. “Do you speak Spanish?”

“No, I took Latin in school. I can get a few words in here and there, but not enough. Why?” Sam responded before reaching for one of the small menus tucked behind a napkin dispenser. Opening it up he quickly realized the nature of the question. The whole thing was in Spanish with pictures accompanying the descriptions. All the pictures looked amazing but he was struggling to figure out what some of the meals were. Chicken he could recognize on the menu and was good to play it safe with anything that listed “pollo” in its description.

“Florencia makes some of the most authentic Mexican here in the city. Can’t go wrong with anything on her menu. Or I could order for both of us?” He arched an eyebrow letting his question sit. His answer came in the form of Sam closing the menu and returning it.

“Sure, I think I can trust you to pick out something for lunch.” Sam conceded, he had been talked into leaving work for a lunch in a small and cozy family restaurant where he couldn’t read the menu. He was slightly intrigued to see what his partner would order for both of us? He arched an eyebrow letting his question sit. His answer came in the form of Sam closing the menu and returning it.

“Gabe, what made you join the FBI?” the nickname fell easily from his lips, it didn’t seem odd to him at how familiar it felt.

“Honestly?”

“Honestly, and as Singer would say ‘none of that ‘I want to help people’ crap’” the impression caused them both to grin at the accuracy.

“You do that pretty well. Well, if I’m being honest it’s for selfish reasons. I ran away from home at a young age, just couldn’t stand the toxic environment I was living in. But as I got older I started to feel guilty for leaving my siblings, well some of them. Some of them I’m sure would try to smite me if they ever found me, or if I found them.” His smile twisted at the thought of how some of his family would react to him now. “But hey, I’m not looking for them. I just want to make sure no one else has to face the kind of things I did growing up. Psychiatrists would say that’s why I see monsters at every corner.”

Sam was grateful that Florencia came over when she did, placing the coffees and a basket with some empanadas in it in the center of the table. His own upbringing wasn’t the best but he had come to terms with the face that his brother had raised him instead of having his own childhood. Hearing other people’s rough childhoods only caused him to want to reach out and shield them from their past. It was making him feel uneasy, like bad memories were being dredged up that he had no right to know.

“Las espinacas encheladas para el por favor y sabes lo que me gusta. Gracias Florencia. Las empanadas son increibles como de costumbre.” Gabriel said as he took a bite of one of the empanadas from the basket. Juices dribbled out the side and down his fingers. He noticed Sam squirming slightly in his chair and revised his answer to the question.
“Actually it’s just because there isn’t too much for someone with duel degrees in psychology and theology outside of trying to become a priest or religious councilor. Turns out with a natural ability to read people I’m pretty good at putting together profiles on criminals. I was recruited into the FBI and haven’t left since.”

“Oh, you studied theology? That would explain the things on your computer.” Sam said absently thinking out loud, he quickly realized how that sounded and back-peddled. “I wasn’t spying on you I swear. The screen was open when I turned down your music this morning and gods I’m sorry.”

He was surprised by the response of laughter instead of being reprimanded like he had expected for invading his partner’s personal space and work.

“So you were spying on me, Samtrack. I don’t think I mind having such an attractive spy reporting in on me, but we’re partners now. It works better if there aren’t too many secrets kept between us. What you saw was a bit of a personal pet project.” He leaned back in his chair and popped the rest of the empanada into his mouth. “I think that certain cases of claimed miracles are more profound and deserve more attention. I’ve noticed some trends between reported miracles in the last decade or so as well as claimed angelic sightings. There is evidence and both anecdotal stories as well as eyewitness accounts that point to celestial activities here on earth.”

“You’re saying that angels walk among us?” Sam leaned back allowing for the plate of hot cheese covered enchiladas to take its place in front of him. It was one thing to hear that their last suspect was among the undead but to hear just how far some of these ideas went, Sam was starting to understand the nickname. Still he was willing to give him the benefit of the doubt, he had shown great work and there were worse things than to have faith.

“Precisely! And there’s a cover up going on too. Gracias.” A plate of meat cubes swimming in sauce with a side of creamy refried beans and rice was situated in his place. Reaching for tortillas he grabbed at his food like he would if it was naan bread and they were eating at an Indian establishment. “There have been cases where I’ve tried tracking down some of these miracles only to find that the trail not only went cold but had been swept up and wiped down. The only thing I could get out of further investigation was that the diocese had been involved and I can’t ever get the appropriation to investigate them.”

Gabriel really seemed to come to life when he was explaining his theories, and while Sam couldn’t follow some of the more supernatural ones this one actually caught his attention. There had been incidents where the church would step in and refuse any additional investigations from outside sources, so the idea of them hiding evidence of something larger happening wasn’t outrageous. It might not be angelic or celestial interference in daily life, but something else and he was inclined to believe that Gabriel might have actually found something.

“Not everything is a conspiracy, Gabe. Next thing you’ll be telling me that Jay-Z is part of the illuminati!” He laughed while accusing his partner of believing ridiculous theories by bringing up one of the silliest ones he could off the top of his head.

“Jay-Z? Nah he’s got nothing to do with the Illuminati, Eminem though?” The look he gave coupled with the wiggle of his eyebrows sent them back into fits of laughter.

They finished their lunch while talking about some of the merits and flaws of some of the zanier theories they had been presented with. Laughing and otherwise slipping into a more relaxed atmosphere than Sam was used to. He didn’t notice how long their lunch break had gone on for until other people started to filter in on their regular schedules. Gabriel paid for their meals and left a nice tip for Florencia, and left before the receipt came back. Sam had gotten the impression that if Gabriel didn’t leave as soon as the money hit the table it would just be returned to him by the loving woman.
Getting back to the headquarter building during everyone else’s break made for a surreal experience. The usually busy building was nearly empty with only a few people who had stayed behind to fill a working lunch in order to avoid stalling on their project. They were still smiling and bumping into each other, occasionally laughing as if sharing an inside joke, when Singer stepped around the corner. The assistant director did not have a happy look in his eyes.

“Agent Milton, Winchester. Do you mind explaining to me why neither of you idjits were in your office earlier?” He stared them down, fiercely challenging them to answer him. Gabriel raised a hand, finger pointing up, and opened his mouth ready to explain when he was cut off. “Never mind I really don’t care. You’ve got yerselves a flight in the morning. Details are in the files on your desks. I took the liberty of taking the report off of Agent Winchester’s as it seemed like he actually managed to get the work done on time. You could take a note or two from him Gabriel. Dismissed”

Sam opened his mouth to protest and defend his partner for filling out all the required forms, a hand gently reached out and prevented him from saying the words that were just on the tip of his tongue. The pointed barb aimed at Gabriel’s work standards didn’t seem to have any effect on the man they were targeted at. With a smile and a shake of his head he gently led the both of them back to stairs leading to their basement offices. The aforementioned case files were right where the assistant director said they would be.

“So Sammaster, how do you feel about camping? ’Cause it looks like we’re off to forests in Oregon.” Gabriel said without looking up from the file. He continued to flip through it making faces at what was in the files. Or rather what wasn’t in the file, it was very thin.

“We’re being sent out to a National Forest because some rangers have gone missing? Why us?” Sam looked at the thin report, it didn’t seem like there was enough of a case for them to be called in. And it certainly didn’t fit what profile the other cases he had seen marked with the X had.

“Federal lands. Federal business. I think they’re treating this as less of a missing person’s case and more as crime scene now. The reports are showing that the ranger station has been on radio silence for nearly two weeks now. Which isn’t unusual for some of the more remote stations, however there is usually some form of check in provided each week.” Gabriel explained as he dropped the new report back on his desk. Anytime something big happened within federal lands like a body was found or a crime more severe than the internal task forces could handle, the FBI was called in. It was standard procedure and many of these cases were quick and easy.

“There really isn’t much here, I can research the area and see if there are any reports that date back with anything similar to this. With back to back cases like this I don’t know how much time you’ve gotten to settle in. My assumption is that you’re still living out of boxes.” There was a question there that went unasked, but Sam could hear it loud and clear. Gabriel sat in his chair and pulled up his computer, quickly sorting through databases and starting his research. “Look, I got this, ok? You head home, text Deano to let him know you’ll be out again, and try to get more than the TV and microwave unpacked.”

“Actually it’s the coffee maker,” Sam didn’t know why he felt the need to correct his guess on exactly what had been unpacked and what still sat in boxes. But he took the hint to take his leave and get as much unpacking done as possible until the morning. He had a nearly nine hour flight to look forward to where he would probably be sitting coach with his knees jammed up against the seat in front of him.

He sent another text out to his brother as he started the walk home. Realizing that he had done no work that day would usually have caused him some anxiety about how that would reflect on his performance scores. Opening his door and starting in on the boxes it dawned on him how he didn’t
seem to mind. He had gone out with a coworker and he had actually enjoyed his time. Sam knew that the longer he worked the more tasks and projects he would have, so for now he could enjoy the small amounts of freedom he had.

The stereo system was one of the first things that he had completely unpacked and set up and he was quick to toss on a record. Letting music fill the silence and help pass the time as he worked on the next box. Two more boxes into unpacking and his phone was ringing, he pushed aside the box and answered after briefly checking the caller ID.

“Dean, what’s up?” He moved across the room, things finally starting to settle into place. Fingers reached out to turn down the volume of his music when Dean responded.

“Is that crap Talking Heads I hear in the background?” He could clearly imagine the face of disgust on his brother’s face. They had always disagreed on their taste of music, which caused a few fights during road trips.

“One of David Byrne’s solo albums but yeah, sure. What’s up?” Sam repeated the question, he didn’t want to get into the conversation this usually headed into. It never got them anywhere and they usually wouldn’t talk to each other for a few days after it.

“You have such a good stereo system and yet you insist on playing garbage like that!” Dean cried out from the other side of the phone.

“Look. Not everyone likes Motorhead, Dean.” He rolled his eyes hard enough that he was sure Dean could feel them through the phone line.

“Blaspheme Sammy! You texted that you got another case, didn’t you just get back from your first one?” And with that he knew their fight over the music was over and he was free to go into what he knew about this new case. There wasn’t much but it would do him good to talk about it out loud.

“So get this. The new case is for a missing person’s report in a National Forest in Oregon. A whole ranger station has gone radio silent for almost two weeks. They’re so short staffed with the fires in California going on that they called in the FBI for this one.”

“So Yogi and Booboo got hungry and gave up on the picnic baskets.” Dean said so matter-of-factly like the case wasn’t even worth the investigation. Sam had felt that way too, but so far he had learned that he couldn’t look at any case that came to him and Gabriel as an easy open and shut case.

“Even if it is just bears, Dean, we’re taking a flight out tomorrow and we’ll see just what happened to those forest service people.” Sam changed the side of his head that the phone was on, cradling it against his shoulder leaving his hands free to return to unpacking. “Hey, I wanted to thank you for the bread and peanut butter.”

“Yeah, well someone has to take care of you Sammy.” Dean grumbled something to himself and Sam could hear the distinct clatter of pans in the background. His brother must have been cooking while talking with him. “Cas said he saw you and Milton leave the building together earlier, anything you want to let me know?”

“No. Gabe took me out for lunch since neither of us had eaten any breakfast. We got back and Singer had our new case for us. That really was my whole day. I, uh, really just wanted to thank you for the food and let you know that I’m going to be heading out again soon.” Sam nearly lost the phone as he tried to juggle some books that had slipped his grip. One fell loudly to the floor the sound echoing in the receiver.
“Alright. Sammy, you got to promise me that you’ll get some real food and not just start living on take out like you did in college.” His brother had dropped whatever subject he had tried to bring up, instead reminding him with sincerity to take care of himself. It was easy for Sam to fall into bad eating habits when he was on his own. He didn’t like cooking, nor was he very good at it. It was one of the reasons he had taken a liking to salads, there wasn’t very much that he could screw up at with them.

Hanging up after making his promise to Dean, Sam looked around his apartment. It was actually starting to come together. There was a pile of broken down cardboard near the door and there was a warm feeling of ownership that was starting to seep into the room. He still had to get things like curtains, but he was pleased with how things had come along, grateful for the time offered to him by his partner. Sam fell into his bed feeling accomplished and happy with how his day had gone.

Chapter End Notes

Song: Buddy Holly by Weezer

Spanish translations:
"Ah my dear Gabriel, your honor an old woman with your visits. Come, Come! .... And for your boyfriend too."

"Spinach enchiladas please and you know what I like. Thank you Florencia. The empanadas are incredible as usual."
On Silent Wings

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The flight was just as cramped as he had feared. His knees were bent up and pressed against the seat in front of him with no room for him to stretch. When he had gotten the print out of seat he had let out an audible groan, he had gotten a middle seat. It was going to be a nearly nine hour flight and he was stuck in coach in a middle seat, his legs weren’t going to be functioning properly by the time they landed. Gabriel hadn’t fared much better with his seating. He had a window seat, but he was stuck next to a man who could have been the body double for Bacchus.

Sam had been trying to talk to the flight attendants about moving him to a different seat since before they even boarded the plane, but the flight was full and he had been told that he would have to work it out with the other passengers if he still wanted to change seats. Sam was just about ready to pull out his badge and demand a new seat and they hadn’t even taken off yet. Pushing the attendant button again Sam looked around the plane and saw a miraculous two open seats near the back. They had already been given the safety briefing and were now sitting on the tarmac waiting their turn for takeoff so it wasn’t as if anyone else would be coming on the plane to claim those seats.

The flight attendant came around again, a tight purse to her lips, no longer amused by this particular customer. She had tried flirting with him when he first got on the flight but that must have quickly passed when he started repetitively asking about being reseated.

“You again? What is it this time, sir?” she said with a bit of acid to her question. If he wasn’t trying to get her to cooperate with his request he would have pointed it out. He looked apologetically towards the person seated next to him, although he wasn’t too fond of them either for refusing to switch seats with him.

“Miss, it seems that there is an open aisle seat back there.” He pointed behind them at the seat in question. “If I could just move there for the rest of the flight?”

She smacked her gum loudly, causing the person next to him to twitch at the sound. “Sir, I can’t let you get up or move about the cabin until we are in cruising altitude. Stay seated until then.”

“Hey, thanks a bunch man! You did me a solid.” Gabriel’s boisterous voice could be heard from further up the plane. It sounded as if he was moving closer too. Sam tilted his head, peering around the people blocking his view to see his partner in the middle of the aisle moving back to the same open seats he had seen and was trying to get moved to, unsuccessfully.

“Agent Winchester!” Gabriel winked as he called out to him loudly, making a show of the use of his title.

“Agent Milton.” He returned the introduction, quickly picking up on the game that was being played out. He didn’t want to use the ‘federal agent’ card unless it was really necessary, they had already provided paperwork allowing them to retain their firearms through the checkpoints and onto the flight, however his legs were already starting to cramp.

“Agents?” The flight attendant whispered incredulously still unimpressed with the exchange. The person seated next to him started to give him weary glances, as if this whole thing was a sham that was being set up. Sam would have thought that too if he had been in the same situation. But Gabriel flashed a grin, and his badge, to the attendant.
“Winchester, it’s good to see that you made the flight! I was worried when I didn’t see you earlier, thought they might have gotten to you. Why don’t you join me back there and we can hash out our plans before we get going?”

He could see the panic growing in the eyes of the flight attendant and had to try to prevent himself from laughing when he stood up purposefully letting his jacket get pulled back enough for his weapon to flash into her vision. She stuttered something and quickly retreated to the very back of the plane among the drink carts. Sam avoided making eye contact with Gabriel as they made their way to the open seats, he knew he wouldn’t be able to prevent the laughter they were both holding back.

“Gabe, was that really necessary?” Sam asked once they got seated, his legs stretched out into the aisle. This was going to be a much better trip already. The passenger who had the window seat had three eye masks on and a pair of those fancy noise cancelling headphones. He wasn’t worried about overhearing any part of their conversation.

“No, but it was funny!”

“Ok, yes it was. But you didn’t have to take it over the top like you did.”

“I could have gone further with it, and besides. Who was it that flashed their gun? Don’t think I didn’t catch that, Winchester.” Gabriel hissed, however his eyes betrayed him. There was no anger to twinkle in his golden eyes. If anything Sam would have said there was a bit of pride in there.

“Whatever, so did you come up with anything after I left yesterday?” He said changing subjects.

“Matter of fact I did.” Gabriel beamed at him before reaching into the briefcase he had brought on the flight as his carry on. With a pop it opened and Sam could clearly see that there was much more in their previously thin file. Pulling out a few copies of what looked like old news clippings Gabriel handed them off to his partner. He started explaining what he had found while the other agent started skimming through the articles.

“There have been other instances of missing people in the same general area. Many of them hikers or backpackers, the kind of people who regularly go missing in these kinds of places. Most of these reports come in around the same time of year too, again not so weird, since it’s a time of year that has a higher rate of visitation.”

He handed over a few more papers to Sam, giving him time to read over some of the new information he had dredged up. Sam quirked his eyebrow as he looked over some of the accounts and stories, Gabriel took that as indication to continue with his explanations.

“Some of those are accounts from native storytellers who recount verbal tradition as it’s passed down generation to generation. Among those were a cautionary tale regarding an area in the Cascade mountain range that was to be avoided during the same time of year. Alternatively there was a tale recommending bringing an offering of a fresh hunt if you did have to travel through the area.”

“So your thoughts on this one, Gabe?” He had been leaning towards a cult or a serial killer, but with some of these cases going back as far as they did he wasn’t sure. The addition of folklore was making him think that maybe his brother was right and that this was just a case of bears that had gotten used to being brought food during a particular time of year.

“I’m thinking we’ve got ourselves a very pissed off forest spirit.”

“Gabe…” Sam dropped his head into his hands rubbing at his forehead and temples, “This is not a case of angry god spurned by a lack of tribute and drop in worship rates.”
“And why not? The reports really only start coming in once the native tribes that did worship the spirits of the area had been pushed out and relocated. Their stories practically mention appeasing the spirit with sacrifices. Maybe this is their way of claiming what they think they are rightfully owed?” Gabriel was practically counting the reasons out on his fingers. What he wasn’t saying was how uncertain he was about his own conclusion. In all the research he had managed all he had come up with was how this wasn’t new and how much sense it made to make this an X-file.

"Because vengeful forest spirits don’t kill travelers or forest rangers. They don’t do anything because they aren’t real. This is probably just a case of bears that have gotten too familiar with humans. All of these cases take place during periods of drought, when their natural food sources would be scarcer and they would be more prone to searching out humans for a source of food.” Sam couldn’t believe that he was picking his brother’s initial suspects but right now it was Yogi and Booboo or Dryads, and at least Yogi was real. At least he didn’t suspect big foot in all of this, which would have been worse than the religious take one it, which made sense now that he knew more about Gabriel’s background.

“Next time you piss off an old god remind me not to help you.” He said as he slumped back into his seat, leaving the files and folders open allowing the other agent access to the work he had pulled together for them. Sam almost didn’t hear the heavy sigh and mumbling over the rattle of the drink cart passing by. “Angry spirits I can deal with, if it’s not that, then I’m not sure what we’re looking at. At least we’re going to be there to find out.”

He was glad that he had picked up a crossword book on the way to their departure gate. It gave him something to do other than immersing himself in the case files. There was only so much he could gather from the documents on this one, they weren’t given much and they hadn’t found out much more. His partner had popped in his headphones and was reading a beaten up copy of The DiVinci Code occasionally stifling a yawn. He was about to ask him about a clue that he couldn’t quite figure out when he saw that he was asleep, book still open in his lap. It wasn’t a bad idea, napping to avoid jet lag, and with a yawn Sam tucked his pen into his puzzle book and closed his eyes.

Sam woke up hours later into the flight with his head resting on something soft, he shifted trying to get back into a comfortable position when his pillow grunted its displeasure. Weary eyed Sam turned to look next to him, Gabriel must have leaned over at some point in his sleep and was resting his head on Sam’s shoulder. In turn Sam had been leaning his head on top of Gabriel’s and he had been comfortable enough to have stayed asleep. He noticed how intimate the situation looked from the outside, but it was also a nine hour flight and a good percentage of the passengers had also fallen asleep. Deciding he had two options and a quick glance to his watch showed that there were still a couple more hours to the flight. He closed his eyes and sunk a little further back into his chair, the other agent’s head tucking into his neck.

The next time he woke up it was to an attendant asking him to ‘please tuck his legs in from the aisle, we’re landing soon.’ Stretching his arms and cracking his neck he scrunched his legs between his seat and the seat in front of him. Gabriel had woken up at some point and was flipping through the files once more, Sam could see that a few had been dog eared and bore highlights over certain sections.

“Afternoon sleeping beauty. Once we land we should probably head up to the town just outside the stretch where the disappearances have occurred. We can ask around the town and head up into the mountain to see the ranger station tomorrow.” He gathered the paperwork into a neat file and returned them into his briefcase.

Sam agreed with that course of action, if they went into the mountains today they would be going into the dark. They still had to drive to the town and then again up into the mountains, which would
be an additional couple of hours of travel. Having slept through most of the plane trip he wasn’t particularly tired but he knew that travel had its way of sapping energy.

And he was right, the car they got was a compact and he couldn’t get the seat to move back far enough forcing him to sit uncomfortably for the majority of the ride. Gabriel shrugged apologetically taking driver’s seat without contest, he had attempted to get them something a bit larger but to no avail. It seemed that even in the land of big foot things were still not accommodating for the younger agent’s height. By the time they got into the mountain town Sam’s legs had cramped up and he was getting irritated. He wasn’t sure how much of that was attributed to his sitting conditions, his hunger, or to Gabriel playing the best of Ace of Base.

“How was I supposed to know that you didn’t like Swedish dance-pop?” Gabriel complained stepping out of the car.

“Oh I don’t know, maybe when I told you five times to please change to anything else? And then you just turned the volume up and sang at me that ‘No one’s gonna drag you up to get you into the light where you belong.’” Sam had his bitch face turned to full as he unfurled himself from the small space he had been trapped in. He sent a glare at his partner as he tried to stretch himself out. Gabriel opened his mouth to speak when a small butterfly flew right into it, causing him to sputter and make faces. Sam cracked a smile unable to laugh at the other agent’s misfortune.

“They say it’s good luck when a butterfly chooses you.” A small child’s voice spoke up from a bench on the sidewalk.

“Sweetheart, that butterfly chose poorly.” Gabriel told them as he tried rubbing his mouth with the back of his hand. He let Sam check them in while he turned and opened the trunk getting their bags out. The young girl watched him carefully from her spot, she got up once he started trying to juggle the bags and briefcases. Catching one of the briefcases as it slipped from his hands, she didn’t give it back when he tried to take it.

“Momma says I should help out where I can. I know what room you’re staying in Mister, you can follow me.” She spoke into the ground and started walking towards the motel.

“She’s right you know. Your mom, about helping people.” Gabriel said searching his pockets for the candy bar he knew he had tucked away. Finding it he offered it to her as his way of thanks, she tentatively reached out and took it, nodding her head.

“ ‘S’at why you’re here?” She asked, “Cause of the missing rangers? You and the tall guy are going to try to find them?”

“That’s right kid, we’re here to find out what’s going on.” Gabriel tried smiling at her, she probably heard a lot of things when the adults didn’t think she knew what they were talking about and wasn’t aware of the details of the missing persons. He didn’t want to risk dashing her hopes, but he also knew better than to raise hopes when he was certain that the rangers were no longer alive.

“Watch out for the moths, they’re bad luck. Not like the butterflies.” A hand reached out and grabbed her shoulder. The girl didn’t react other than taking another bite of the candy bar.

“Margo, leave the nice man alone.” A woman came over to the door of the room they were waiting at along with Sam. She opened the door after jiggling the handle. “Sorry the door gets stuck, I kept asking for the locksmith to realign it. But now you two know the trick. Margo, did you thank him for the candy?”

“Thank you mister.” Her mom ruffled her hair and she wandered back to the bench in front of the
motel office.

“Sorry about my daughter, she can be a handful at times.” She rubbed at her elbow, watching her daughter walk off.

“She’s a lovely young lady, very kind and helped me with our bags.” Gabriel assured the woman with a smile. He didn’t want her to worry, the girl really was a good kid and from what he could tell, she was being raised well.

Sam pushed past him with an eye roll and dropped their bags on their respective beds, he hadn’t heard anything except what they already knew from the motel’s owner. He was hungry and had a headache and was two minutes away from leaving Gabriel at the motel and going out on his own. Tossing his jacket on the bed he cast another look over the woman’s head, making pointed eye contact with his partner.

“You shouldn’t worry too much about her. Do you know of a good place for food nearby? We’ve been traveling all day and haven’t had much to eat other than airplane food.” It didn’t take much to know what that look meant after the day they had had. He was already tired of the grumpy attitude he was getting and the one he was starting to develop. She pointed them in the direction of a local steakhouse where they were able to get a seat and were started with a basket of garlic knots. Gabriel had even gotten Sam to order something more than just a salad.

“Feeling better with some food now?” Gabriel asked after the bread basket was empty earning him a sheepish look from Sam, he had only gotten a single one of the garlic knots when they were first set down at their table. “We’re meeting with a Forestry Service ranger tomorrow. They’re going to be taking us up to the cabin. They haven’t had time to check it themselves so we’re getting a front row seat to whatever went down.”

“So they haven’t even checked in on their own people?” Sam asked

“It would appear that the forest fires south of here are higher priority. Not that I blame them, those fires could rage out of control and kill hundreds or thousands. But yes, it would appear that we’re going where no man has gone before.”

“You guys heading up into the mountain tomorrow?” Their waiter asked as he placed their meals down. “Sorry I didn’t mean to ease drop on anything, but you folks should be careful if you’re going in. This time of year isn’t the best to go up there.”

“Any reason?” Sam twisted in his seat to address the waiter. Gabriel was sneaking fries off his plate while he was distracted.

“Just not good to head into the mountains right now.” He said before walking off to take another table’s order. Sam followed his movements before he turned back catching Gabriel grabbing another fry off his plate and shoving it into his mouth.

“Gabe…” Sam cocked his head and let out a heavy sigh before picking up his chicken sandwich, his second choice after having been talked out of his usual order of a salad.

“We can order you a side of fries.” He said calmly, his own fries sitting untouched.

“It’s not that, it’s the town. No one wants to go into the mountain, except us. Do you think there might be a reason?” He was still wary about the prospect of bears, especially with hearing cryptic warnings from the locals. After last case, he was going to make sure that he brought his gun with him. Now he was thinking of picking up bear spray before they went in.
“Yeah, angry forest spirits.” He said grabbing another fry from Sam’s plate, earning himself a bitch face. “Is that for the fries or my theory? Because I’m not sure right now.”

Sam spun his plate moving the fries out of the reach of his partner and finished off the rest of his dinner without it being taken from him. The silent treatment continued until they got back to their motel room. The door jammed just like she had warned them and Gabriel couldn’t get the leverage needed to get the door opened.

“I got this, Gabe.” He said gently pushing him aside and began to jiggle the door. “Just needed to … and ah!” The door popped open swinging into their shared room. Sam held his arm open welcoming them into the cozy space.

“My hero.” Gabriel wiggled his eyebrows at him, causing Sam to shake his head at his actions. Shucking out of his jacket and casting it out on his bed, he was the first to get the shower this time around. He came out with just a towel wrapped around his waist, water dripping from his floppy hair. Sam rolled over trying to hold into that image as he forced his eyes closed until he started to drift to sleep.

~*~*~*~

Trees blocked the road, they looked as if they weren’t going to be able to continue by car. They were picked up outside their motel by a government issued pickup, driven by the regional supervisor of the missing crew. Even with a supply stop, they were on their way into the national forest before noon. They would have made it to the cabin by now if it hadn’t been for the natural road block, something that they were assured was common. Leaving the vehicle behind, they had taken to the road by foot once they climbed over the trees.

“Ranger Rightland is this normal?” Sam asked pointing up at the trees. Branches were completely coated in insects, it was something he had never seen before. It was mesmerizing watching the trees flutter with life.

“It’s a bit unusual but it’s not uncommon. Butterflies are known for mass migrations, especially the Monarch Butterfly. There are places in Mexico where the jungles will transform into shades of orange because the butterflies are so thick.” He smiled looking up at the trees, it was an incredible sight and under any other circumstances he would have been documenting the spectacle. However he was here with two FBI agents looking into the disappearance of several of his men.

“Are we there yet?” Gabriel complained, they had been walking for nearly four miles since the fallen trees had blocked their way. His feet were sore, there was no reason for him to be walking in dress shoes through the Cascade Mountains, if he had known they would be going for a lengthy hike he would have brought sneakers. Right now he was mentally cursing the woodland spirits for bringing them into this.

“Nearly there, about another mile or so if I remember correctly. I haven’t been up in this are in a while, my men are usually pretty self-reliant, so there isn’t need for me to check in on them.” He shifted how his pack was situated, pushing them forward on the trial. For the most part it was easy hiking since they were sticking to the road.

Things started quieting down as they continued to walk. Sam wasn’t sure when exactly he had stopped hearing bird calls, but now he wasn’t hearing the call of other insects. Looking up into the trees he was surprised to see that they were empty of the butterflies he was entranced with earlier. There was no movement at all, it was sending off warning signals. The cabin came into view as they
rounded the last turn of the road. It was just as quiet as the woods around them, and from the outside seemed just as empty.

Sam and Gabriel both reached for their pistols at the same time as they came up to the cabin door. Ranger Righthand opened the door and stood there as a look of fear washed over him draining his face of color. Running up in place on either side of the ranger, they looked into the building, lowering their weapons setting their faces in place not letting their emotions show. A bare skeleton was seated behind one of the desks, light webbing and a layer of dust made it to look as if it had been there for years rather than the few weeks it had been.

“Think your nature gods could do this?” Sam shared a look with Gabriel, even under normal circumstances it would take a body months even years to reach this state. There was something else going on here for the remains to be so clean and for there to be almost no smell of decomposition lingering in the cabin.

“This is unexpected, to say the least.” Gabriel returned his gun to his side, taking the first steps into the room, Sam right behind him. He looked around for any apparent signs of struggle or cause of death, from the corner of his eye he could see that the others were doing similar. He turned away from the remains to see that Sam had paused, looking closely at the lamp on one of the other desks. “You got anything there Samenstein?”

“Probably not, I found… a moth.” Sam held his hands up, questioning himself with what he had found, “It’s probably nothing but it’s the first living thing I’ve seen since we got to the cabin.”

“Maybe it’s a witness, I’ll give you the honor of questioning it.” Gabriel joked, he was coming up with nothing as he continued to search over the bones. By all means the skeleton should have collapsed, there was no tissue or ligaments left to hold it together. They were all gone as if everything had been meticulously scraped off. He couldn’t think of anything that could have done something like this in this short of a period of time.

“I had three other rangers working this station. I need to at least find what’s left of them if this one is any indication.” Ranger Righthand sat down on the old sofa that was in front of the fireplace. Other than the four desks there was a kitchen, what could be called a living room, and two doors that most likely lead into living quarters, the ranger station looked more like a dorm or bunk house. If it wasn’t for the skeleton, Gabriel would have considered it a nice vacation cabin.

“Well, while there’s still light outside I’d like to see if I can find any sign of them. You two are welcome to come with me, I wouldn’t recommend going too far on your own. It’s really easy to get turned around and lost up here.” He tugged his hat back in place and stepped out of the building. The two agents shared a look and followed after him. Neither of them had found anything that would help them inside the building, and the ranger was right, without knowing the fate of the other three people there wasn’t anything they could do.

Following the ranger through the underbrush they started picking up on noticing where things had moved through. A broken stick here, trampled ground plants there, extra wiggle room between bushes. Even with their new skill, they stayed within visual distance of each other, neither agent wanted to get too far from the others there were already enough people lost, they didn’t need to add to that number. Walking around it was easy to see how easy it would be, each tree looked just like the last and there were few landmarks that stood out enough to judge location with. So they stayed close enough to each other that they would be able to help should any of the find anything or need assistance.

“RIGHTLAND! GABRIEL!” Sam shouted over the brush to get their attention, he had found something and needed someone else to see it too. Gabriel was the first one at his side, if he had
gotten there unusually fast Sam didn’t notice. His eyes and attention were locked onto the large tent of webbing at the base of the tree in front of him.

“What is it?” Rightland asked loudly before he made his way to their location, his movements through the brush were loud and easy to track. He came through into the clearing on the other side of Sam and followed his outstretched arm.

“See for yourself.” Sam said pointing at the object. “And if you could explain what we’re looking at, all the better.”

Rightland pulled a large knife out from the sheath on his belt as he tentatively stepped closer to the webs. Warily he reached out touching the sticky fibers and cut into a thick section of them, strands clung to the blade as it pulled through, his hands shaking under his nerves, unsure what to expect next. A few more decisive cuts and the ranger stepped back so the others could see, his own face wore a tired look of shock and fear. There under the dirty silk was another skeleton grinning out at them from its final resting place.

Chapter End Notes

Song: The Sign by Ace of Base

AN: OK heads up, Darkness Falls is one of my favorite X-Files episodes and I actually liked the Supernatural episode Bugs.
They called off their search after finding the second body. Ranger Rightland marked the location of the skeleton on his GPS, citing that he couldn’t move it without risking damage to it. They were all unsettled by the find, no one was certain what could have caused the pristine state of the bones. Even after uncovering a bit more of the skeleton they were unable to find any signs of damage to any of the bones. The flash had been completely stripped without tool or tooth marks and the only clues they could find was the silk that encased the skeleton.

Walking back Sam tried keeping a close eye out for any movement in the forest surrounding them. Things were still eerily quiet, not a single bird call or buzz of an insect had been heard in hours, he had never realized how loud the forest was until it was quiet. Every time he thought he saw something moving out of the corner of his eye he turned to see nothing. It was frustrating and terrifying that there wasn’t anything moving around or making noise.

Back at the cabin Gabriel began pacing back and forth nervously, his voice getting louder and louder with agitation as he tried to make sense of what they had seen. They had returned to the cabin after discovering the skeleton of a second ranger in the woods. There were no signs of struggle with this body either, the way it had been resting against the tree suggested that it had fallen asleep and never woke up. But the state of the bones continued to puzzle them all, there was no reason for them to be that clean and with no signs of damage. They found nothing new with the second skeleton other than the large mass of silk webbing, again the bones were completely stripped of flesh.

“Two bodies, or rather skeletons, every bit of tissue gone! I didn’t see any teeth marks, did you? And not even any discoloring on the bones since they were wrapped so nicely in silk! So are we experiencing some spiders of Mirkwood shit, because I would LOVE to know before giant spiders drop from the canopy and make off with my body!” He was really animated, his arms flailing as he paced.

“Gabe… Gabe! GABRIEL!” Sam stopped short of physically grabbing his partner by his shoulders and shaking him to get his attention and snap him out of his panic. “It’s not spiders, they slurp their prey up after liquefying their insides. Even normal, regular sized spiders that aren’t from Middle Earth leave a desiccated corpse behind. We would have found mummies, not skeletons. Besides, I haven’t seen any spiders anywhere. And I’ve been looking”

Sam received stares from both his partner and ranger Rightland. Gabriel, closed his eyes and took several deep breaths to gather himself after his little freak out. He didn’t usually get that way during cases, but there was a first time for everything. He really didn’t like not knowing things about a case, usually there was something for him to latch onto but so far there was nothing. He needed another look at the corpses.

“Ok, sorry. I’ve been re-reading The Hobbit.” He tried to come up with a reason for his outburst, he was embarrassed by it and was regretting letting the others see him like that. He had ways of finding out what was going on without going into a panic, but he had gotten into certain habits now that he had a partner again. He could do this, he just had to find a different way about it.

“No you’re not Gabe, I saw you reading The DaVinci Code on the plane.” Sam was quick to point out, rolling his eyes at his partner. He was anxious about this case as well, they had almost no leads and two dead bodies. They still had two more to find as well as discover the reason and report it if
they couldn’t stop it themselves.

“I can read both. But you really haven’t seen any spiders?” He tried defending his previous statement after being caught, he was unsure of how he wanted to deal with the knowledge that Sam had been watching him. They had already gone over the fact that he wasn’t sent as a spy by the people higher up, so it wasn’t for any reason his paranoia could come up with.

“Not a one, and I haven’t seen anything either. This whole area is completely devoid of life. Almost like we have an oceanic dead zone, but up here in the mountains.” Ranger Rightland had been staying out of their conversation for the most part, watching them from the couch. He had noticed the same thing that Sam had and it was bothering him as well. There was no reason for an area to be empty of signs of life, they should have been hearing birds and seeing the movements of small animals in the surrounding brush. There weren’t many times that he had seen or heard of something like this happening before, maybe before a natural disaster or something, but he wasn’t sure.

“There’s still some light out, I’m going to hike back to the truck and send a call out. The radio here has blown a tube and I can’t reach anyone by phone, no signal. It’ll be faster if I go alone, either of you would just slow me down.” He stared directly at Gabriel when he said that, who just shrugged at the suggestion.

“I should go with you.” Sam didn’t like the idea of anyone being out in the woods alone while they didn’t know what was going on yet, but he understood the ranger’s line of thinking. He could radio in letting someone know of their finds and hopefully request some help. But it was better if they implemented the buddy system while moving around outside. The cabin seemed to be the most secure place, despite the skeleton still sitting at the desk.

“No, stay here, see if you two can find anything around the immediate area that could help us. Don’t let the cabin leave your sights at any point and meet back inside when it gets dark. It will probably take me three hours to make the round trip, I’ll be cutting it close but I should be back right at sunset.” He said as he shrugged his bag over his shoulders and flicked a flashlight on and off testing it before he stepped out the door. He looked over his shoulder one more time before letting the door close behind him and making his way down the road.

“I don’t like his plan.” Sam mumbled as he moved around the cabin, he kept sending glances to the skeleton. He wasn’t sure if they should continue to ignore it as if it wasn’t there, he really wanted to throw a sheet or something over it. It bothered him that they hadn’t done anything with it since they had found it. He knew all about leaving things so not to disturb any evidence, but it still creeped him out that they were spending extended periods of time with a dead body just sitting at a desk.

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“Yeah, I’m not a fan of it either. Just like I don’t like how we have nothing so far in ways of theories. Not even my idea of an angry pagan god could count for this, they like to be a bit more showy and get credit where it’s due, this all just seems too natural.” Gabriel said flopping backwards into the couch, he eyed the fireplace wondering when it was last used and if they would need to use it tonight. The more he thought about that the more he thought it was a good idea, him and Sam sitting in front of a warm crackling fire.

“Don’t you mean ‘Unnatural?’ ” Sam asked arching an eyebrow at his partner’s word choice.

“Sure,” Gabriel was staring into the fireplace, his face set in concentration, brows furrowed and eyes narrowed. He continued to stare before getting up and moving closer to the fireplace. Taking out his pen from his pocket he poked something in the back hanging on one of the soot covered bricks.

“Samfry? Can you get me a jar?” He asked without turning to address his partner. He didn’t want to let the thing he had found out of his sight. It blended in really well with the back of the fireplace and
he was surprised that he had noticed it at all. Gabriel could hear the sound of Sam rummaging through the kitchen area searching for his requested jar. Footsteps came up behind him and he held out his hand, feeling the cool smooth sensation of a glass as it was handed to him.

“What is it?” Sam asked, his voice very close to his ear. Gabriel could feel his warm breath across his skin as he scraped the thing off the wall. The small capsule like item fell with a soft ‘tink’ to the bottom of the jar. Twisting the cap on, securing the car and its contents, Gabriel turned his face suddenly very close to Sam’s.

“I’m not sure yet.” He said leaning back before he stood up. Holding the jar up to the light, he was able to look at the thing closer. Its dark color had helped it to blend into the back of the fireplace, it was tapered on either end and had some segmenting to it. “I think it’s a pupae of some kind. Help me poke some holes in it and we can watch to see if it hatches.”

Taking the jar to one of the desks Sam found a knife that they could use to stab through the thin metal lid. With newly created air holes they set the jar aside and stared at it for a bit longer. Gabriel stretched his arms up above his head, the edge of his shirt rising above his waist line.

“There’s no sense watching it, it’s not going to hatch faster if we stare it down. Want to go outside and see if there’s anything else we can find? It’s better than being in here with Dr. Bones.” He crooked his thumb in the direction of the skeleton. Sam had to admit that he was right about the pupae, watching it would be like watching paint dry, and he wasn’t the biggest fan of the skeleton either. Nodding his agreement they walked out the cabin door, not before he flicked the porch light on for them in case they lost track of time and stayed out later than anticipated.

Sam noted a couple more of the pupae things on the sides of trees nearby. They were standing out more and more as he knew what to look for. He scraped a couple more off, tucking them into makeshift envelope he made from a piece of paper ripped from his pocket journal. After finding over a dozen he stopped collected them, and started to just count them. His numbers were getting starting to get up around a hundred, when he heard Gabriel call out for him.

Pushing his way through the underbrush, branches snapped backwards behind him as he moved past. He had been so focused on finding and counting these new things that he had lost track of his location. Looking around he could no longer see the cabin, he had to push down the panic that flared up, focusing instead on trying to follow Gabriel’s shouts.

“SAAAM!? SAMOOSE!!”

For such a short guy he sure had a big voice, and for the first time Sam was glad for it. The yells of his partner carefully lead him back through the forest. He was surprised at how far off he had gotten during his short walk. The cabin finally in view, Sam let his shoulders relax from the tension he was holding in them. He wasn’t certain what would have happened to him if he had gotten lost as night fell, but he was glad to be back at the cabin.

“There you are! Good, I was starting to get worried.” Gabriel said from the side of the building before leading them inside. Sam saw that he had a couple more jars laid out on the desks with more pupae, he divided the ones he had collected between the jars, adding to their new collection. They watched the jars carefully, Sam slapping Gabriel’s hand just once for shaking one of the jars. The two of them both startled when the cabin door was thrown open, Ranger Rightland stepping in.

“I got a hold of folks back in town with the radio. Someone will be able to come out in a couple days to help us carry out what’s left of my men.” He moved across the space into the kitchen, ignoring the multiple jars covering the desks. Rummaging through the cabinets he started coming up with canned goods and dried food. “There’s enough food stocked up in here to last us for a week at least. I
suggest you two get comfortable and pick out your bunks. We’ll head back out tomorrow to see if we can’t find them.”

Gabriel was quick to jump up and head out the door, returning with an armful of small sticks. There was a small collection of cut wood sitting near the fireplace, but he remembered seeing more around the backside of the cabin. He made a couple more trips before he was satisfied with what he had grabbed. Stacking smaller sticks and twigs between larger pieces of wood, he readied the fireplace, while Sam checked out the two rooms.

Each room had two beds, made up as if their former occupants would be returning to use them again any moment. There were also trunks and upon further inspection he found they were full of clothes, both uniform and normal clothing. One of their missing rangers was actually pretty close to Sam’s height if the length of the pants were any indicator. He changed out of the FBI business suit look into jeans and a t-shirt.

“Are you wearing a dead man’s clothes?” Gabriel asked when Sam stepped out, he had gotten a decent fire started in the fireplace, and the crackling was a nice reprieve from the silence outside. The clothes however seemed to fit well enough if a bit tight, but he wasn’t going to complain about that, just the questionable ways he came about them.

“He’s not using them, and the suit and tie look doesn’t really work up in the mountains.” To him it made sense, he needed something that was available to him and didn’t currently have a claim on it. Maybe it was a holdover from living with his brother and having a lot of hand-me-down items.

“Are you wearing clothes of one of my men?” Ranger Rightland’s face was scrunched up in confusion staring at the taller agent as he brought over a pot of bubbling soup. He placed the pot on the table and went back for bowls, shaking his head as he went about the cabin.

“That’s what I said!” Gabriel moved over on the couch, making room that Sam fell right into. The two agents graciously accepted the food, occasionally bumping elbows as they ate their meals. The forestry ranger pulled over one of the chairs from the desks and the three of them sat in some relative quiet eating in front of the fireplace.

Morning came and they were surprised with moths in a couple of the jars, they appeared to be the same kind that Sam had found yesterday when they first examined the cabin. Ranger Rightland was carefully examining them with a hand lens through the glass. Sam had pressed that they maintain their isolation so they could provide specimens for identification once the forestry ranger said they didn’t look like any moth he was familiar with.

“I’m not an entomologist, and I’m not claiming I know anything about them either. We could be looking at something new, or we could be looking at a species that’s common to the area. I studied resource management not moths.” He shook his head frustrated that they still had nothing more than a dozen or so insects. It wasn’t the kind of thing he was hoping to find, he wanted to be out there looking for his last few men. However he was waiting on the two agents, one of whom had insisted on breakfast and was making something from the canned goods. They had both found clothes that mostly fit them from the trunks left behind by the missing rangers. Gabriel was just as surprised that someone was close to his size as he was when Sam first came out in the same clothes he wore today.

The shorter agent was merrily moving about the small kitchen creating smells that were borderline distracting. His humming was upbeat and if it weren’t for the situation, would have been infectious. Sam looked up from the desk where he and the ranger were examining the moths and watched as his partner shuffled a dance while he finished cooking. He couldn’t help but wonder if he was always
like that when he cooked.

“Sorry it’s not much, but hey, it’s what I could manage with a few cans.” He placed plates on the edge of the desk for the other two, choosing to eat directly from the pan himself. Carefully leaning over their shoulders to look at the insects, he noted how they looked like almost every other moth he had seen. Smallish and dusty brown, the only thing remarkable about them was their very presence.

“Mmm… Wow!” Sam looks surprised at his fork, their breakfast looked somewhat like a beef and potato hash but the taste was just as good as the smells had been. “And you made this from the cans?”

“You should see what I can do with fresh ingredients.” Gabriel winked at his partner, taking another bite of his own breakfast to hide his smile. He was pleased with the reactions he got from his cooking, even getting an appreciative nod from the other man, something he hadn’t gotten since they first met him. “Get anything from our fluffy friends?”

“Not yet, but Gabe, Rightland doesn’t know much about these. We’re going to have to get a specialist to get anything more.” Sam stood up, giving Gabriel access to get closer to the new moths. He took his plate, as well as the empty plate of the ranger’s, and brought them over to the sink, taking the time to wash them along with the bowls from last night.

“Ok, if we’re set. I’d like to get out there to find my two remaining men.” He stood up quickly knocking one of the jars to the ground. The glass shattered and the moths fluttered freely into the room. “We still have the other jars.” He said waving his hand dismissing the broken glass as something they could deal with later.

He grabbed his equipment and with the two agents following him they walked out of the cabin into the forest. They implemented the same safety techniques they used the day before, always keeping in eyesight of at least one of the other two. They combed the area surrounding the cabin once again before moving their search radius further out. Again the woods were quiet as they worked, the only sounds coming from their movements through the brush.

Sam signaled to Gabriel that he had found something but by not calling it out loud he made it clear to his partner that it wasn’t something he was wanted to draw attention to. Moving as quietly to get to his partner’s location Gabriel immediately saw what it was that Sam had found.

“I think we’re close to finding another of the bodies.” Gabriel said pointing to the side of the tree. The bark was speckled with cocoons, covering the first five feet. As was the next tree, moving together they saw that the density of the cocoons was increasing as they continued. Soon whole bushes were drooping under the weight of these insect pupae, sides of trees were blackened with them.

“You might be right Gabe. Look at this.” Sam pointed down a small hill where a makeshift lean-to had been constructed. Thick webbing could be seen covering the inside of it and trailing out to the ground surrounding it. “Rightland! I think we found them…”

They stayed their distance until Ranger Rightland appeared and was able to mark their location. He tore down the lean-to and they were all able to see how the webbing was larger than the previous one. He took his knife to it and turned away when the smiling faces of two skulls gaped out from inside the silk. There was more gear and data logs located in the general area of these two suggesting that they were out collecting information on something. They collected the journals before solemnly heading back to the cabin. All four missing rangers had been found, all four of them mysteriously skeletonized and Gabriel had an idea.
“The moths are the key. I don’t know how yet, but I’m sure of it.” He said in hushed tones as he grabbed at Sam’s arm. The other agent looked at him, his face set grimly as they hiked back. “Like you said there is nothing else living out here except them. And we have found them at every body. The evidence is there.”

“Adult moths have a liquid diet if they can eat at all. There is now way this theory can account for the state of the bodies. It’s circumstantial at best.” Sam shook his arm free and continued walking in step behind the ranger. He didn’t want to admit that he was thinking along the same lines, they had seen moths and their cocoons throughout the area, and in higher concentrations near where bodies had been found. But as far as he knew moths either didn’t eat in their adult form or were like butterflies in that they only were able to drink liquids.

“Maybe we’re not looking for the adults, maybe we’re looking for the young. There have been species found in isolated regions like the Hawaiian Islands where caterpillars are capable of not only catching smaller insects and invertebrates but eating them. There was one that I saw a video on youtube where the caterpillar acted like a stick until a fly moved close enough and WHAM!” He slammed his fist in his hand, the impact making a smacking noise. It startled Sam and had Rightland turning his head over his shoulder to look at them. Gabriel dropped his voice back down to a whisper. “It caught the fly and munched it to pieces.”

“That’s all fine and well, except these cases are only documented in isolated areas with limited resources and high competition. Something like that would have been discovered and documented in this area.” Sam countered, if they were on a remote island or an isolated peak his theory might make sense for their situation. “Besides it sounds like those kinds of caterpillars would eat their siblings if they came across them. These ones, if they are caterpillars, are exhibiting behavior more like that of tent caterpillars. And I think someone would notice if they were being eaten alive by insects.”

“Still to be safe I’d like to sleep with the door closed tonight, after I double check that the moths aren’t in our room.” He said before falling back behind the others again. Hiking slower than the others because he was still wearing his dress shoes, he had refused to put on a dead man’s shoes claiming that he didn’t want a repeat of the Twilight Zone.

The cabin was just as quiet as they had left it, their movements bringing the only bit of sound to the area. Footsteps seemed to echo as they entered the building, and the door’s creak was louder than any of them remembered. After placing his equipment down, Ranger Rightland started to open one of the jars.

“NO! Don’t, leave them!” Sam tried to warn the ranger of opening the jars and releasing the moths, but he wasn’t quick enough. The lid popped off and the ranger gave him an exasperated look, rolling his eyes as he dump dead insects and empty pupae on the desk. All the moths were dead, they noticed as he took the lid off the other jars and dumped out the bodies.

“We should have petri dishes that we can place the bodies in for collection.” He said sweeping everything into a pile and starting on separating the moths from the casings. Using a wave of his arm to indicate where he thought the collection tools might be stored. Sam followed the vague directions and started looking through the other desks. Coming to the last desk he opened the bottom drawer and was able to locate the items. Standing back up something small and green caught his eye. Along the window sill, inching slowly across the dusty and worn wood, was a small inchworm. It moved with careful measurement, lifting its head up to test the area before making any changes in its directed path. He couldn’t help but smile at the small sign of life, anything was better than all the death and void they had been encountering.

“Here you are. Do you mind if I read through your men’s notebooks?” He placed the petri dishes on
the desk, where Ranger Rightland immediately started putting moths in one and pupae casings in the other. Once the initial separation had occurred he began to separate the moths even further. He barely looked up to register the agent’s question.

“Yeah, sure, knock yerself out.”

Taking the weather worn notebook, Sam stretched out on the couch, his long legs reaching across the piece of furniture. The notebook was full of coordinates and lists of numbers he assumed were measurements. It was as if it was in a foreign language to him, he was unable to make sense of most of it. However there were drawings and some journaling alongside the meticulous data collections, whichever ranger this had belonged to they had very neat and precise handwriting. The drawings were simple but easy to tell what they were with the notes paired with them. He was immersed in the notebook and lost track of time.

Sam brought his knees in, resting his feet in the center of the couch, and continued reading the journal. The other end of the couch dipped down as Gabriel took a seat with him, he placed his phone on the table a clear timer displayed on the front screen. He had started something for the three of them for dinner after getting into a small argument with Rightland over soup.

“So anything interesting in that?” Gabriel pointed at the notebook he had been reading.

“Lots of information regarding the potential cordage of the trees. And this person noted the same increased presence of butterflies for several days, and then suddenly nothing.” Sam tried explaining everything he had read so far in a simplified and condensed manner.

“Well of course! The dude died, can’t do too much writing from the great beyond.” He leaned back, letting his head fall over the back of the couch, his hair spilling loose and flopping freely. Staring up at the ceiling his eyes squinted and his lips pursed together as he made a face.

“No, I mean, the notes continue but they kept reporting nothing, like what we’re noticing. No birds, no deer, no squirrels, no animals at all.” He swung his legs down off the cushions and leaned into Gabriel’s space, opening the notebook wide so he could show his partner what he was talking about. He nudged him in the leg getting his attention, Gabriel sat up and read a couple of entries from the notebook.

“These weren’t too long before the initial reports of radio silence.” He commented, his timer going off on his phone forced him up to finish and serve their dinners. He had an uneasy feeling about things as he passed out the plates, he couldn’t place it, but something was different. Looking around the room he tried to place his gut feelings on something, catching a bit of movement near the window he stared at it a little bit longer before deciding it was shadows outside.

Ranger Rightland turned in for the night after clearing his plate, turning the light off in his room but leaving the door open. The two agents shared a brief look before adding their plates to the sink and heading into their room, turning the lights off in the central room. Gabriel shook out his blankets and was looking under the furniture, he examined the seal on the window and covered the air vent with a pillowcase.

Sam excused himself from the room to grab a glass of water before his partner entombed them into their room with his paranoia. Grabbing a mug off a hook from the wall, he let the water run for a while until it was cold enough for his tastes. As the water slowly filled the mug Sam watched as an inchworm made its way across the countertop. It was nice seeing living things after seeing so much death, he returned to the room as Gabriel finished double checking the area before jamming a towel under the door and climbing into his own bed.
I did warn you that I liked Darkness Falls and Bugs right?
Puzzle Pieces

Chapter Notes

Fair warning: The bugs are hella gross in this. But I still love them.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“I like watchin’ the puddles gather rain. And all I can do is just pour some tea for two, and speak my point of view but it’s not sane. It’s not sane.”

Gabriel’s alarm on his phone went off, waking them both up from their sleep. Grumbling into his pillow Gabriel swung his arm out and blindly reached for the source of the noise so he could turn it off and either go back to sleep or be forced to acknowledge another day. Sam wasn’t surprised at the music emanating from the phone instead of a blaring alarm, he rolled out of his bed and knocked the towel away from the door with his foot. Stepping into the common area of the cabin, he shuffled eyes half open to the kitchen. He knew there was coffee somewhere after finding a tall percolator yesterday. Filling the device with water and setting it on the stove, Sam set about looking for a tin of grounds that he could add. Reaching into the cabinet with the canned goods he found the coffee, and felt a small but sharp pinch to the side of his hand.

The smell of fresh coffee pulled his partner out from the room, the two of them stood side by side waiting for their drink to finish. Gabriel rubbed at his face a couple of times forcing himself to wake up faster. Sam filled the mugs and pushed the sugar container over to his partner after adding some to his, he watched with distaste as he added scoop after scoop into the dark drink. It would be more of a syrup if he didn’t reach out and take back the sugar, he figured his partner was still half-asleep and had zoned out while scooping.

“Gabe do you think Ranger Rightland would want some coffee too?” He asked absently rubbing at the spot on his hand while he held his coffee. Casting a look to the still dark room, he was surprised that he hadn’t woken up before them.

“We should let him sleep right now, he’s had a rough couple of days. He lost four colleagues and had to document their remains. If he wants some when he wakes up, we’ll make more.” Gabriel said, offering a good explanation for their guide’s behavior, he was probably stressed and worn out from the discoveries they had made. And without any set project or tasks to do until the backup crew arrived to help remove and transport the bodies there wasn’t much he could do to distract himself.

Sam nodded his agreement as he finished off his cup, the warm liquid waking him up. Placing it in the sink he saw several small inchworms moving across their plates from last night. Letting his face scrunch up in thought he watched as they seemed to munch through some of the food bits that remained on the plates.

“Gabe can you hand me one of the jars?” He asked keeping his sights on the small insects in the sink.

“Yeah, they’re empty though.” He could hear Gabriel’s steps as he moved across the room and back.

“That’s fine.” He reached out and grabbed at the jar, feeling it slip through his hand and crash to the floor, he turned his attention to it and Gabriel. Both of them had looks of surprise and Gabriel’s was
coupled with some worry. “I must not have had a good enough grip.” He mumbled, leaning over to pick up the shards of glass. There were even more inchworms moving along the base boards, Sam quickly stood up startled by the number of them on the floor.

He looked around the room and started seeing more and more of the little bugs. Gabriel followed his partner’s worried stares and started picking up on the movement throughout the room. Instead of aimless inching they seemed to be moving with a sense of purpose towards the other room. His stomach dropped when he came to a conclusion.

“We need to check on Rightland.” He said taking a deep breath, trying to keep his voice level, to keep the sound of his fear out of it. If things were as bad as he imagined than he would need to maintain a level and clear mind. Moving towards the door he made a point to step on as many inchworms that were in his path but he didn’t go out of his way to step on any. The door was still open from last night, Sam reached in and flipped the light switch causing them both to stiffen at the sight in front of them.

The brief moment of inaction was swiftly followed by an outburst of energy from the two agents. They were both at his bed tearing into the silk webbing that was cast up and around his body. Silk grabbed at their fingers as they attempted to pull it away from his body, inchworms crawled up their hands as their nest was disturbed. Sam could feel their small mouths and trying to bite at him as he scrambled to uncover the other man. His hands were starting to feel slow and stiff, but just as they ripped through the last of the webbing he had to cover his face, trying to hold back his gagging. Inchworms wriggled through now empty sockets, the soft tissue of the eyes had been eaten away first. They held their place as they chewed on his flesh like corn on the cob, moving across in methodical sweeps. The small green worm-like insects had made short work of the soft and protruding tissue like his ears and nose. His lips no longer covered his teeth and they could see into his mouth where caterpillars were eating through his tongue. The agents didn’t move to uncover any more of the body, their minds filling in the blanks of what they weren’t seeing. The remaining tent of silk seemed to shiver with the movement of insects underneath it as the caterpillars inched and ate their way through their prey.

Pulling a sheet over the tent of silk and the ranger’s body before Gabriel turned away, the disgust and horror on his face were clear as day. He was softly murmuring under his breath, Sam wasn’t able to make it out the exact words but it seemed to be some kind of chanting. He wondered if he was delivering last rites or something for the man or cursing the creepy insects. Sam shook his hands out, a tingling sensation spreading over them. There were a few red welts from where he was bit, looking at his partner he saw he had similar marks as well, a result from ripping at the silk with no protection. They stepped out into the main area again, now keenly aware of the insects and their brand of horror, letting the click of the door closing behind them echo loudly.

“We need to get these things as far away from us as possible.” Gabriel offered as he stepped on another inchworm with a pop. Sam could only nod in return, he had seen dead bodies before in various states of decomposition but there was something about watching a body being actively eaten. That was something he would never forget and would have nightmares about for years, he was sure of it. He felt a sharp pinch near his ankle and slapped at it, pulling his hand away seeing green goop on it.

“Caterpillars don’t like salt right?” Gabriel asked pouring out a container of salt on the floor, creating a thick ring of the stuff around the couch, what seemed to be one of the few caterpillar free zones. They watched in interest and horror as one of the green insects inched their way through the stuff with no reaction other than what could possibly be taken as mild annoyance.
“I think that was slugs, not caterpillars.” Sam’s foot was starting to feel like it had fallen asleep, pins and needles sparked through to his toes. He rotated his ankle trying to bring feeling back into the extremity, another sharp bite on the back of his thigh, had him slapping himself again. Shaking his head he reached for the small broom next to the fireplace, he removed as many of the caterpillars as he could from their general area with it, he swept a path into the kitchen and began tentatively searching the cabinets for anything that could help them. The broom clattered loudly on the floor at his feet. Gabriel arched his eyebrow at him from across the room, using another broom to clear as much of the area around the couch as he could of the insects.

Sam’s face looked devastated and terrified as he flapped his hands uselessly. “Gabe…” his voice cracked. “Gabriel, I can’t feel them.”

He dropped his broom and crossed the short distance to be at his partner’s side, holding his hands in his own. Pulling each finger in succession and folding his fingers into his palms and back out, he tried to help him out.

“You can’t feel any of this?” He asked, trying to keep his own emotions in check. This was his new partner and the first one that he enjoyed working with and was able to keep up with him, not to mention he was damn good looking. He needed to remain calm and not escalate any panic he might be feeling. If the caterpillars were utilizing any venom to pacify their prey, than a faster heartbeat would just move the venom around quicker.

Moving him to the couch Sam’s legs gave out surprising them both and nearly bringing them down. Gabriel had to support his partner the rest of the way, reminding himself the whole way that he couldn’t afford to freak out or lose his self-control. This was about helping his partner right now, he could panic later, after the fact, when he wasn’t needed to be the serious one. His stomach clenched when he saw a couple caterpillars hanging from strands of silk suspended from the ceiling. Steeling himself, he looked up and couldn’t prevent the croaking noise that escaped his mouth at the sight of the ceiling wriggling with life.

“Gabe, what’s wrong?” Sam asked but he wasn’t sure if he wanted to know.

“It’s. It’s nothing Samstorm. Nothing. Don’t worry, how are your hands?” Gabriel spoke quietly and calmly trying to convince himself as much as his partner that this wasn’t a worst case scenario. He sat them both down on the couch, keeping his broom within arm’s reach to keep the caterpillars as far away as he could from them. Any idea of trying to escape and hike the distance to the truck were shot now that Sam couldn’t feel parts where insects had gotten to him.

“Nothing, I can’t even move them. It’s like they’re not there anymore. Is this how they do it, Gabe? They poison prey larger than themselves and wait until it can’t get away and then start to eat it?” He asked thinking about other animals used that same technique to catch their food. Komodo dragons were the first ones that came to his mind followed by certain snakes. He didn’t want to be like the skeleton seated at the desk behind them, or like any of the others. It was a sobering and terrifying thought.

“Can’t say, but it makes sense, and now those Native People’s stories have more meaning. We found an important puzzle piece, Samboat. A puzzle piece that fits in so many puzzles.” He brushed out with the broom maintaining a ring around the couch as best as he could. These moths were the reason for generations of superstitions surrounding the mountain, for a multitude of missing person’s reports, for the eerie silence they had experienced the whole trip.

“They must release some kind of pheromone trail that the other caterpillars follow. Working together to wrap the body in silk, it provides them shelter and safety while they eat.” Sam continued with his idea of how the moth’s biology worked. “They spread out in search of food and the first one to find
anything sends out a signal calling the others to action. They must have escaped detection for so long because outbreaks like this are rare. Occurring only when certain criteria is met. The moths themselves are pretty bland and don’t attract attention. Gabe am I wiggling my toes?”

He wasn’t and it was making him nervous. When were they expecting Rightland’s backup to arrive? An inchworm dropped in front of their vision, hanging from a strand of silk. Gabriel immediately swatted at it with the broom causing the insect to fly across the room. They needed to face the facts and prepare for the worst.

“How’s your breathing right now, Kiddo? Is that still fine? As long as things aren’t starting to get foggy on you yet.” They needed to keep inventory on his situation to stay ahead of it, he maintained his calm presence trying to extend it to the other man. They had been sitting on the couch for what felt like an eternity, but was probably just hours judging on the level of light.

“How come your hands aren’t dead? They got you too.” Sam focused on where there had been red welts on his partner’s hands, it was something for him to think about that wasn’t his own wellbeing or the murder moths.

“Must be immune to their toxin, like how some people aren’t affected by poison ivy.” He shifted his body so that he was right up against his partner, wrapping his arms around his shoulders and pulling Sam’s unresponsive body to his. The ease at which he was able to move his larger partner was worrying, there was no resistance and he just went with the movement, but having his body close it would be easier to monitor his breathing and heartrate. “I’ll keep them off of you, we’ll see our way out of this.”

Sam nodded into his shoulder, he believed and trusted his partner. He felt a warmth wrapping around him, it felt like safety and hope. Every part of him told him to close his eyes and fall asleep, every part except the rational mind that said if he did it might be the last thing he did. He felt his voice before he heard the words, Gabriel was singing quietly.

“I ask of you a very simple question, did you think for one minute that you are alone? And is your suffering a privilege you share only, or did you think that everybody else feels completely at home? Just wait…” A different feeling hit him while he listened to him sing, he felt disconnected from the space and time he was in, like he was floating. It was a strange feeling, but it wasn’t a threatening one, it felt oddly safe to be floating. Darkness slowly enveloped him into the calm.

He woke up to blindingly bright lights and the rhythmic soft beeping of machines. He let his head flop to the side and was able to see that there were tubes and wires connecting his body to a set of machines just out of his reach. The place smelled sterile and isolating. His whole body was sore and it was when he pushed into the soft surface below him to sit up that he realized he had use of his hands and arms again.

“Sam-n-Eggs! You’re awake!”

He knew that voice, and the nickname was new, his partner must have been nearby. Smiling felt forced, like his face didn’t want to stretch out. Gabriel was at his side with a paper cup filled with water, the arm that held it out for him had a medical band on its wrist. For the first time he looked at himself and was able to see that he was wearing a hospital robe and had a matching bracelet. The sterile environment was a hospital of some sort, they weren’t on the mountain anymore.

“What happened with the moths?” The sound of his voice seemed foreign.

“Your first words after regaining consciousness and you’re worried about moths? Oh Samsides don’t change.” Gabriel smiled softly at him, dragging a chair over so that he was sitting next to his bed.
“They’re being taken care of, I suggested Lecterus for their name, but I have an idea that the government’s method of ‘taking care of them’ is not scientific in nature.”

Sam nodded, he never doubted that their discovery would be taken as a threat to the communities in the area. There was something about ‘Face-eating Moths’ that didn’t really inspire awe and a desire for protection in most people.

“So how’re you feeling? The doctors should be around soon run some more tests on you now that you’re among the living once more.” Gabriel leaned back, spreading his hands out palms up.

“Tired? Sore? Like my body was on fire and put out with ice?” Sam didn’t really know how to articulate how he was feeling in a way that would be useful to the doctors once they came in. Having Gabriel there to try his words on first was an unexpected relief.

“They said that the toxins were something new, but they were able to synthesize something from similar anti-venoms. I think they’ll be surprised that’s all you’re feeling. I’m just glad you’re back with us, I was starting to get attached to you as my partner and would hate to get a whole new one after all this.” Gabriel’s smile was warm and his eyes sparkled reflecting the same smile within. He ruffled his partner’s long hair before standing up to get the doctors for him.

The doctors put him through a number of tests, drawing blood and having him show a range of motion with his hands and arms. They were pleased with his progress and his reaction to their treatments, and were willing to let him check out. A few hours later he was allowed to change into his clothes and board a plane back to Washington DC with his partner.

“Hey, Gabe.” Sam said as they got to his apartment, he started fiddling with the hairs at the back of his neck. “Would you… I mean after what just happened, I was wondering. Maybe if you’d like. Do you want to get dinner tomorrow?”

“Kid, are you sure? I’m much older than you, you could pick and choose from anyone you wanted. And I mean anyone, have you seen yourself? And then there’s the little fact that we’re coworkers. Don’t get me wrong, I’m flattered, really.” Gabriel closed his eyes, he couldn’t look at him while he was rejecting him. His own heart was yelling at him, this was the person he had nearly thrown caution to the wind for. But first and foremost, this was his partner, his fellow agent to the X-files. He mentally repeated that like a mantra, trying to convince himself that what he was doing was the right thing. He was hating himself right now.

“Then as friends?” Sam interrupted he couldn’t listen to whatever other excuses he could come up with and didn’t want to sound heartbroken. He had just opened up to his partner and he felt like he was pushed away, even though it wasn’t a hard no, it was still rejection.

“Yeah,” Gabriel opened his eyes and looked up into Sam’s, he could see the rejection wearing on his face and hoped that his weren’t reflecting that. “That would be nice. I’ll… I’ll see you tomorrow.”

~*~*~*~

Sam actually missed the bold flirting that Gabriel usually slung his way, they barely spoke other than a brief exchange of awkward laughter when they realized that they had each gotten the other coffee. Gabriel had his music going and it created a pleasant background noise as they pushed through the paperwork of their last case, not really surprised at the tighter level of security regarding this one. He
had the feeling that if they ever saw their reports again after they had been filed most of it would have been blacked out.

His phone chirped as a message came through, Dean had gotten his text from last night and was asking about meeting for lunch. He jumped at the chance to get out of the shared office and get some fresh air, leaving his jacket on the back of his chair as a symbol of his eventual return. Gabriel was absorbed in his work and didn’t react when Sam waved to him as he walked through the door. He was tempted to close the door behind him just to see if it would be opened again when he returned.

The brothers didn’t meet at the same small café they had the past times, instead Sam found himself at a diner. Red and white checkers painted the trim near the ceiling, an honest juke box sat at the far end of the narrow restaurant. This place was exactly the kind of place he’d imagine meeting one Agent Dean Winchester at. He shook his head, smiling, for the first time that day, at the idea of how well a diner could fit his brother’s personality.

“Sammy!” he looked for the source of the voice and saw his brother waving at him with a cheesy fry in his hand. Joining the empty seat next to him, he waved at the waitress getting her attention. His order in he turned back to his brother, who was shoveling cheese fries into his face at an alarming rate.

“Did you not eat today or something?” Sam asked watching his brother wolfing food down. There were a few reasons for Dean’s compulsive eating, either it was pie, or he was upset about something. That made two of them then, maybe he could get his brother to commiserate with him, however at the same time Dean didn’t really deal with talking about feelings.

“Actually no, I didn’t. Thanks for noticing, anything else you want to notice?” Dean slowed down his eating and shot a glare at his brother.

“Last case that bad, huh?” Sam understood the feeling and attempted to get Dean to let some of it go. Even if his brother hated talking about his emotions, talking about the problems around them sometimes helped either solve them or lessen them. And right now he could use the distraction from his own.

“You could say that.” Dean grumbled down into his fries, pushing the last ones around with disinterest.

Sam gave him a sidewise glance, prolonging the silence because he knew it would get his brother to talk. It was an easy tactic to goad him into arguments or discussions, because unless Dean started the awkward silence he hated them.

“Cas went and got himself in trouble again. He’s always pulling shit like this, we had a cut and dry case, easy! But no, he had to go all terminator mode when we found that the guy was trafficking humans as well as electronics. Damnit! We were supposed to bring him in alive so they could question him.”

“Shouldn’t you be there with him in the deposition?” Sam knew that he would be there if it was Gabriel, even though he was upset with his partner he would still be there to support him. He was actually surprised that his brother was sitting here in a diner after hearing that his partner was being reprimanded before a counsel.

“Bobby kicked me out.” He punctuated the statement by taking a long drink of his coffee, his plate of fries already gone. The face he was giving his empty plate could have been easily mistaken for anger, but Sam knew that it was more frustration aimed at himself.
“Because?” Sam tried pushing the issue, sometimes he could get Dean to continue other times he would clam up. But he figured he would keep talking based on how agitated he was about the situation.

“What?”

“Dean, there’s always a reason that you get kicked out from something.” He tilted his head, giving his brother a look. They had grown up together and were pretty close, he knew when Dean was omitting part of a story.

“I might have jumped over the table attempting to shut them up and had to be forcibly removed from the room.” Dean said quietly, of course he had been there during his partner’s hearing. He also stood up for him when he was being accused of not following the mission, unfortunately Dean’s methods of conflict resolution usually involved some kind of physical altercation when something he cared for was being threatened.

“You must really have a thing for him if you’re willing to risk your job for him.” Sam smiled at him, he knew it was a risk pointing out any kind of relationship his brother might be in, especially if it threatened his perceived notion of masculinity. But he had met Castiel and saw that his calm and steady personality had an effect on his brother.

“He shouldn’t be punished for that, he was doing the world a favor taking that scumbag out. And let’s talk about you and your partner. Since when did you start calling him ‘Gabe’?” The retaliatory question quickly diverted the attention back to the younger Winchester. Dean had noticed that some level of formality had been dropped between his brother and his new partner, and a level of familiarity had taken its place.

“I uh… don’t think I’ll be calling him Gabe anymore.” He suddenly wasn’t so pleased with how the teasing had turned. Poking fun at his brother was one thing, but now he was reminded that he had a ‘friend date’ tonight. This lunch was no longer acting as the distraction he had hoped for.

“Why? You quitting the X-files? I told you that shit wasn’t good, it’s a career suicide. No one will take you seriously if you work too long with that weirdo Mad Milton.

Sam pursed his lips together and forced himself to take a deep breath. He wanted to stand up for himself and his new job, but he also didn’t want to talk about Gabriel right now. Avoiding the question he took a bite of the chicken salad that was brought for him, he wanted any delay he could get.

“You’re staying. You’re not leaving the X-files.” Dean knew his brother well enough to know when he was avoiding something. He was disappointed that he was choosing to stay in the department that he, and many others, believed to be a joke and a career ending move. He knew his brother was really smart but he couldn’t understand why he kept getting moved into dead end positions.

Sam shook his head, forcing another forkful of salad into his mouth. He was keenly aware that he had a blush creeping across his face, his ears reddening. Maybe if he continued eating his brother would drop the whole thing.

“You didn’t ask him out did you?” The other shoe had dropped, Dean hit the nail on the head, and there was no escaping this anymore. Sam’s face went from flushed to pale as it dawned on him that he was cornered and was expected to answer this time.

“He, uh, made it clear that we’re ‘just friends’ because we’re coworkers.” He no longer had an appetite and pushed around the remaining salad. Not looking at his brother anymore he waited for
the yelling that was going to come next, telling him how he was a screw up and how wrong it was to try something with his partner. But those never came, instead a warm hand was placed on his shoulder.

“He said no, but you still have a date with him?” Sam looked up, startled, he hadn’t told Dean about his plans for that night, so how would he have known? His face must have been easy to read because Dean reassured him. “I’ll drop something off at your place after work. Just promise me Sammy you’ll have fun?”

Sam remained seated as his brother paid for their lunches and walked out of the diner. He stared at his unfinished salad, lost in his own thoughts. He didn’t have to make things awkward, he could enjoy tonight for what it was instead of what he wanted to be. He had made a friend whom he trusted and who was willing to spend time with him outside of work. Finding himself smiling once again he ordered a piece of cake to go and was soon on his way back to his desk. The day was almost over and he still had to plan the evening.

“So did you want to go out to eat or stay in?” Sam asked placing the slice of cake on Gabriel’s desk. The offering was accepted with a big grin, and the strange atmosphere between them seemed to melt away.

“As much as I would like to show you off to more of my favorite restaurants, I wouldn’t mind staying in.” He said opening the plastic takeout container for the cake, the heavy scent of the sugary icing quickly filled the room. “I know you said you didn’t have much of a preference when it came to food, although you do seem to eat healthier than me. But what do you want? I’ll pick it up and bring it by your place, since we both know where that is.” He winked at Sam before running a finger through the icing and licking it off his finger.

“You said that you knew a good Thai place?” Sam was glad that the air had cleared so easily between them, they still needed to get along in order to work together. While he was happy that things could continue forward with his working relationship with his partner, the mixed signals he was getting from him were frustrating.

“Hells yes I do! Samgate, I will bring you the spiciest of prawn curries. Is 6 o’clock to early?” The way his honey colored eyes lit up was worth it though. He was looking forward to tonight, even if it wasn’t the date he had envisioned.

Chapter End Notes

Writing Dean is difficult, sorry if you don’t think I did him justice.

Songs: No Rain by Blind Melon
Just Wait by Blues Traveler
From Within the Shadows

Chapter Notes

My computer is in the shop because it crashes more than a giraffe on ice. There might be some delays in my updates. Writing on my phone takes forever.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Sam got home to find a case of beer not so cleverly hidden by a new door mat. Laughing at his brother’s gift, he unlocked the apartment and brought the beer in leaving the mat in front of the door. The thing made him smile so it would be a good thing to come home to everyday. He took a quick look around his apartment and while most things were out of boxes it still looked like he had just moved in, it wasn’t as warm of a place as he wanted to show off. He lit a candle and placed it on the counter before taking the cardboard down to the bins.

There were little things he could do while waiting for Gabriel to stop by; finding a blanket to throw over the back of the couch, move the remainder of the unpacked boxes into the bedroom, make sure there were a couple of hand towels available in the bathroom. He didn’t want his apartment to feel like a cold temporary living space, but with the books in the bookshelf and the stereo system in its place front and center in the living area, it wasn’t so bad.

He double checked on the beers that he had tossed into the freezer, they were already cold but there wasn’t anything wrong with letting them sit for a while longer. He checked the clock, 6:09… He took a deep breath and forced himself to think rationally instead of jumping to the furthest conclusions he could. He was just running a little late that’s all, maybe got caught in some traffic, or the food took longer to prepare. Even with the reminders he still checked and double checked on things like dishes and utensils, checking through his phone for what seemed like the hundredth time to make sure he didn’t miss a call or a text cancelling things. When he heard a barking laughter followed by a sharp rapping at his door he just about jumped across the room, running his fingers through his hair before pulling open the door.

“Really? ‘This house is protected by a Winchester?’” Gabriel was laughing as he stepped across the same door mat he was quoting. The mat was definitely staying if it made him laugh too.

“How thought I needed a door mat, and we have a particular sense of humor about our name. Kind of had to growing up with everyone trying to make fun of it.” Sam was laughing with him as he directed him into the apartment. Closing the door he watched as Gabriel took of his sneakers and brought the bags of take out into his small kitchen. He looked different in civilian clothes, sure he had worn some ill-fitting clothes from the trunk of a dead man while they were on their last case, but these were his own. Soft worn jeans and band t-shirt that hugged his torso, Sam suddenly felt overdressed in his dark jeans and a button up.

“Samedge, where do you keep the cups?” Gabriel was making himself at home in his kitchen pulling out dishes where Sam should have been the one doing things for his guest. He stopped ogling his partner and moved into small kitchen to help get their dinners ready. In the close quarters of the tiny kitchen their actions were causing them to brush into one another but at no point did it feel like they were in each other’s way.

“Gabe, here.” He opened the freezer and passed a cold beer to him, “Cups are in the corner cupboard
“Nah. This is fine, should pair well with the spice.” Gabriel waved a hand at the two plates piled up with food, the heat from the spices reached Sam’s eyes and caused them to water. He could tell it was authentic without even taking a bite. He was going to have to find out where Gabriel found all these authentic ethnic restaurants.

“I don’t have cable yet, but we could watch a movie or –” Sam was interrupted as he fumbled over what they could do, he hadn’t planned that far in advance.

“Is that a record player? Tell me you have actual records and that it’s not just some decorative hipster piece.” Gabriel nearly bounded up to the machine after having quickly placing his plate on the small table near the couch. He found the crate of vinyl and had pulled it out and was thumbing through them. He was making all sorts of appreciative noises as he went through Sam’s collection. With an exclamation he pulled out a golden album sleeve. Giving the vinyl record a flip in his hands he carefully placed it on the stereo system and turned it on.

“We spotted the ocean at the head of the trail, where are we going, so far away? And somebody told me that this is the place where everything’s better, everything’s safe.” The record crackled and popped as the needle dragged over the surface.

Gabriel hummed along as he began to eat, looking up he caught Sam staring at him and he motioned to his plate encouraging him to eat too. The cool beers went really well with the spiciness of the meal, Gabriel was right when he claimed these to be the spiciest curry prawns. But everything was fresh and well done, it was another good takeout that Sam would have never known if not for his apparent foodie of a partner.

“Gabe, this is really good.” Sam said as he was finishing what left on his plate. The heat of the meal was intense to say the least, his face was red and his eyes were watering but it was a good heat. Authentic and some of the best Thai food he had had in a long while.

“Glad you’re enjoying! It’s from a small family run place, first generation so nothing has been ‘Americanized’. And sorry I was late but they wanted to make sure I knew that I was invited to their grandson’s baptism, I couldn’t leave until I promised I would. Next month, on a Monday.” He had started rambling and he knew it but he couldn’t stop himself.

“Hey, I just wanted to say thank you.” Sam reached out placing a hand over Gabriel’s effectively stopping his talking. He looked into Gabriel’s eyes, his own hazel eyes tried searching the amber for anything he could hold on to. Gabriel dropped his gaze, avoiding prolonged eye contact, the action caused Sam to pull his hand back worried he had done something out of line.

“For what? If anything I should be thanking you. You haven’t run screaming from our cases and you don’t outright dismiss me when I sprout my theories.” He pushed his empty plate to the side and picked up the record sleeve, turning it over and carefully studying the images on it as if they would have the answers to questions he didn’t know.

“They’re not all crazy. You were able to get a dead on profile during our first case. What is it?” He pointed at the sleeve he was playing with, noticing the stylized angel on the front of it. Sam wasn’t surprised that his partner had picked one of the records with religious motifs, although there were several, since it really was a common theme that musicians reached for.

“That’s not what they look like,” he said quietly as he traced his fingers over the short stubby wings. He quickly amended his statement. “At least not how they appear in most eyewitness encounters. They’re more beings of pure energy, bright light, and vague shapes. And they’re huge, absolutely
“So the church has been wrong with their depictions?” Sam was wondering where this came from and where it might go. He knew of Gabriel’s fascination with angels and had heard a bit of his conspiracy theories regarding the churches. He was interested and wanted to hear more, to watch the passion of the topic light up his face.

“Not quite wrong, more deceptive. The cherub look sells easier than a creature the size of the Chrysler Building with four heads.” He continued to look at the cover, the mannequin like angel and everything surrounding it were bathed in gold. “There are plenty of reports of them taking human or human like forms, even passing for human for a while. But they just have so much power they can’t stay for long, eventually something starts leaking. First it’s simple like shadow manipulation, like their light or energy can’t stay contained.”

“Take the classic ‘alien’ encounter, bright light, huge waves of energy, loud piercing sounds? Even the feeling of having experienced a life altering occurrence. I think some of the more credible alien encounters are actually angel interventions. In every instance things are explained away or the church steps in and covers things up. But why the church and not some shadowy government agency? It’s not like these are demonic possessions, which are also a thing, but that’s a different story. There’s something going on and the churches don’t want us finding out what.”

Sam didn’t have a response to that, he picked up his beer and felt that it was empty. He got up and pulled two more out from the fridge, placing one in front of Gabriel. He did wonder how the loud piercing sound had anything to do with angels though, the idea of vast amounts of energy and bright light fit with what little he remembered from the few times he attended church.

“So, aliens too now?” He asked popping the cap of his before passing the bottle opener over.

“Why not? Either we’re alone in the universe or we’re sharing it. Which is a more frightening prospect for you?” The lid came of easily and Gabriel knocked the neck of his bottle into Sam’s, “Cheers! To odd thoughts on odder theories.”

Sam had to think about that, both ideas were frightening in their own ways. But the idea of angels being among humans was still too much, Gabriel must have just had an overactive imagination or had spent too much time in his theology classes. If angels were on earth shouldn’t they be easier to find with their massive energies and shouldn’t things be better than they were, instead of all this disease and hate?

“It sounds like angels are a bunch of dicks if they did exist.” Sam mumbled around his beer, it wasn’t something he was planning on saying out loud but it kind of slipped as he was thinking.

“Why?” Gabriel rolled his bottle between his fingers, honestly curious as to Sam’s thoughts on this. It was the first time he has said anything that wasn’t an outright dismissal of his celestial theories.

“Because if they have all this power and are aspects of heaven, shouldn’t they be making the world a better place instead of beaming up the occasional wacko and making statues cry?” Sam didn’t understand how these potential creatures could let the state of the world remain to deteriorate. They were supposed to be good, everything he had been told were that they should be good.

“I guess that would make them seem like jerks, and then there’s the biblical omens that they are occasionally responsible for.” Gabriel was mildly surprised by the reasoning, but he couldn’t fault him either. It wasn’t difficult to see where angels and related instances had caused great destruction and negative happenstances.
“Omens?” Sam questioned letting his eyebrows arch high on his forehead.

“Raining frogs?” he tried offering an example. “It’s said that a rain of fish or frogs had a strong biblical connection. Fish being one of the symbols of Jesus’s first miracle. And frogs having importance in the Old Testament, having been the creature to teach Hania the Torah. They are being used as signs to remind and strengthen belief.”

“The raining of small animals is a long documented and easily explained weather phenomenon. Waterspouts are strong enough to lift things into the atmosphere and has enough energy to maintain their suspension for several miles.” Sam easily explained the science behind the first of Gabriel’s omen theories. It wasn’t a miraculous event, just one that was a little unusual and had lots of folklore attached to it.

“Rivers running red with blood.” Gabriel pointed out, pulling another omen complete with biblical connections, “Quoted multiple times throughout religious texts as a form of judgement. Angels are messengers and warriors of heaven, here to purge the wicked and test the faithful.”

“Rivers have been running with a reddish tint for centuries, especially after seismic activity where pockets of heavily oxidized minerals are exposed and the iron rich material makes its way into the waterways. And there is a kind of algae that can experience large population blooms which can both cause a change in the water’s color as well as produce large fish kills. And why do they have to test the faithful?” Sam came back with two explanations to this new theory. He changed how he was sitting so that he was facing Gabriel, his back in the corner of the couch and a leg tucked up with his foot under his thigh.

“Alright if you have answers to everything then why discuss this?” Gabriel mimicked his stance, challenging his partner with a smirk. He was enjoying their back and forth. Sam was proving how intelligent he was by being able to take his rapid fire theories and come up with rational explanations for them instead.

“Just because there isn’t a logical explanation for some things does not automatically make them something supernatural or mystical. They’re just questions that we haven’t found the answers for yet.” Sam followed up, it was a saying that he enjoyed because it was saying to always question. To not be satisfied until you knew more. That no matter how far we came with technology there would always be something else worth exploring.

“And dreams provide answers to questions we haven’t asked yet.” Gabriel parried back with.

“What?” The response came a surprise, he didn’t know how to take it. It posed the idea of a continuous cycle of questions and answers and perpetual mystery. It was very much like his partner to come up with something like that, to preserve his ideas of there being something more to things than they appeared.

Gabriel only responded with a smile, getting up he returned the record to its sleeve and picked out a different one. Letting the music change the mood of the room and the change the course of the conversation. They continued talking into the night before Gabriel suggested that they get some sleep, and wished him good night before walking himself to his car. Leaving with a smile and glad that he had agreed to the non-date.

He remained in his good mood until he got to his own place, and that quickly changed when he found his front door unlocked. Letting his hand slide to his hip he was reminded that didn’t bring his gun with him to Sam’s. Cursing at himself he carefully pushed the door open, flicking the light switch up and down a few times he groaned. The power had been either cut or turned off to his house. This wasn’t an ordinary break in, Gabriel picked up a statue from the table as he passed it
moving cautiously through his own house. Stepping past his own furniture he guided himself to the back of the house. He could sense that he wasn’t alone before he entered his home office. Sitting in his chair was a tall gentleman bathed in shadows.

“Who are you?” Gabriel’s voice was demanding and had edge to it. Danger sparked around him, he didn’t like being surprised, especially not in his own home. The man had helped himself to Gabriel’s liquor cabinet, a bottle of Johnny Walker sat open on his desk, a second glass poured for him.

“You think I want to be here? I don’t want to be here. I don’t work on the Sabbath.” The voice was rich and reminded him slightly of Special Agent Singer. But it had a quality to it that was annoyed, like he couldn’t be bothered, but here he was anyways.

“It’s not the Sabbath.” Gabriel said with a heavy sigh as he sat the statue down on the desk with a heavy thunk. He had dealt with shadowy agents in the past but never had he been confronted by one in his own home. It had always been on neutral ground. He wasn’t sure if he was all that pleased with the unannounced house visit.

“Nah ah ah. There ain’t no time for that. I needed to make sure you got this information. You’ve got a friend or two inside, Milton. Although I couldn’t give a rat’s ass as to why.” He dropped a sealed folder on the table between them. Pushing it closer he stood up and moved around the table, keeping his distance from the other agent. “You’ve seen this before, you know that you need to get there before they do. They’re going to cover it up like they always do and it will be as if this had never existed. I’m trying to do you a solid here, by giving you an advanced heads up.”

“So you want me to be your gopher, your back up on this one?” Gabriel narrowed his eyes on the intruder, only giving the file a brief glance as if to only acknowledge its existence. He found himself slowly circling with the stranger, as if preparing to jump into a fight with him. There wasn’t any reason for him to trust this man other than the fact that he hadn’t tried killing him.

“If by back up you mean you’re doing all the heavy lifting and getting into the action instead of me, then yeah. I’ve already risked a great deal just by getting this information to you. I suggest that you don’t look a gift horse in the pearly whites.” He said as he made his around Gabriel and got closer to the door. “Oh and if you can’t take care of it, you know they will.”

And with that the mysterious man was gone, having left only an empty bottle of his own whiskey, and the sealed file, behind. Gabriel stood alone in his house as the lights flickered to life, electricity suddenly restored. He stood still letting his body calm down before he picked up the file and opened it, dumping the contents out over his desk. Looking at the images he wasn’t surprised at what he was seeing, the mystery man was right, he had seen it before. It just wasn’t something he was expecting to see again.

Returning the contents back to the folder he placed it in a drawer and locked it. He knew he was going to have a long day tomorrow and what had been such a good evening had quickly lost its magic. His smile was just a memory now as he locked his front door and fell into his plush bed. A long day indeed.

~*~*~*~

The voices coming from the Assistant Director’s office were loud and were barely muffled by the heavy doors from the outside the room. Special Agent Milton had gone in earlier with determination etched on his face and an envelope with a broken seal. Other agents knew to stay out of the shorter man’s way when he had that sort of look on his face that meant he was on one of his crusades. They remained at their desks but those closest to the assistant director’s office had quieted their own work.
Gabriel left the office, letting the door close a bit louder than anticipated. Between that and the Assistant Director’s yelling several agents had stopped their work to watch him. He wasn’t in a great mood and he didn’t need an audience watching, he sneered at them as he stalked past them on his way to the stairs, sending them scattering to get out of his way and back to their work. He did not like
not getting his way when there was something he thought of as serious going on, and it was at times like this that he questioned his own methods.

He took the stairs up instead of down and opened the roof access door, he needed time to himself before he wound up in his own desk staring down a pile of other people’s work. The wind that whipped up at his back from the edge of the building was usually calming enough, but it took time. He wanted to calm himself down before seeing his partner, Sam didn’t need to see him worked up like this, ready to snap. That thought alone was enough to bring him back down, Sam deserved better than a wild goose chase that was brought to him in the middle of the night by a mysterious stranger. But the stranger was right, this was time sensitive and it would help uncover any machinations that the world church leaders might be covering up. It also have him a chance to fix something had screwed up on in the past. He had to look into it, but he had to ask Sam first instead of just throwing him into another case like this.

Feeling like he was finally ready to face his partner and circumvent his supervisor’s recommendations, he took the long walk down the full flight of stairs from the roof to the basement. The door to his office was open and the light from within spilled out into the cold hallway. As he got closer he couldn’t stop the smile that spread across his face; he could hear his music playing in the office. He didn’t know what he deserved to have such an amazing person like Sam as his partner, or even to have him in his life at all.

“Hey Samonella,” he greeted his partner as he walked into the room, his momentum was stopped when he took a look at his desk. It didn’t have the pile of paperwork he was expecting on it. Instead it was relatively neat, his usual mess had been contained to the edges of the desk.

“Oh Gabe. You just missed Assistant Director Singer, he was just down here looking for you and he sounded kind of pissed. He took most of the files you had piled up on your desk, didn’t know if you were working on those, but with his attitude I didn’t want to get in the way.” He looked up from his desk where he was clacking away at his keyboard. He had been working on going through his emails and filling out some of the busy work that was sent their way.

Gabriel was still standing with his mouth slightly open, pointing at his desk. He was surprised that all the tedious work that he had been threatened with was taken away from him, this was highly unusual. He wasn’t sure if he should be excited or worried that the work had been removed. He cast one more glance between his desk and his partner, before closing his mouth and pointing at his partner. He could see that Sam had something else he wanted to share, the shifting in his seat and the nervous tapping on the keyboard without typing anything were giveaways.

“So get this. Bobby also left this for you.” Sam passed a new red file across the space. With a tilted smirk on his face Sam gave himself away, he had looked in the file and knew what it meant for them. “Looks like we’ve got another case.”

Gabriel returned the grin and opened the file. There were the signatures required for the transferral the case to them. The rest of the case file he already knew after pouring over it last night after the departure of his unwelcomed guest.

“Well it looks like this one is time sensitive. You ready to rock another one?” He closed the folder and handed it back to Sam, moving to his desk, opening and closing the drawers. Not finding what he wanted he turned back addressing his partner. “I need to grab some things from my place but I'll swing by your and we'll head out today.”

Sam was already putting his jacket on and grabbed a duffle out from behind his desk. Gabriel gave it a surprised look, not expecting him to be ready so soon. “I, uh, put it together this morning to keep at the office. I wasn't expecting to use it so soon.”
“Fair enough, well then. You could wait in the car while I run around my place trying to be half as together as you are.” Gabriel offered turning the lights off as they walked out of the office and to the garage.

Sam was impressed to see that Gabriel lived in a rowhouse instead of an apartment. The buildings looked old and historical, but well kept, he admired the architecture while he waited. He had left the car running, parked against the curb as he ran inside promising to out quickly.

He walked into his office trying to locate the file he knew could help this case. Snapping his fingers as if remembering something, he found the file easily in the top drawer of the old flat files cabinet. With the documents in hand he made quick work of throwing a travel bag together and fell back in place in the driver's seat.

“Old old case I worked. Similar cause of death, this one went cold case and nothing ever came up again. Until now.” He handed the files over and shifted gears taking them out of the city limits and into the highways.

Chapter End Notes

Songs:
Walk on the Ocean - Toad the Wet Sprocket (album Fear for the art)
Answer the Call

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sam sat quietly comparing the two case files. One was almost over a decade old, but the similarities were striking. Victims in both cases died of severe blood loss and had near identical laceration marks on their necks, indicating that the perpetrator was likely the same for both. Blood seemed to be a theme regarding the situation of the cases as well. The older case file was in regards to an attack and theft on a campus blood drive. Sam could see why the case was assigned to Gabriel, the only things stolen during the theft was the blood itself. The catholic college had initially asked for assistance from the bureau, but once the diocese came with their own investigation of an incident on their grounds the case was removed from their control. He was surprised that Gabriel had left the case at all, the notes in the files indicated that had followed some leads but nothing was left in regards to them.

This new case seemed more organized and less messy than the previous case. Just a single victim, the labs were mostly intact however blood was not the only thing stolen this time. The files indicated that in addition to the blood stored for samples and testing, some of the doctor’s notes were missing as were the new compounds that he was testing and his assistant, who was the primary suspect at this point. Again it was a strange case but Sam was learning that was the norm for them.

Tucking both folders into his briefcase he turned to face his partner. He took a quick glance at the speedometer and wasn’t put at ease when he saw that they were pushing near ninety miles per hour. With Gabriel’s heavy foot they just might make it to the crime scene before evening. He just hoped that his partner would remember to stop somewhere for a short break and food, although it seemed like he took his meals seriously.

“So you’ve seen this before.” Sam broke the silence with the simple phrase. He hoped to get more information out of his partner than he did from the old files. The files didn’t have the same flair of the dramatics he was used to regarding Agent Milton.

“Yeaup.” The p at the end of the word popped loudly as Gabriel smacked his lips. Sam watched him as he concentrated on the road ahead of them, waiting for more than just the one word answer. It felt like forever as he watched the background zoom past with Gabriel not saying anything else.

“So… What are we looking at then? I assume you had theories or a profile done up for our killer. Especially since you specifically brought up the older case file, but I didn’t see anything in that file.” He pushed for more information. If they were going to be going up against a potential serial killer than he wanted to hear a profile on them. Any bit of background information was like knowing chinks in the armor, weakness that they could exploit, ways of making tracking easier for them.

Gabriel shifted in his seat, checking his mirrors. He was avoiding the question. Casting a look next to him, his eyes locked onto the hazel of Sam’s and his resolve began to crumble. “Uh… Vampires.” He said turning back to face the road, it was an easy excuse to avoid eye contact as he imagined the judging look being sent his way.

“Seriously? Gabe, I get the whole wounds on the neck, lack of blood deal from the victims, but you’re asking me to belief Nosfaratu is lurking around a military instillation where some guy was doing research on blood borne pathogens?” Sam wondered when the day that he wasn’t surprised by one of Gabriel’s theories would be, because it obviously wasn’t today. It would only be worse if these vampires were like Anne Rice’s and they all had a questionable sense of fashion.
“Yeah, seriously. Look Samphibian, these are nothing like the vampires from movies or books.” Gabriel paused because Sam had snorted in laughter. He had to take a moment to realize that he was laughing at the nickname and not the idea of vampires. “Ok sorry, not one of my finest nicknames for you.”

“It’s a new one, and you haven’t repeated yet, so I’ll give you that.” Sam got his laughter under control and let the other agent continue with explaining what he was before the interruption.

“Like I said, not the same as the vampires you’re used to. They can actually go out in the sun, it doesn’t kill them just gives them a nasty burn, like a particularly bad sunburn. Holy symbols do jack squat, don’t know where that story even came from. And a stake to the heart won’t do anything more than annoy them.” He drummed his fingers on the steering wheel as he tried to explain the kind of trouble they were up against. Even if he didn’t believe him then at least he had told him in attempt to warn him.

“The only thing that is accurate is the blood lust thing. Vampires still need a fresh source of blood to survive, and while they can survive off animal blood, it seems like they prefer blood that is most similar to theirs. After all they were human at one point. The studies our victim were involved in definitely involved blood, and I think if we ask around the implications of the trial drug he was working on either cleaned pathogens from the blood or worked as a thinning agent.”

Sam cringed at the idea of them dealing with anything drinking blood. Along with the mental images of a twisted human bent over the body of their scientist his brain also supplied him with the coppery taste in his mouth. It was almost enough to make him gag, he could feel his stomach souring at the thought.

“Then why aren’t there more instances of this kind of M.O. in more unsolved homicide cases?” If vampires did exist than there would be more proof of their kills. Everything needed to eat, and if they needed to kill to eat then there should be more bodies as a result, it was that simple.

“You find any, and if you do the case is mysteriously solved with miracle evidence pointing to the conviction of someone who still claims that they didn’t do it, or the case itself is wiped from existence. They’ve gone a long way to remove any proof of the existence of vampires. They’re one of the oldest threats to humankind, other than humans themselves. And while the church wasn’t the only one to vilify and demonize them they were the ones who have waged the most successful war against them. Look into every possible case of a vampire attack and you will find the sticky fingerprints of the church all over the place, shadowing and obfuscating the real truth.” Gabriel was clearly driven by this subject. Sam wasn’t sure if it was because he never solved the older case, or if it was because of the church’s involvement in another one of his conspiracy cover-ups. “Any arrests will show that the church is against the suspect using phrases like, ‘deeply disturbed’, ‘touched by the devil’, and ‘has a desire for harm and destruction’. Eventually those ideas worm their way into the minds of the jury and, well, the suspect is convicted.”

“But why? What does the church have to gain by going through these lengths to hide the existence of these things? Wouldn’t it be more in their interest to expose them, wouldn’t they have more to gain that way?” The questions were honest ones as Sam was curious about the direction of Gabriel’s thoughts and the depth of his paranoia regarding the conspiracy theories he believed in. “Wouldn’t they gain more strength and clout through the fear of the masses? Power or something like that?”

Gabriel was impressed, his partner was thinking this through with a rational mindset, bringing questions that he was happy to shed his light on. He could only hope that it was also breeding a bit of empathy for his theories in his mind as well.

“They don’t want that because it doesn’t fit their ideals or agenda. They’ve diverged from the true
meaning and see the supernatural world as a threat to their accomplishments. That includes angelic interventions. If the regular lay person could have knowledge of and access to these creatures of lore, then what function would the church serve? It goes back to the days when they still provided the sermons only in a language no one else spoke. It gave them a certain level of mysticism and power over the others.” He explained, the ideas rolling from the tip of his tongue as if he wanted to explain all his ideas but never had someone willing to listen. Sam was a captive audience as they traveled side by side in the car, unable to leave until they go to their final destination. But it wasn’t as if he was opposed to listening, having been the one to initiate the conversation.

“So this is all about a power struggle for the church? Then why does it seem like they have governments in their back pockets, being able to get the, not assistance, but they able to have agencies turn a blind eye?” Gabriel’s eyes sparkled at Sam’s newest question, it was one of the things that he was trying to find out. His partner’s line of questioning was aligning with his own, and even if he didn’t hold the same level of conviction and belief on the subject at least he could follow his rambles.

“Now that’s the ten thousand dollar question.” Gabriel smiled as he said it, letting his mind return to the drive ahead of them. They still had a while to go until they got there, and the rumbles of his partner’s stomach were an indication that they were going to have to stop soon for a stretch break and something to eat. He spun the volume dial up letting the music take over where the conversation ended and preventing a moment of silence to last too long in the car.

“…I have a secret to tell, from my electrical well. It’s a simple message and I’m leaving out the whistles and bells, so the room must listen to me…” Sam reached over to turn down the music that had been playing so that he could point out the fifth exit sign that they had passed by. He was starting to get a little bit cranky from hunger, he didn’t have anything to distract himself with to keep his mind off of the fact that he was hungry and they still hadn’t stopped anywhere. Gabriel had kept up with telling him that they would stop soon, he just wanted to get a little further first. Sam hoped that he would get the hint this time, turning the music down was something he did to get his brother’s attention when they would drive together, and it seemed to work.

“Do you mind ordering something for me too? I’ve got to make a call to check in on something.” Gabriel said as they pulled off the exit and into the parking lot of a small restaurant. Sam nodded and made his way into the building ready to finally get something to eat after being in the car for so long. The shorter agent stayed in the car, looking around before making his call. The phone rang four times and he could tell it was about to go to voicemail when someone picked up.

“There better be a good reason to be calling. You know they put trackers in phones so they can monitor and trace callers. Keep it short.” The voice was crackly as if the call was being filtered through something.

“Devereaux, you paranoid bastard! Good to hear you man. Hey, I need some help on a case I have. I’m about two hours out of getting to location and I’d like to know the movements of the holy-folk on this one. It’s a vamp kill, Camp Lejeune North Carolina, time is not on my side on this one but I’d like to chalk this one in the win column.” He quickly described the situation while asking for help. He knew he needed the extra help this time if he wanted to stay ahead of the curtains. It would be easy to lose track of time and let the whole thing get lost forever, but he wasn’t willing to do that this time.

“Vamps you say? I’ll see what I can do. Don’t forget the code word this time, your boy B isn’t here to back you up this time.” The static was strong but Gabriel was able to make out the reply. The vague threat was enough to explain why the phone wasn’t answered by the others, but he was glad, he wanted this done quickly and he had gotten the right man for the job.
“I’d love to chat, but I’ve got a lunch date with a good looking giant.” Gabriel smiled before hanging up, looking inside the restaurant’s large windows he was able to see that Sam had gotten them a booth and what looked like a milkshake. He had the best partner ever, and he was still upset with himself for turning down his offer for a date, even if he was doing it to protect Sam. No one should have to be dragged into his insane life.

“Get what you needed?” Sam nodded his head in the direction of his phone before Gabriel tucked it back into his pocket. He sat down joining his partner at the table and pulling the milkshake closer, the delicious cool of the drink slid down the back of his throat as he sipped the slightly melted dessert.

“Mmm.” Gabriel hummed, his eyes closing as he nodded his affirmation. “Yeah, well, kind of. Mostly. They’ll call me back.”

Sam accepted the vague answer as he didn’t know what the call was in regards to and it didn’t seem like Gabriel was going to tell him. As much as he liked talking about everything he was a surprisingly secretive person. Sam knew very little about his partner’s life, he never spoke of family or friends, for all he knew he didn’t have any. He could have been calling the military instillation where their victim had been working to get more details before they got there.

Their meals came and went relatively quickly, both of them were hungry so they ate quickly barely talking to each other between bites. They were back in the car and on the road as soon as their food was paid for, Gabriel anxious to get to their destination with the looming threat of an unknown deadline. Loud ringing blasted from his pants pocket, causing Gabriel to jerk his body in attempt to get at his phone.

“Gabe! Gabe! Eyes on the road!” Sam tried to get his attention back to driving instead of trying to get his phone. He reached across and carefully tucked his fingers in his partner’s pants pocket, feeling around for the phone.

“Watch the goods!” Gabriel yelped as Sam’s fingers brushed the inside of his leg through his pocket. He was trying to watch the road, but between his partner’s hand in his pants and the phone still ringing he was mildly distracted to say the least. Sam’s hand was mercifully removed along with his cell phone from his pocket.

“Hello, you’ve reached Agent Gabriel Milton, he’s otherwise busy. I’m his partner Agent Sam Winchester.” He answered the phone, earning a groan from Gabriel. He quickly held the phone away from his head as a loud sound blasted through the speakers.

“- you are not the intended recipient of this call, please hang up and-” came through mixed with various sounds of feedback and electronic static.

Gabriel could hear the screeching noises coming from the other side, and his partner hadn’t even put it on speakerphone. He needed to settle this situation or he was going to lose the only edge he thought he had with this case. Breaking the thin trust of the man on the other line seemed to be the only way to fix the current situation. “I am the eggman! Say it! I am the eggman!”

“I am the eggman?” Sam said tentatively into the phone through the static on the other side. The feedback noises calmed down as soon as the phrase passed Sam’s lips, and an annoyed voice came through that sound like it was being played through speakers under water. It was difficult to hear the voice but turning up the volume he was able to make it out.

“You can tell Pookie Bear that I’m only doing this once. After this he’s done, and that code phrase is burned, so make sure he gets all this. They know, and you only have about six hours on them this
time, sending in two teams to cover it. Not a whole lot, but better than nothing. Make sure you also let him know that bowling night next week will be at Rinaldi’s.” The voice hung up after that, leaving Sam looking at the phone with a very confused face. He continued to stare at it while he tried processing the message he had just taken.

“So what did he say?” Gabriel prodded him for a recap of whatever information they had just gotten. He was still driving fast, trying to get them there as quick as he could.

“He called you ‘Pookie Bear’.” Sam started with, still unsure of what to make of the whole exchange.

“Ok, so he’s mad at me, I get that. He’s not really keen on someone intercepting his phone calls. One of the most paranoid people I have ever met. What else?” he asked knowing that Devereux didn’t return his call just to call him by a passive aggressive pet name.

“Right, uh. He said that they know, and we’ve got six hours on them? They have two teams being sent in. And bowling next week is at Rinaldi’s. Can you tell me what’s going on here? First you tell me vampires, now some paranoid bowling buddy of yours is calling and I’m telling him I’m the eggman?”

“Good to know about bowling. Samtots, do you bowl? You’re welcome to join us, we need one more person to make a team.” Sam knew his partner well enough to tell when he was about to go on a tangent and avoid the question all together. The clearing of his partner’s throat was enough to set Gabriel back on track.

“I’ve been antsy since I got the details on this case because it’s time sensitive. Yeah we like to get the bad guy before they skip town or kill again, but this time we’re not going up against the bad guys. It’s the church, they’ve stepped in and killed cases like this in the past. I had Devereaux check in on something for me to see how far ahead of the curve we are, and it’s not much. But it’s something. I’d like to stay ahead of them and not lose another case to a cover up.” He let the reasons out to his partner, he could get into some serious trouble for divulging case information to parties outside the proper channels. And sharing information with known conspiracy theorists didn’t help his credibility. But Sam didn’t have any harsh words for him, instead he nodded and looked forward, watching the traffic move along with them.

“Oh, so how do we stay ahead of them?” The words startled Gabriel, he wasn’t expecting his partner to go along with his plan like that. His face must have shown his surprise because Sam looked at him when he spoke again. “I might not like the way you went about this, Gabe, but there’s nothing I can do at this point. I don’t want to lose this case either. And if that means we accept information from a shadowy source about the movement of a counter group, then we do it. Just this time.”

Sam had gotten uncomfortably close to the truth of where the case came from right there, but Gabriel knew that he had to stop acting like he didn’t have a partner. He needed to start including him in on more things, or he wouldn’t keep his trust and their partnership would fall apart. He looked down the road and saw a sign for their exit, they were close but there was enough time to explain the rest of the situation before they got there. He could only hope that Sam would be as accepting as he was regarding Devereaux.

Flashing their badges they were granted easy access to the base, directed to the compound headquarters where they would meet with the commanding officer before being given access to the crime scene and the body. Gabriel kept his theories to himself knowing it would only prolong them from getting to the meat of the case. He was antsy with energy, unable to stand still, or keep his hands to himself while the major general spoke.
“Agent Milton…” Sam warned him gently as he was touching things on the major general’s shelves. Some of the trinkets were old and probably had some value to the general, he looked up and caught the look that was directed at him by the owner of the office. He gently put the thing down with a slightly embarrassed look, before moving along to look at more of the contents of the bookshelf.

Following his partner after they were dismissed from the major general’s office, they were met with by another fellow in uniform who led them through the compound. Gabriel had tuned him out and was lost in his own thoughts when they rounded the corner into the medical examination room. The body of their victim was laid out for their viewing.

“Sam Solo, you got this? I want to go question some of the associates of the good doctor here. We can meet back at the mess hall, or commissary, or whatever they’ve got here for food and share our findings. Say in a two hours? Three?” He clapped his hand on Sam’s shoulder and walked out of the room, he needed to do this his way, which meant splitting up. They didn’t have enough time otherwise. He made his way down the hall checking his phone for the time and setting an alarm as a reminder to meet up with Sam and not get too caught up in the case. He double checked his case file for the directory of those who worked with or close to the former lab doctor. Snapping his fingers once he pulled out the list, he got to work.

Sam watched his partner leave him with the autopsy table and the body of their only victim. He wasn’t exactly sure what to make of it, but he knew how much this case meant to him and why he was splitting them up. They had limited time and splitting the investigation would help save some of that for them. He took another long look at the shrouded body before motioning to the officer that he was ready to proceed.

The sheet was lifted and he had to maintain his composure at the site of the body. It wasn’t the worst he had seen, especially not after the last two cases he had taken. However it was still a brutal and serious wound that the doctor had sustained. Covering his mouth with a facemask and donning a pair of latex gloves he got closer to the body. The wound certainly did look like someone had taken something serrated to the side of his neck. He was expecting to see puncture wounds, but this looked almost as if there were multiple bite marks overlapping. That would make this three in a row with things eating humans, Sam groaned inwardly.

Having seen enough of the body he was shown the lab where he had been working on his research at the time. True to the report the body was just about completely drained of blood when it was discovered, although there was only minor amounts of blood stains surrounding where his body was found. Sam stepped over the stains as he checked out the lab station, broken glass and scattered equipment were evident of a struggle that had taken place. There were gouge marks in the heavy tabletop that looked almost like claw marks, Sam wondered if they weren’t made by the same weapon that was the cause of death for the doctor.

A glint of metal caught his attention from under the table, tucked up against the wall. He kneeled down and reached in, his long arms able to grab the item from where it was nearly wedged under the base molding. A thin ball chain came loose and at the end was a pair of dog tags, Sam tucked them into an evidence bag from within his pocket. This was something that he wanted to show Gabriel when they met back up, it was a possible lead towards a suspect. He stood back up and made his way to the computers, hoping that there were back up files of the doctor’s work so he could see what was worth killing him for.

For being an encrypted government computer the password was surprisingly easy to crack, the blank computer access card helped get through to the authentication screen but after that it was just a simple password required. The files were neatly labeled by trial name, Sam thanked the dead man for his organization as he opened and skimmed through them. Thankful for the classes he took in law school
that had required him to read through longwinded legal documents in a short time, he was able to get through a majority of them before he heard a knock on the lab door. Looking up he saw that he was being motioned out into the hallway by different officer.

“Sorry to interrupt you in the middle of this investigation sir. But I wanted to let you know that they found the assistant. It looks like he’s not a suspect any more. Same markings, lack of blood either at scene or in his body. He was found behind one of the training facilities. I’m to take you there as soon as you’re ready.” The young man stood at attention as he gave the bad news. Sam nodded at him and looked back into the lab, he had gotten as much information he could have in the time frame given. He motioned to him that he was done here and ready to be taken to the new crime scene.

It was getting dark but the marines in training had gotten spotlights out and set up around the newest crime scene. Sam wasn’t sure what to think of these people having been so close to the area, although he supposed seeing a dead body was just practice for these people he was also grateful for the illuminating light. The assistant’s body was just as he had been described, same wounds on his neck and he could see the collapsed veins on his body. There were footprints that he pointed out to the policing team that was marking off the scene and documenting any evidence. Seeing that they had it under control he looked around for his partner.

A flash of golden light caught his attention across the compound, he carefully watched where he had seen it waiting to see it again. Movement continued from that direction and was on path to meet up with him and the lighted area. The light flashed again, but paler this time and much closer, it illuminated the figure and Sam let out a breath he hadn’t noticed he was holding in. His partner waved to him as he got within the lit area, flicking his phone closed dousing the light it had been casting.

“Sambone! You could have let me know about body numero dos. Instead I heard about it through the military grapevine, which is actually a lot chattier than I was first led to believe. Here I was expecting more of a ‘Don’t ask, don’t tell’ atmosphere but in reality I am getting more of an ‘Ask and ye shall receive’.” Gabriel had a bounce to his step as he got closer and he wasn’t as fidgety as he was an hour or so ago. The smile looked like he had gotten his way and Sam felt slightly unnerved by what that could have meant, it just felt like trouble.

“Sorry, I figured they would have told you the same time they told me. You get anything?” Sam shoved his hands in his pockets and immediately was reminded of the tags he had found as his fingers came in contact with the plastic evidence bag. He had his own findings to share with his partner but he wanted to hear what he had found first.

“After interviewing what felt like half the barracks, I think I’ve found us some leads on this. We’re not dealing with a single person, but likely three. Two are new to the whole Twilight thing while the other is looking to build a new nest.” He held up a single finger and flicked his wrist as he changed the number to three to show their suspect count going up. Sam wanted to ask how he had managed to talk to that many people in such a short time, but he knew Gabriel was exaggerating to soften the news about his bloodsucker theory. “And I’m pretty sure our two newbies to this are newbies here too.”

“Would one of them be a Private Jerry Stone?” Sam’s question seemed to catch Gabriel off guard because his smile faltered for only a moment, but he saw it just as quick as another one replaced it. He pulled out the evidence bag and showed his partner. At the sight of the tags, Gabriel’s face lit up again honestly impressed and proud of his partner for catching clues by looking where they shouldn’t be. “I found this under the lab table, it was nearly wedged under the baseboard so it was missed during the cursory sweep of the room. Also you were right. About his work. He was close to an antibiotic for West Nile, possibly had found it, but with his lab work trashed and his most recent
notes gone, and of course both him and his assistant are dead, we might not find out.”

“I both love and hate being right.” He let out a large sigh and pushed past Sam to get into the new crime scene, he felt that he should at least take a look at it before deciding he had more pressing things to do. “We’ve got to turn over every stone, there will be nothing left private.”

“Did you just?” Sam groaned at the terrible joke his partner made but still found himself smiling as he followed him back into the well-lit crime scene.

Chapter End Notes

Song:
Birdhouse In Your Soul - They Might Be Giants
Gabriel was done with the crime scene the moment they stepped foot in it. It didn’t have any new pertinent information for them, and the victim wasn’t getting any less dead to help them out with his killer. The multiple footprints that Sam pointed out were a good start, and helped prove his multiple suspect profile. But there wasn’t a need for them to be there babysitting the progress of the in-house forensic team. They had a name for at least one of their suspects, and he wanted to go find him. Gabriel thought that a better use of their time was looking for and watching this private, maybe uncover who his accomplices were. He also wanted to call and get and update on the movements of the shadows that were lurking to start covering their case as if it had never existed. However he knew he had burned his code phrase with the actions he pulled earlier, and as Devereaux had said to him over the phone, he didn’t even have his usual buddy to back him up.

Sam must have sensed his frustration and anxiety of the situation at hand because he excused the pair of them from the crime scene. He simply claimed that they needed to follow up on some questioning and a possible lead and couldn’t hang around watching for much more.

“So if you could call us or send someone for us if you guys come up with any new piece of information, that would be greatly appreciated. Again, thank you for all that you do.” He said nodding his head at the uniformed personnel that were acting as the internal forensics unit for the base. Firmly grabbing Gabriel by his elbow, he walked him back towards the mess hall. He loudly whispered at his partner once they got out of ear shot of the crew working the scene. “Gabe, at least pretend like you’re paying attention when they have something to tell us. I know you think we’re on a deadline here, but for the meanwhile can you remain in the present?”

“I can only do that if I pretend they’re all clones of you Samuelito, otherwise there is almost nothing they could say that would have my full attention.” He looked up and batted his eyelashes at his partner causing the other agent to blush and stutter. They stepped inside the mess hall and it didn’t take them long to find a higher ranking officer from the crowd. They just looked for someone who didn’t have a look of tired anxiety and who had more decorations than his fellows. Sam got to the man first having an advantage of longer legs coupled with the fact that Gabriel didn’t want to talk to anyone.

“Excuse me, sir? We’re Agents Milton and Winchester and we’re looking for a private Jerry Stone. Can you tell us where we might find him?” Sam flashed his badge, having quickly learned that he had more influence with the badge around the base than without. The officer looked at the badge and immediately took a more straightened posture, quickly glancing around the mess hall as if to see if there was someone else higher than himself that he could direct them off to.

“The hell has he done this time.” He grumbled into plate, returning to pushing food around with his fork. He clearly wasn’t the biggest supporter of the private and so far the exchange had Sam thinking that the private was known for poor behavior.

“Nothing, we hope. We just want to question him, we think he might have more knowledge on some of the things that have been going on recently.” Sam tried to explain their reason without flat out naming him as a suspect. If Gabriel’s assessment of how fast word traveled around the base was true than he wanted to be careful about what he said to who.

“So in other words he FUBARed.” The officer took a look at Sam’s face as Gabriel tried to swallow a snigger, “Fucked Up Beyond All Recognition?” He offered a clarification of his use of an acronym.
“I can get him to meet you in one of the offices or classrooms in a half hour or so if I just give him a call.” He started to push his dinner away in preparation for him standing up. Sam was quick to jump in, offering a more agreeable alternative for both parties. Stopping him from getting up and making that call.

“Actually. We’d rather if we could meet him instead of him meeting us. We don’t know what kind of person he is and we just have a few questions for him. But we don’t want him to do us a runner.”

“Do a what now?” He had a puzzled look on his face, but sat back down, understanding that he wasn’t being pulled away from his meal time like he had feared.

“You know. Bug out? Get the hell out of dodge? Go AWOL?” Gabriel finally said something, although the comment was sharp and the sarcasm was thick at his expense. Time was ticking and he could feel things slipping out of his grasp, he wanted to wrap up this case yesterday. The look on the officer’s face went from puzzled, to understanding, to mildly offended.

“We don’t want to risk that because being asked to speak with two FBI agents who are openly investigating what is now a double homicide case can be intimidating and scary. Especially if the person thinks they have any possible connection to anything that could jeopardize their military career.” Sam’s words must have gotten through to him because he was quick to nod along with him.

“Oh yeah, I can see that. He should be on approved libo right now. Him and couple of the other guys like to hang around at some local dive bar in town and play darts.” Gabriel had heard enough and had started to walk away, ready to find the bar and their suspect leaving Sam alone to deal with the officer.

He quickly thanked the man and allowed him to return to his meal before he picked up his pace and nearly jogged out of the dining center and down the hall. He caught up with Gabriel as he stopped and was investigating a decorative piece on the wall. He reached up and tugged at it, pulling free a ceremonial officer’s sword from off the wall. Taking the bladed weapon he continued to make his way to where their car was parked.

“The hell Gabe?!” Sam nearly shouted out at his partner. His actions were stranger than usual, and he was starting to get frustrated with him. But taking a ceremonial piece from a military base was beyond what he was expecting, and was probably illegal.

“Please, they never use these things.” He said giving the sword a couple of practice swings, letting his wrist rotate as the blade completed a figure eight through the air. “No one will even miss it. Besides we might even need it tonight depending on how things go with Private Stones. Decapitation is the only way to stop these things.”

“No. Gabe. We are not decapitating anyone.” Sam tried to take the weapon out of his partner’s hands only to have him dance nimbly out of his reach, this went on until they got to the car like a game of cat and mouse. However Gabriel couldn’t drive and hold the sword out of his reach at the same time, and Sam was able to get a hold of it and toss it in the trunk.

“Spoil sport.” He pouted childishly, sticking his tongue out for the complete effect. He knew he was going to get it out of the trunk as soon as the opportunity arose, he wasn’t going to let himself get caught without some way to protect Sam from these bloodsuckers. This was his partner, but there was more to it now, he found that he could rely on him both on and off cases. It was rare that someone was willing to seek him out with no ulterior motive, he didn’t have many people he could call a friend, and less that he could count on.

With a rumble the car’s engine came to life and they were flashing their badges again as they left the
The sword rattled in the trunk as Gabriel took the corners a little fast, Sam’s hand flying up to push into the ceiling so he wouldn’t fall over or bang into the window. They were in a hurry, there was every chance that when they found him Private Stone would bolt and they would have to chase him. Sam wasn’t sure if he could outrun some of these marines, he jogged but he wasn’t maintaining the same level of regimented training schedule that he had back in Quantico.

The bar was easy to find, there were multiple junky vehicles parked on the road and in the abandoned lot next door. The building itself was worn and grungy from the outside with several lights on the sign flickering on and off, the two agents shared a look between them before stepping in through the doors. They walked into a cloud of smoke, Sam automatically took a step back and blinking his eyes hard to combat the irritants. Gabriel looked up at his partner with a cheeky grin, his height letting him sit lower in the smoke cloud not getting the brunt of it. Through the smoke they saw dozens of eyes set on them, the sounds of the bar had quieted the moment they stepped inside.

Their suit and tie looks set them apart and made them stand out from the grungy look of the bar’s patrons. They sized the two of them up and when Gabriel shot one of them finger guns and a wink they rolled their eyes and waved their hand at him, the loud boisterous atmosphere of a dive bar quickly returning. Gabriel sauntered up to the bar and leaned into it catching the bartender’s attention.

“Hey! Can I get a cold beer, whatever’s on tap, for my tall friend here?” He pointed back at Sam who was standing awkwardly surveying the room.

“Gabe we’re working…” Sam reminded him, they weren’t allowed to drink on the clock and they couldn’t afford the effects of drinking with their suspect so close.

“I’ll take a muay thai for myself. And while you’re at it, can you point out which one of these is Jerry Stone?” Gabriel spun his finger with a flick of his wrist, motioning to the entire room. He knew he was here, but didn’t get a file picture of the guy when he had a chance, but then most jar-heads looked the same to him anyways.

“He’s over there tossin’ darts. Look if you cause any trouble, I don’t got issue tossin’ you outa my place.” The threat was only half-hearted, as if it was a practiced phrase that really didn’t have much meaning. Gabriel looked around the room and could see trouble taking place in at least three corners.

“Not here to cause trouble, just want to talk with Jerry about something back at the base. And no beer for me.” Sam took the chance to speak up and turn down the drinks.

“Thank you, and sorry about the drinks but we might have to take a rain check on those. Looks like my partner is being a stickler for the rules today. Love it when he takes charge like that.” Gabriel’s exaggerated wink was meant for Sam to catch, the bartender squirmed at the comment uncomfortable with the open teasing going on.

Sam was grateful for the low lighting in the bar because he could feel his face heating up, the flirtatious comments and suggestive wording were frustrating to say the least. As much as he wanted to flirt back or say anything to let Gabriel know he heard him, he held back, this was not the best of places to be openly saying things like that. They came here to finish a job and their suspect was playing darts in the corner, and he wasn’t going to forget that because of some choice words his partner had said.

Patting Gabriel’s shoulder he started to move in the direction of the dart boards, his hand staying a little longer than necessary. The shorter agent hummed something before following behind him. Gabriel was enjoying the view only looking up as they got close to their suspect.
“Private Jerry Stone?” No sooner had the name slipped through Sam’s lips, the man took off running, pushing people away and pulling tables down in attempt to slow down the agents. They both took off after him, Sam taking a direct approach and following him as close as he could. Bumping into people that couldn’t get out of his way quick enough and deftly jumping over the obstacles that Stone tried throwing in his path. He chased him through the back door of the bar into kitchen where he had pulled a large pot of hot soup off the burner, the liquid splashing up dangerously and slicking the floor up. Sam skid through the noodle slick, catching himself on the door to the walk in freezer. Stone threw himself into the backdoor causing it to burst open into the cool night air, he stumbled before regaining his footing and taking off.

Gabriel took off in the opposite direction, running for the front door and pulling his keys out from his pocket in the process. Hitting a button the trunk popped open and he grabbed in the sword as he ran past the car circling back around to the back of the building just in time to see both Stone bust through the door and take off running into the abandoned lot with Sam on his tail. Not wanting his partner to get into trouble by jumping directly into the situation, yet again, Gabriel ran after them both. The sword carefully tucked behind him as he chased after.

Stone took them on a chase that lead them through the abandoned lot and into a stretch of woods that opened up into a field. Sam was gaining on him once they hit the open stretch able to use his long legs to his advantage. Before he could tackle of grab him though Stone ducked into a building that had clearly seen better days. At one point the building might have been a barn or a carriage house, but the wood was rotting and had collapsed in one of the corners. It was also very dark and once he stepped into the building Sam lost sight of him. He followed him in, while waiting for his eyes to adjust to the new dark he was attacked.

Sam shouted out as he was knocked over, a heavy weight straddling his chest landing a few hard blows to his face before he was able to block and catch the attacker’s hands in his own large ones. He bucked his hips in attempt to catch the other man off balance and flip their positions. Gabriel heard his partner’s cry just as he was getting to the dilapidated barn. He stepped into the gloom to watch as they tumbled over the dusty ground switching places a few times, each time Sam was on top he tried to subdue him by pinning his hands together.

Gabriel couldn’t get a good enough break in the action to help his partner out. Every time he thought he had a window it would either pass by or it was too close where he thought he might hurt Sam instead. He was so engrossed in the wrestling match that he missed the entrance of another person coming into the barn. The punch came as a complete surprise to him, fist connecting near his temple sending him falling to the ground, sword knocked into the shadows out of his reach. The commotion distracted Sam long enough that he lost the upper hand in his own fight and was pinned to the ground. Stone stared down at him with a twisted grin that made him feel uneasy, he couldn’t quite put a finger on why but it was almost as if his smile had too much teeth to it.

Done with trying to hold back and trying to subdue his opponent, Sam jerked his hand down and free slamming it hard into the other guy’s knee. The action and sudden pain caused a brief pause that he took advantage of by slamming the same fist into his ear. He scrambled up to his feet and kicked him hard in the ribs hoping to keep him down for a longer time. His first action was to look around for Gabriel, he was worried about his partner. Sam knew that he could probably hold his own in a fight, but he wasn’t a big guy and these were trained marines that they were up against.

He saw that his partner was in a similar fight, although the smaller agent seemed to have the upper hand. But as he watched their fight he saw that his partner didn’t once go for his gun, but was trying to back up slowly to get to where the sword had landed. Hearing a noise behind him he turned and readied himself as Stone got to his feet. Pulling his gun from its holster he steadied the weapon on him, Stone stared down at him with a twisted grin that made him feel uneasy, he couldn’t quite put a finger on why but it was almost as if his smile had too much teeth to it.
“Just try it Fed! I’m the perfect soldier now! You can’t touch me!” He challenged him, laughing again and rushing at Sam with a fire in his eyes. Sam pulled the trigger and a loud bang went off, the smell of gunpowder faint as the bullet spiraled out of the barrel. It connected into Stone’s chest, slightly off center, the power of it at the shortened range knocked him back a step. However it didn’t take him down like it should have, Sam immediately thought that he must have been wearing a bulletproof vest but he didn’t have the bulk of one on. He could see the blood welling up from where the bullet landed, it was a lot less than the amount it should have been. With eyes wide in fear he fired off another round, connecting in Stone’s shoulder, his body twisting back with the contact. He continued his approach crashing into Sam who shot off another round sailing past his head into the rotten beams above them, splinters of wood raining down on them. Getting a good close look at his face as Stone pushed into him, laughing and grinning maniacally, Sam saw that he appeared to have a second set of teeth giving him a shark like look.

He gave a yelp as a blade came dangerously close to his nose, slicing through Stone’s neck in a fluid motion. Warm blood splattered across his face and he was quick to close both his mouth and eyes. The head fell with a heavy thunk next to him as the body collapsed on top of him. Keeping his eyes closed he gave the body a shove, pushing it off of him as it rolled to the side. His front was warm and wet with blood and he fought to keep his stomach down, his body shaking with nerves he looked up into the golden eyes of his partner reaching down to help him up. Sam grabbed ahold of his hand like it was a lifeline, and used it to pull himself up, once again surprised at how easy it was for his partner to accept his weight.

“You holding together Samboni?” There was kindness and a smile to his words, the warmth spread through his chest, their hands still clasped together. They stood in the broken barn with two headless bodies, both agents were had various amounts of blood splattered over them from their fights. Feeling his heartrate come back down and able to hear his own thoughts once again, Sam took his hand back slowly.

“He looked like a shark, no that’s not fair to the animals. Gabe, he had too many teeth and they were sharper than they should have been.” Sam watched as Gabriel took the few steps to the head of Private Stone and picked it up. He moved to be at his side and watched as his partner opened the mouth and pushed into the gums, a set of razor sharp teeth coming forward. “This is a medical trait that is unheard of in humans, Gabe! We need to get this back to the base or to the forensic labs in DC and get some tests run on it. See if we can’t document this and learn some of the genetics responsible for this anatomical anomaly.”

He took the head from Gabriel, going on about how this was going to change some of the current scientific and medical studies of the world. When his partner took the head of the second private and went through the same motions without saying a word, showing that this one also had the same set of hidden teeth, Sam silenced. It was incredible for one person to have this trait, but for two unrelated individuals whose only connection was that they lived and trained at the same military base, was close to impossible.

“Samwyl. It’s not a genetic trait, these are vampires. The real deal. But I agree with you we need to take the remains of these two individuals and bring them back. Not just for study, but for proof. We have undeniable proof that vampires exist, they can’t argue with what’s right in front of them. Then they can start finding ways to fight back. It doesn’t have to be the sole responsibility of the church to hunt these things in the shadows and keep the rest of us in the dark. We can protect ourselves better and prevent unnecessary deaths if we aren’t held under the glamor of a religion that wants to be the only way.” Gabriel put the head back down near the body, he didn’t have room in his car to transport two bodies, and he certainly didn’t want to get their fluids all over either. If that happened it would be easier to trash the car than to get it cleaned.
“You know that’s not the reason Agent Milton.” A voice called out from the doors of the building. Outside lights lit up casting into the barn, making the owner of the voice appear as a silhouette, and causing Sam and Gabriel to throw up their arms to block some of the brightness. Other figures stepped into the doorway next to the first figure, they were suddenly outnumbered.

“Who are you?” Sam called out at them, there had already been too many surprises for him tonight. He was still wound up from the fight and his introduction to the real supernatural.

“Nobody to worry about, we’re here for the bodies of the two dangerous people you have taken care of for us.” The person gestured to the two dead bodies, as well as the head that Sam was still holding. “However it would have been easier to come up with a more convincing story if they weren’t both decapitated.”

One of the others leaned in, whispering to the one who acted as their leader. They were too far away for either of them to make out what the conversation might have entailed. But even from the distance they could tell that it wasn’t something that they would like.

“That could work as a good story, but either way we have our work cut out for us. And that includes what to do with the two of you. Your choice. Easy way you just give over the bodies and let us on our way and you go along with whatever the outcome is at the end of the day. Or we add you both to the body count here today. The second would be an easier choice for us because it would fit very well with the story my associate here proposed?” The way he said it made it clear that they would prefer the second option, and might just go with that regardless of their choices. Sam wasn’t liking how they were being eyed and sized up by the shadowed people.

“Doesn’t killing break one of your precious commandments?” Gabriel shot the question at them angrily stepping forward and putting himself between them and Sam. He cared about his partner and didn’t want to see whatever they had in mind come to fruition. He felt a hand on his shoulder and looked back to see the light reflecting in the hard glare of Sam’s hazel eyes, he wasn’t going to give up either.

“That may be so but we can seek confession and repent so long as our path is righteous and true.” He spoke with conviction that made him sound as if he would not stray from his path, it was something that made him sound like he was part of a dangerous cult. There was no proof contrary to that theory either, but he was dangerous and had them trapped inside the barn.

“I think you might want to re-think that, bucko. There is no such thing as righteous murder. And since you’re already planning our demise I would count that as murder.” Gabriel attempted to use their beliefs to sway the situation into their own favor. He didn’t want to give up the proof he finally had in his grasp, but he was starting to run out of options. There weren’t any other ways in or out of the barn that they could escape out, and their car was way back at the bar there was no way they could out run these people.

“Well the options still remain, not all of us are men of a holy order.” The threat came with the sound of a shotgun being loaded. The cold metal glinted in the light menacingly. Gabriel made sure he was in front of Sam and that his partner hadn’t tried to maneuver around him in some self-sacrificing way. Sparing another quick look at the corpses, he came to the conclusion that if it meant handing over their evidence to keep Sam safe he would do it. With that thought he knew he was in trouble, his willingness to toss aside all he believed in and worked towards uncovering for the wellbeing of a single person meant only one thing. He had fallen hard for him and he was willing to do anything to keep him in his life.

“Sam give me the head…” He reached out behind him not letting his eyes stray too far from the shadowed figures. He didn’t want to give them the opportunity to try anything sneaky against them.
“Really? Right now? I don’t think this is the best time and you already told me that we were just friends.” Sam couldn’t help it, things were wound too tight and the threats were weighing heavy in the air. He had seen that vampires were real, despite everything in his mind telling him that it wasn’t possible. And now they were being held at gunpoint by an unknown group who were demanding their lives. For his own mental stability he had to crack a joke when his partner gave him the perfect set up.

“You’re joking with me now of all times? I’m trying to save our lives here!” Gabriel spun around in disbelief and frustration, his voice cracked as his volume went up. He stood wide eyed looking up at Sam, back to the others, the worry in his face was enough to get him to stop smiling. “They are going to kill you! Over what? Two dead vampires?! They’re not worth that, I can get a dead vampire another time! I don’t think I can get another Samchester, you broke the Big Man’s mold when he made you. Just let me hand over the head and we can get out of here, you and me.”

“Listen to him, Agent Winchester, he finally has a good idea.” The man at the center said with a smugness that made Sam just want to lob the head at him instead of handing it over in any civil manner. So that’s just what he did, Sam chucked the head across the room at the line of shadowed people as if it was a shotput. A gun shot went off quickly followed by a second, and Gabriel closed his eyes waiting for the impact that never came.

He opened his eyes to chaos, Sam grabbed his hand and pulled on him as they ran through the barn, the old structure collapsing around them. One of the men who had previously blocked their way laid prone on the ground, blood pooling out from under him. The others were scattered, some had run back to the cars while others tried in vain to find the source of the first gunshot. Sam was tugging on his arm, causing him to stumble as they ran back towards the wooded area. He could hear the people shouting to catch and capture them, but they reached the trees where it was easy to hide from them. Gabriel tripped and fell over a root reaching out across the path, quickly rolling off the path and under the brush. He could see as Sam dove into a patch of brambles that enveloped him providing excellent cover.

The shadowed people stomped through the trail, waving torches to illuminate their search. He held his breath as a pair of feet stopped inches from his face, the flickering shadows from the fire helped in hiding him, never casting a full light into his hiding place. They left after a while and stomped back out of the forest, rejoining the others. The torch was tossed onto the collapsed barn, the old building quickly going up in flames. The sound of car doors slamming shut and engines roaring to life, Gabriel caught Sam’s eyes and nodded. Both agents left their respective hiding places and watched from the forest’s edge as the cars taillights disappeared into the dark. In sync they walked back to the inferno that was the barn they had been in less than fifteen minutes earlier.

Sam pulled his phone out of his pocket and called in the fire to the emergency center. With a fire this hot there wasn’t much chance that they would be able to find either body if they had left them there. Their suspects and evidence gone up in smoke, there was nothing left for them to do but watch the flames and wait for the fire department to arrive and put it out. Sam looked down at his jacket and shirt both heavily stained in blood, and over to Gabriel who was in a similar wardrobe situation.

“Not sure if we want to be around when they show up to control the fire, this thing isn’t worth saving so they’re most likely just going to wet down the fields so it doesn’t spread. Ready to head home? It’s going to be hell to explain this one.” Gabriel said aloud what Sam was thinking, turning his back to the fire he started the long walk back to the bar. Sam took up a place at his side until they reached the car, his partner was right about one thing, explaining this case wasn’t going to be easy.
After changing out of their blood stained clothes and driving back to the base they had expected to share their versions of what had happened. Instead they were intercepted by a black car parked sideways across the road preventing them access to the base. Gabriel stopped the car and the both of them stepped out and made their way to the front of their vehicle. A figure emerged from the other vehicle and mirrored their actions, Sam could just barely make out a moustache and goatee against his dark features.

“Agent Milton, I see that you weren’t as successful as we’d anticipated.” The figure spoke and Gabriel pulled up to his full height ready to challenge this person. He received no reaction to his posturing.

“You knew I was going to fail this didn’t you?” Gabriel’s fist were clenched as he spoke with an elevated voice, he wasn’t quite shouting but the frustration was evident. If he was here to mock his failures then he should just get to it already. He knew that they were unable to bring back what they needed to, but he made his choice and he knew he would make it again if he was given the opportunity to do it over.

“There was always the chance that you’d actually manage to pull it off, however slim that chance was. And you can’t say that I wasn’t rooting for you.” He pushed off the car getting closer to the two agents. “I hate to see them win again and again.”

Sam had the same uneasy feeling that he had back at the barn with this man in front of them. However Gabriel seemed to know the man, and the man seemed to know of their case, as well as the details they knew they wouldn’t have been sharing. His hands opened and closed into fists as he tried to make sense of the scene playing out in front of him, and somehow the vampires were no longer the strangest thing he had seen that night.

“Gabe, who is this?” He finally asked fed up with being sidelined for this tense conversation. He could tell there was more going on than he was being told and he was tired of it. He was tired of a lot of things right then, he wanted nothing more than to get home and fall into his bed and deal with everything in the morning.

“This was someone I thought was an ally of ours. They’re the informant that brought us the case. Turns out we can’t trust him.” His eyes were dark as he stared down the man whose fault it was they were there in the first place. If he hadn’t brought him the case, he wouldn’t have pushed for it, and they would have never been here.

“Oh even I wouldn’t trust me, I’m more of an ‘enemy of my enemy isn’t quite an enemy of mine’ kind of deal. But you two didn’t quite screw up as bad as you could have.” The man’s voice softened as he admitted that they did an alright job with what they had managed.

“Not quite as bad as we could have? They got to us before we could get out with one of the bodies! The whole reason to get down there was to bring one back, wasn’t it?” He was upset, but he knew the words were coming. He failed the task yet again, let the proof slip away when he had it firmly in his grasp. Let “them” sweep everything under the rug and into the shadows. He had gotten a heads up, knew about how much of a time frame they had on it, and he still couldn’t pull it off.
“No, it was to get there before them. Which you did, you also kept them away from covering things up their way. You got a damn good partner there too, without him you would have screwed up for sure. I especially liked the story the two of you came up with as to why the remains of these two trainees were found in a burnt up abandoned barn.” He pointed out that they had done as he had asked, even when his instructions were vague. Pulling a file from his jacket, he opened it and skimmed over the documents, glancing up at Gabriel with a trace of a smile.

Sam wasn’t sure how to take the compliment from this man who he was just finding out had set them up for a task that was destined for failure. The same man was also offering them a full report and a way out of the mess that he had put them in. He had already said that they shouldn’t trust him, so why should they take the report being handed to them. Sam pushed past Gabriel right up to the mysterious man and grabbed at the files.

“Now Agent Milton, I expect that should I come to you with another case under similar circumstances you’ll be more likely to accept.” Letting the folder out of his hands he stepped back to his car, offering one last comment before he closed the door and drove around them and into the dark.

Sam quickly read through the reports before handing them over for Gabriel to take a look at. It was a full and complete report on their case, however Sam noticed a couple of things that had been altered or omitted and a few things that had been added. Most notably that the case was turned over to CIA after their discovery that Stone and his associate were implicated in acts of espionage and theft of scientific ideas. This would cause the case to dead end for the and more importantly put a level of classification on it that rendered it nearly invisible unless someone could manage the high levels of clearance required. But it also complicated things in a different way.

“This is actually really well put together,” Gabriel muttered as he leafed through the report. He didn’t want to admit it but this would save them so much time and they had a convenient lie already pieced together and notarized for them. There was just the issue of where it made him out to be hotheaded, rash, and as a result produced sloppy detective work that nearly cost them the case. Although, after how he had behaved during their investigation he couldn’t blame an outsider for seeing that of him.

“This is going to land you in a hearing! For something that wasn’t in your control. Gabe, can’t you see, whoever this person is working for, they’re setting you up to fail!” Sam pointed at the report, he didn’t like what he had read in it. Especially what it meant for his partner.

“What other option do we have for this one? Even you wouldn’t have believed what we saw if you weren’t there to witness it, and sometimes I have my reservations about even that. You’re a smart cookie, Saminal, even you don’t believe me when I bring up my theories. You’re right there with some sort of logical and reasonable explanation as to why I’m wrong.” He moved back to the door of the car, tossing the report folder into the back seat. It had been a very long day and they had just been handed their first easy win as far as he was concerned.

“Gabe, this could have been their plan the whole time. You said it yourself, they are all about obscuring the truth, covering things up. And you, you’re working against them, loudly and it doesn’t always work, but how many times have you come close to spoiling things for them?” Sam was upset that he wasn’t seeing this for what it could be, the man who saw el chupacabra around every corner and angels in the National Enquirer, couldn’t see the blatant attempt to get rid of him. “This could be their plan to remove you as a threat to them. Without you working the X-files you’re just another kook with tinfoil theories.”

“You flatter me with your faith in me, but either we go with the truth and we both get kicked out or we go with this and I get made to look the fool and get kicked out. I’m willing to risk my own career
but you have so much more ahead of you.” Gabriel couldn’t see another way out of this, he knew he’d be facing a panel either way when they got back. The decapitation of two suspects could only be explained so far, and Assistant Director Singer hated the CIA as much as he hated the paperwork involved with them. At least he was the one who had taken and wielded the sword, Sam’s hands were clean of that act.

“I can’t believe what I’m hearing, this is not the Gabriel Milton I heard stories about. This is not the same partner I’ve been working alongside. This is not the agent that I have come to admire. The Gabriel Milton I know has fight in him, and refuses to be told something can’t be done. I won’t allow them to kick you out, if you won’t fight for yourself I will.” Sam was shaking when he was done with that little rant of his. He was tired, and frustrated, and upset. His partner was ready and willing to roll over because of some misplaced sense of protection towards him. He didn’t want to see the driving light of Gabriel to burn out, he knew that even if he believed in some questionable things he was still an incredible agent with a sense of what was right. Someone who didn’t give up because he was told to. It was a lot like himself, he had heard that he would have been better working the courts and judicial system than out doing field and detective work. But he had tried it and while they were right that he was good at it, he didn’t feel the same draw or gain the same level of appreciation from the work.

Gabriel let the silence fall between them, using it to think about what he had just been told. He knew Sam liked him, he had admitted as much when he had asked him out the other day, but he had pushed him away thinking it would be the best way to protect him. He was still pushing him away at the same time he was keeping him close and trying to protect him, the signals he had been giving were mixed and he was seeing that for the first time. But Sam had just told him that his dreams were worth pursuing, something no one had told him unless they also gained something from it. Sam wanted him to succeed for himself because he should, no other reason. And he was willing to help him stay in the bureau when he was ready to give up.

It was a while before he realized that his partner had fallen asleep, he was so lost in his own thoughts. Looking over Gabriel was able to see the calm on Sam’s face, the stress of the day washed away with sleep, forgotten until the next time he was awake. Wayward strands of hair draped over his nose, covering one of his eyes, he had to keep himself from reaching over and brushing them out of the way behind his ear. Instead he popped a CD into the car and gently brought the volume up to just where he could hear it playing, the soft and calm sounds filling the space and creating a liminal atmosphere.

“-September’s coming soon, I’m pining for the moon. And what if there were two, side by side in orbit around the fairest sun? That bright, tight forever drum could not describe nightswimming…”

He was still asleep when they stopped at a gas station, Gabriel stepped inside and got them both drinks as well as some rest stop packaged food. He placed the cold drink in the cup holder and gently shook him awake giving him the option to use the rest room before they took off again. Sam gratefully accepted the drink and the bottle of tea was gone in a matter of minutes, he turned down the cream filled cupcakes, and rolled over to let his face rest on the cool glass falling back asleep.

They weren’t far from the city when Gabriel woke his partner again. The sky was rosy with the dawn’s light, he had driven the whole way back not wanting to spend any more time in the town where they had faced a pair of vampires. The emptiness of the drive helped him focus his thoughts and try to make sense of how things were going. Pulling up in front of Sam’s apartment he dropped him off, waving to him as he stumbled to the door. Getting to his own place he nearly fell asleep under the cascade of hot water in his shower, the grime and sweat from the day washing off his body. After setting the alarm on his phone so it wouldn’t go off in twenty minutes but hours later he collapsed into his bed.
It was almost noon when his phone went off waking him up, he grumbled as he grabbed for it. He hit the call button without looking at the caller ID. Pulling the phone away from his head he blinked heavily attempting to wake up while being yelled at over the tinny speaker. He looked back down at his phone to catch the time again, it was really too early to be dealing with this.

“Yeah sure, whatever you say Bobby. I was planning on coming in later to drop off the report… Cut me some slack, we got in this morning around five.” He complained into the phone, pushing the palm of his hand into his eye. “So what if I did? Look I’ll be in a few, you can chew me out in person over this. I need to put on pants first. No I didn’t to tell you that, but now you’re imagining me without pants and it’s the little things like that that get me through the day.”

Hanging up the phone with a small chuckle he quickly got ready, that small easy victory might be his only one for the day so he relished it. Just as Sam predicted he was going to have to face a hearing, Singer had gotten word of the case transferal and was ready to take it out on him. He just had to survive the initial meeting, hand in the report and wait for the rest of the shit to hit the fan. Since he was already late he figured it wouldn’t be that much worse if he stopped somewhere for a coffee.

Lifting his coffee in greeting to the security guard, Gabriel walked into the headquarter building and past the broken elevators to the stairwell. Maybe he would get a little time to talk with Sam before they got the official call. There were a couple of things that he really wanted to talk about if he got the time. Upon getting to the office he saw that the lights were off and the door was locked. Pulling his keys out he opened the door and flipped the switch illuminating the room. A sticky note was tacked to the screen of his computer.

‘Gabe. In proceedings, get here ASAP. Hope you get this before Singer gets to you. Do not talk about the beheadings. Be prepared to explain the espionage theory. –Sam’

Gabriel groaned, looking at the time he saw that his little detour for coffee took him longer than expected. He better get to the hearing that might be the one to kick him out, at least he could defend himself. The stairs seemed to go on forever and he wondered if there was some cruel joke that he wasn’t in on that involved the elevator. The doors to the room where the deposition was taking place were closed, he waited at them listening to the proceedings for a little bit before making his entrance, had to wait for just the right time to make it dramatic.

“-Don’t see why this is even an issue! They had attacked us and were aiming to deal us grievous bodily harm or death.” Sam’s voice rang clear through the doors, and Gabriel could tell that he was using his trainings from law school to share and explain his view in a way that would persuade the others. Another voice said something but it came through as a mumbling.

“We attempted that first, and only when that didn’t work did we have to resort to heavier tactics.” Sam was very clear in his wording and didn’t allow for them to be misconstrued. Again came the low murmurs. “Came after I had already shot him three times. If I were to make judgment, I would say that he could have been under the influence of some heavy drugs, possibly mefloquine given that the studies that were taking place were involved with mosquito borne diseases. It was Agent Milton’s quick thinking and quick actions that I am able to stand before you today.”

More low voices followed and Gabriel couldn’t let his partner get chewed up on his own in front of the hearing committee, especially since he was defending him just like he promised he would. He pushed the doors open and strode through like he owned the place, head held up high.

“So nice of you to finally see fit to join us, Agent Milton.” The voice was cold and measured, narrowed eyes swiveled around the room to fall on him. Gabriel refused to squirm under the scrutiny, that was what they wanted and he wouldn’t be the one to give it to them.
“I don’t even see why we were called in on this deposition. The case was transferred over to CIA, it being more if an issue of international acts of espionage and theft of medical research. Shouldn’t they be the ones issuing any hearings?” He pointed out as he made his way to the empty seat on Sam’s left. Bobby was seated on Sam’s other side, the two of them facing the panel. Sam’s eyes connected with him and he could see the relief in them, whereas Bobby’s only held annoyance, yeah he was late but they would probably do better without him present.

“This is about your acts of gross misconduct. We have reports of you disregarding a superior officer and using excessive force on a suspect.” The leading voice of the panel quickly made it apparent that he was the reason the hearing was taking place and that things were all his fault. He wasn’t surprised, Sam’s comments in the car replayed loudly in his head, they were trying to find a way to silence him.

“And you heard Agent Winchester’s account of it. He had shot the man three times and was still in threat for his life. If I was presented with the same situation again, I would still make the same choices. I would choose my partner over some monster trying to kill them any day of the week. Or would you rather I let an excellent agent like Sam here go to waste?” He waved his arm at his partner, their accusations were nothing given the option he was presented with. It was annoying and he was getting defensive about it, they could try to silence him, but he would only shout louder.

“Monster. Now there’s an interesting choice of words. Agent Milton as I understand you are the one who insisted that a murder-suicide was a case of demonic possession?” The snide smile he said it with was unsettling. Like they had just been handed what they were after. And by the shift in the atmosphere of the room it felt as if they would get their way.

“-yeah, but wha-” Gabriel attempted to bring things back to the current case and not ones that had already been solved and dealt with.

“Same Agent Milton who had a case where youth disappearances were later connected to drugs and trafficking but you claimed it was… what… Fairies?” The word was nearly said with a bark of laughter, they were trying to discredit him based on theories he had presented, make him seem unhinged and unfit for investigative work.

“Fae folk, unseelie actually, but-” He tried again to defend himself but found that he was already being spoken over, his voice lost as the panel spokesperson continued with their attempt at smearing him.

“What I’m seeing here is a pattern Agent Milton. You can’t keep a rational mindset during a case and unchecked you are a threat to the agency and-” They were cut off from finishing their verdict with a loud bang.

“Excuse me? I would like to motion for dismissal with prejudice based on the irrelevancy of these comments.” Sam stood up, both his hands on the table where they had been slammed down. His tall figure seemed to loom over the room as he continued to speak loudly, not letting them talk over him.

“We were called in under the admission of a report and transferal of a case cross departments to the CIA which was, at the time and remains so, out of our control. The uncovering of acts of espionage and trade of military secrets was discovered by Agent Milton.”

“We attempted to confront our prime suspect in a manner that was well within the bounds of our investigation and was done so at a neutral ground. The fleeing of the suspect and resulting fight and deaths were merely unforeseen and regrettable outcomes of a hostile situation.” He turned to face his partner briefly before turning back to the panel with a fire in his eyes. Bobby leaned back in his chair with a smug grin as he watched the panel shrink back a little. “Agent Milton was the one who broke the case with his brilliant work as a profiler and detective and your insinuation of his work ethics based on personal beliefs instead of results is not only misleading but discriminatory. And should
Agent Milton wish to press a litigious act on workplace harassment I belief he would have a more solid argument than you currently do.”

Gabriel stared slack jawed at his partner, he had shifted into a different person while delivering that speech. Reaching a level of focus and drive that he hadn’t witnessed in a long time, Sam seemed to glow with energy as he remained standing, staring down the panel. He was awestruck and silent after witnessing his defensive outburst. He wasn’t the only one, the hearing panel was also cowed into silence by the sudden outburst and legal stand his younger partner took. Clearing his throat with a cough, Assistant Director Singer pulled the attention back from Sam and onto himself.

“If that’s it, gentlemen. I think me and my agents will be going now.” He stood up and the three of them left the room. As soon as the doors closed behind them he turned to face the two agents, Sam had a huge smile on his face and a slight shake to his hands while Gabriel still had a dumbstruck look on his, occasionally opening and closing his mouth without any words coming out. Bobby wished he could bottle that moment, he had never seen the older agent at a loss of words.

“You two idjits should count yer lucky stars. If Sam hadn’t stepped in like that you’d be facing the chopping block Gabriel. He saved your skin, and you ought to be more careful, because next time they might be more prepared. This was a witch hunt here today boys, and you survived by the skin of yer teeth.” Bobby was glad that they had made it out of there in one piece. He knew that the X-files had their place in the department and although many thought it was a joke that they continued to receive cases and practice their investigations, it was something else to see someone try to go about and dismantle it. If someone wanted to see it go away, maybe it had more meaning than he initially thought.

“You two might not want to hear this though. I’m putting you two on alternative work for the next two weeks. You need time off from working cases and this is the only way I can do it. Sam you’ll be helping out in the medical labs working transcriptions and moving the stiffs. Gabriel you’ll be doing-”

“Don’t give me wiretaps…” Gabriel interrupted dramatically, letting his head fall back knowing that he was going to be working with something that he hated.

“-wiretaps.” Bobby finished after letting Gabriel have his moment.

“Damn it!” Even if he knew it was coming he didn’t have to like the response. It was tedious and boring listening to other people’s phone calls, there was rarely anything interesting being said. They watched as Bobby walked off shaking his head. Gabriel nudged into Sam as they started on their own way back to their office, a grin inching his way across his face.

“Holy snickers! You were incredible! New nickname, came up with it just now, Samazing! I had no idea you had that in you! Just BAM! Suddenly lawyer mode! I was floundering up there and you stepped in and saved my bacon.” He bounced in excitement, reliving the final moments of their hearing where he got to see Sam step up into something else.

“I was surprised that you even showed up, after last night I thought maybe that you’d given up. I know it must have been difficult to see the evidence you’ve worked so hard to get lost that easy.” Sam didn’t have the same level of excitement over what had just happened that Gabriel had. But his tone of voice said that he was relieved and pleased with the outcome.

“Samcakes, you don’t know how easy it actually was.” He smiled softly as they made their way down the stairs. They had to wrap things up in their office before they started getting assignments from their temporary placements. Moving nearly in tandem they got their spaces tidied and their files tucked away, things would remain untouched for a while.
“Two weeks is going to feel like a vacation after the last few cases we’ve had, huh Gabe?” Sam looked at his partner as he closed the drawers on his desk, they wouldn’t be working with each other for a while either, so it would almost be a vacation apart. They would probably still see each other in the building but they wouldn’t work together during their forced break from cases.

“You want to celebrate this with pizza at my place tonight? You kicking ass and me not getting my ass kicked.” The excitement was back as they stepped out of the office, Gabriel’s keys jingling as he locked things up behind them. He had two weeks of painful transcriptions to look forward to, but after that it was back to the X-files, something he wasn’t sure he was going to see when he was being dragged by the hearing committee. Bobby was right, it was just a witch hunt, but they had made it through and would continue their work.

“Yeah, that sounds nice Gabe. Want me to pick some up?” He asked. Last time they had gotten dinner together Gabriel had picked it up. Sam might not have known all the best little restaurants in town but he had an app that would help him.

“I was thinking I could make you some instead.” The tops of his ears were red and warm as he said it.

“Alright but I don’t do anchovies.” Sam said with a smile, he had gotten a taste of Gabriel’s cooking with limited ingredients and had been wishing for a chance to taste more since then.

“Come on! They add the best flavor! Little salt, little vinegar, they’re quintessential to real Italian cooking!” He whined, pretending to be upset over the ingredient denial, the laughter in his voice gave away his true feelings. They continued to laugh and bump into each other until they got to the doors of the building and went their separate ways. Sam knew he was going to have to get a cab to get to Gabriel’s place, it was too far to walk.

Gabriel immediately set about getting things together for dinner. The dough would take the longest so it was the first thing he started on, letting it rise while he prepped the rest. He had set up his music to play through the TV’s sound system, while he worked in the kitchen. Swaying to the beat he lost track of time, the sound of his doorbell pulled him out of his zone. Refusing to ignore the music he danced across his living room to the door and opened it to find himself face to face with a bottle of wine.

“All over you all over me. The sun, the fields, the skyyy. I’ve often tried to hold the sea. The sun, the fields, the tiiides.”

“Are you ever not listening to music?” Sam laughed as he stepped into the warm house, handing the bottle over and taking his shoes off.

“Never. Music is the greatest human invention. A way to share stories and spreading messages with soul and emotion all tied together. Also dancing,” he said with a mischievous smile as he wiggled his way back into the kitchen, knowing that Sam was watching was part of the fun. Pulling the pizza out he put it on a large plate and brought it to the couch where Sam had made himself at home. Going back to the kitchen one more time he returned with the wine and two glasses.

“Here’s to not getting fired.” He lifted his slice of pizza in toast, letting his eyebrows bounce and a tilted smirk to spread across his face.

“I’ll toast to that!” Sam laughed but lifted his piece as well, there was something to be said for toasting with food instead of the drinks they had. It was fun, and less formal, and felt right.

“Oh wow, Gabe this pizza. Hmmm.” His eyes fluttered closed as he enjoyed the food, licking his
lips he hummed his approval. The cheese dangled between his closed lips and the piece he held in his hands, his tongue darting out to try bringing it in.

Gabriel was all smiles as he watched Sam drive in for a second piece. They laughed and ate while the music continued to provide a pleasant atmosphere. With the pizza gone and the wine quickly joining it the two of them had started to comfortably melt into the couch and against each other.

“Sam I want to thank you,” He leaned back letting his head fall on Sam’s shoulder, studying his face upside down.

“Hmm?” Sam turned his head, his chin brushing on his hair. His own eyes starting to feel heavy between the drink and events finally catching up to him. He was comfortable, felt more at home on the couch with the other agent than he did at his own apartment.

“It’s been such a long time since anyone believed in or stuck up for me. I had forgotten that I wasn’t the only one in the fight. So thank you.” Gabriel’s thanks came as a surprise, he was expecting it to be about his work during the hearing. Unable to come up with a response he leaned in and kissed Gabriel’s forehead, his lips lingering on his skin. He was warm, almost hot, but it was a welcoming like a fireplace’s heat. He wanted them to stay like this as long as they could.

Gabriel pushed him away, pain in his eyes. Sam looked hurt and before he could ask the question that was on the tip of his tongue it was answered.

“I … I would love to Sam. I really would. You’re smart, funny, incredibly handsome, and willing to deal with my shit but not put up with it.” He fumbled through the words not letting their eyes connect again, pulling himself to the side of the couch their bodies separating. Putting distance between them again.

“But? Gabe there’s always a ‘but’. Why?” Sam pushed, he could tell there was something there and he was tired of the dancing that had been going on.

“Because I care, I want to protect you and the best way to protect you is to keep a distance.” Gabriel could feel himself hurting as he tried pushing Sam away. He didn’t want to push him, he wanted more than anything to keep him close.

“I don’t get that. I’ve seen your vampires. You know I can stand up to them and more if you let me. Just please Gabe…” He wanted to be let in but he was hitting that wall again. The wall that his partner threw up every time he started getting close. He thought he had felt that wall come down a few times, but it was never really gone.

“There’s so much more to it than that Sammy.” He pleaded, he couldn’t let Sam get caught up in it all. There were things much more dangerous than vampires that were out there, maybe this two weeks break would be just what they needed.

“Don’t Sammy me.” He pushed off the couch angrily and stormed out of Gabriel’s house. Gabriel dropped his head back against his couch with a groan.

Chapter End Notes
Songs:
Nightswimming - REM
All Over You - Live

This chapter kicked my butt five ways to Sunday. I rewrote the thing about two times and I'm tired of it. To the next part!
Sam found the next week difficult. He got up, went to work, and helped in the medical labs. He tried avoiding Gabriel but it seemed that the other man was better at it than he was. He hadn’t seen or heard from him since he stormed out of his house, although part of him wished that he could. As much as he hated that his partner was playing games with him, he felt as if he should be the one apologizing.

Turning back to the body on the slab, gloves up to his elbows and protective mask on he looked at the coroner ready to step in and help when he was needed. The body was similar to the last three they had examined; red sores and lesions covering the body, the sclera of the eyes a smoky grey, signs of burst blood vessels under the skin around the eyes, organs appeared to suffer internal damage. They were expecting to find the same results with this one too. They were ready to call in the Center of Disease Control on this one but they didn’t find any signs of this being as a result of a bacterial infection or a virus.

And so far the bodies didn’t have anything in common other than their religion; different social backgrounds, different states, no shared places of recent travel. It was a mystery so far, something that he wouldn’t be surprised to see come across his desk in the basement. He was going to need a second opinion. That meant he needed to find and talk to Gabriel.

As soon as he was given his lunch break Sam scrubbed as much of his body as he could before heading out to find his partner. He was armed with photographs of the bodies but he was really hoping that he would be able to get the other agent down to the medical labs to look at them himself. However he had no idea where to start looking for the other man. There had been silence between them, and he hadn’t caught sight of his in the buildings since they started their temporary assignments. He had an idea who might be able to help him though.

He leaned over the wall of the surprisingly tidy cubical, a muscle car calendar was hanging on one of the walls with thumbtacks. Sam smiled when he spied a picture of his brother with a huge smile, his arm around the man in the tan trench coat, the two of them both happy. At least someone could be happy between the two Winchesters. Dean finally looked up from his typing, aware that his brother was practically looming over him.

“Hey Sammy, how’s the med lab treating you? Toss your cookies yet?” He leaned back, his chair giving some bend, crossing his arms behind his head. A smug look on his face as he waited to hear about his brother’s adventures in the morgue. The office gossip got around quickly after the hearing, people were split on the news of the witch hunt against one of their own. Some people thought it was about time that something was being done about the joke department that was rightfully hidden in the basement. Dean was glad that his brother was able to showcase his skills during the hearing and still had a job. Castiel seemed to agree with Bobby that the X-files needed to continue after the attack because there had to be a reason.

“Actually it’s not that bad. Hey have you seen him around lately?” Sam didn’t mind working in the medical labs, the dead bodies were clean and things were clinical. They had seen more dead bodies as kids than was healthy.

“You looking for the robot? He’s in the records room.” He wasn’t surprised that his brother was looking for his partner, but he was surprised that he had taken this long in asking. The wiretaps that
Gabriel had been assigned to transcribe were for a case that he and his team had been working on and appreciated the help. However even he had noticed that something was off with the older agent. “He’s been working non-stop since you two were given your ‘vacation’. I’ve never seen someone go through wire-taps on the first take. Something’s eating at him, you know what?”

“I have an idea, Dean. Is he still in the records room?” Now that he knew where his partner was he was getting anxious to find him. It wasn’t as if the dead bodies were going anywhere but it was a reminder that they hadn’t so much as exchanged a ‘hello’ in a couple of days.

“Yeah, should be. He went down there with Cas about ten minutes ago.” His partner had expressed worry for the other man and had asked that he step away from the tapes to help him find something. Castiel had told him that he was close with Gabriel, but he never said how, he figured that they had probably gone through Quantico together or had been partners at one point. He never pushed the subject since they never seemed to have anything more than a brotherly relationship.

“Thanks.” Sam pushed off the cubical wall, ready to go track down his partner. He needed to shake the unwanted feeling of dread in seeing the other man. It wasn’t as if he was seeing an ex since they hadn’t started a relationship, let alone had been in one worth breaking up over. But still he was anxious as to how the other man would react to seeing him after what he could only assume was avoidance.

“Sure thing Sammy… Hey, want to catch dinner with me and Cas tomorrow?” Dean called back, catching his brother before he got too far. The uncertainty in his voice gave off the impression that he had been putting off this invitation.

“Uh, yeah? Sure, text me the details, let me know if you want me to bring anything.” He said as he walked backwards out of the area and towards one of the halls, an agent stepped out of his way so not to get run over. Sam had the feeling that the invitation was for more than just a dinner with his brother. However he didn’t want to promise anything just in case something came up, and Something with a capital S always came up. But at least he would offer his brother peace of mind and go through the motions of making the promise.

The halls seemed to go on forever and Sam checked the time as he quickened his pace wanting to find him before his lunch break was over and before Gabriel changed locations. There were a couple of records rooms, but they were all located in the same general area. He ended up checking a few before he heard two familiar voices talking. They were speaking low and in hushed tones so he couldn’t make out everything they were saying. He was about to open the door when Gabriel said something that caught his attention and made him falter, his hand falling back to his side away from the handle.

“-I really am happy for you Cassie, really. But how do you do it? I can’t even start anything because I’m so scared for him. How do you not worry for him all the time?” His voice was anxious, and the words made Sam bite his lip. Again he was hearing Gabriel keeping his distance, but this time he was also hearing the pain it was causing the other man. He could almost forgive him, listening to him like this, almost.

“It is not that I do not worry, but he has shown himself capable of being able to care for himself. I am sure Sam would do the same if you gave him the chance.” Castiel’s voice replied to Gabriel’s questions, that stiff formality still present in his mannerisms. “However I do not face the same level of danger as you do, you have a unique level of threats upon your person and you do not make it easier on yourself in any way.” There was a pause in his speaking and Sam could almost imagine him doing the head-tilt thing.

“We can continue this discussion another time Gabriel, I believe Sam has something he wishes to
talk to you about.” He ended their conversation and his footsteps could be heard approaching the door. Sam just barely had time to step back from the door when it swung open. The intense stare of the blue eyes met his and he felt small under them.

“Oh, uh, hey Cas... I was looking for Gabe. Dean said I could find him in the records room.” Sam fumbled with his excuse, trying not to look like he had just been caught eavesdropping on their conversation. His face flushed in embarrassment as the other agent continued to stare blankly at him, almost without blinking. Sam couldn’t help but notice that he was wearing the same tan trench coat down in the records room, he preoccupied his attention with the jacket hoping to avoid looking into the awkward stare again.

“Samtronica, fancy meeting you here…” Gabriel stepped up to the doorway of the records room, allowing Castiel the chance to walk away and get back to his work.

“Gabe, I… I.” Sam stuttered over his words, not ready for this at all. He needed to pull himself together, this was his partner and someone he was expected to work with. And he was still the person that he felt butterflies for when their eyes locked on each other.

“I’m sorry. I’ve been a selfish jackhole and-” Gabe took a couple steps closer to him, ready to apologize and hoping to bring things back to a sense of normalcy. He wanted to tell him how much he cared and how he wanted to try to make things right between them but he didn’t get the chance.

“I need you to see a dead body down in the labs.” Sam regained his voice and spoke over his partner, he couldn’t listen to an apology right now, and he certainly wouldn’t know what to do if Gabriel decided to retract his earlier statements. Things were strange and he wanted the person he knew was an expert in strange to give his opinion.

“Romantic. All right,” Gabriel’s voice dropped any signs of previous emotions, instead mirroring Sam’s serious and business like tone. He waved his arms towards the end of the hall, “lead the way.”

“We’ve had a couple of them come in now, same deal and it’s something that I thought would eventually come across our desks.” Sam was all business now that they were on their way, the walk and talk was something he was familiar with and something he could accomplish without his mind thinking too much.

“Our desks? You still think of it as ours?” Gabriel muttered to himself, his face pulling in mild confusion. He thought that his partner wouldn’t want anything to do with him, he was prepared for Sam to tell him he was done with the X-files. Yet here he was acting as if they hadn’t been temporarily reassigned.

“It’s weird enough that these bodies are showing up with what looks like kind of like small pox or a plague. But get this, these people had nothing in common, they weren’t even from the same area.” That was the thing that had got them all stumped in the labs and the main reason that CDC hadn’t come in to take over. Without any shared form of interaction or method of contract, the cause and spread of whatever caused their death remained mysterious.

“Wait, did these open sores they look like they’ve been burned?” Gabriel suddenly caught up with what was being said, he put a little spring to his step quickening their pace to the labs.

“Oh, yeah? They had organ damage too.” Sam picked up his pace as well, matching his partner’s, again surprised that he was able to come up with details about the case that he hadn’t divulged yet.

“Lemme guess, they cooked?” He asked, already trying to link this to similar cases and historical occurrences in his mind. It sounded all too familiar and he was starting to get worried about the
potential of what this could mean.

“The opposite actually, like their body temps dropped rapidly. There was indication of damage caused by crystallization within the cells.”

With that phrase Gabriel stopped in the hall, a dead stand still, his face completely blank. Sam was halfway down the hall and about to turn the corner when he realized that the other agent wasn’t near his side anymore. He turned to see the man completely still like a statue, he wasn’t blinking and it was hard to tell if his chest was rising and falling with breath. It was honestly creepy, his face was set in a look that was both distant and intense, it reminded him of the look Castiel had when he wasn’t being engaged.

“Gabe? Gabriel? You alright there?” He called out to his partner with a hint of worry in his voice. Gabriel was usually full of energy and talking or humming or singing. He had never seen him go completely blank before, it was unsettling to say the least. His eyes had a dark intense focus in them and he could almost see the gears turning as he stood lost in thought. Sam tried one more time to get his attention, louder than before. “Gabe?”

Life seemed to return all at once to Gabriel, he picked up exactly where he left off in his walking and was at Sam’s side in mere moments. His hands were gesticulating wildly as he spoke, asking question after question about the bodies, where they were found, if anything else had been reported alongside the strange deaths, they were coming non-stop. Sam couldn’t answer most of his questions but continued to lead them both to the labs where the bodies were being kept for further study.

Sam made sure that they were both wearing protective gear before he opened the doors to the lab. He started to introduce his partner to the lab techs he had been working with when the doors burst open and the head medical examiner walked in with Bobby right behind him.

“Good, you’re both here. I’m reinstating you both to the X-files as of immediately. Another body was found just two towns over from the last, and it’s your case now.” He grumbled mildly pleased that he didn’t have to track them down or take a look at the bodies himself. He had left that work behind when he signed up for the desk job, but there were days that he missed the action and others where he was glad that he did.

Sam and Gabriel shared a surprised look before Bobby continued.

“I want you to take a look at these bodies Agent Milton. You had proposed something like this a while back and it was found in your records while one of the techs was looking for anything that might help them identify this. So this is all yours.”

The techs grumbled at the loss of their temporary help but were ultimately glad that this was no longer their problem. They just had to continue with the standard autopsy report and send duplicates of anything they found to the two agents. Leading them to the newest body they lifted the sheet, the body was just as Sam had described. Red lesions speckled the body, the open sores looked nasty and the edges of them crispy as if they were burned in or were starting to scab over or both. Gabriel pulled his pen out from the inside of his pocket and brought it close to the body the point hovering over some of the wounds.

“Anything different about this one from the others?” He asked as he continued his examination.

“Well we haven’t done a full autopsy on this one yet, but so far it’s the same as the others. Has the strange eye thing going on too. That’s really got us freaked out. Other than the whole possibility of a return of small pox. I thought that disease was extinct?”
“It is, and this isn’t small pox. Come on Samjam, we’ve got to make a couple stops before we start on this.” He spun around quickly, his golden hair bouncing in his face. Stripping the gloves and goggles off as they stepped out of the room, he dumped them into a sanitation bin.

“You have an idea already?” Sam was skeptical but he had heard Bobby say that his partner had already had a case related to this in the past, or something similar. Although it wasn’t all together surprising that his partner had a theory regarding this. At least it wasn’t small pox and they could stop worrying about the rapid spread of a highly infectious disease that no longer was inoculated for.

“Of course I do! But I’m hoping I’m wrong, because if I’m right this is a lot worse than we could have imagined. But first, have you heard of Angel Radio?” They were walking and talking as Gabriel lead them back down the hallways. Other agents moved to the sides, out of their way, as they walked with purpose. Gabriel had an air about him that changed as soon as they had gotten the case, he seemed more lively and driven.

“No, I don’t think so? Should I?” Sam racked his brain for any mention of the station, either in passing or from conversation. It wasn’t something that sounded familiar to him, he gave up trying to match it to anything in his memories. If it was important to their case he would know soon enough.

“Probably not and that’s fine, it’s a station that runs on the AM band, mostly deals with interpretations of various religious texts.” Gabriel’s motions were highly animated as the two of them entered the garages, their footsteps echoing loudly in the concrete space. He continued with his explanation of the radio station “They also cover a variety of controversial theories regarding the church and their actions.”

“So they’re your kind of people?” Sam was starting to put things together, although he was still uncertain as to how a radio station could help them out. Especially on something that should have gotten the attention of the Center for Disease Control.

“Exactly! And my bowling team, well we’re still one man short of a full team. How’s your score? You ever bowl a turkey or a clean game?” Gabriel’s thoughts started wandering back to the idea of having a full team and being able to compete in the local tournaments.

“Gabe…” He was getting used to pulling his partner back in to the discussion at hand, they needed to stay on topic regarding their new case. Several bodies had already started to crop up, and they didn’t have time to talk about bowling. Sam realized that he also wouldn’t have time to meet Dean for dinner now that they had a case that was taking them away again.

“Remember how we were talking about biblical omens?” Sam nodded, remembering how every so-called omen Gabriel brought up he was able to come up with logical explanation for it. “Well this is one of them. And it’s a big one.”

“And why can’t this just be a regular medical outbreak Gabe?” So far there was nothing about this case that even seemed remotely linked to one of Gabriel’s theories of angelic or demonic presence on earth. There wasn’t anything supernatural about people getting sick and dying from something similar to small pox or the plague.

“You heard the man, I’ve dealt with something incredibly similar before and while I was waiting on the CDC to come in and do their job guess who rolled and stuck around to brush things under the rug?” He paused for dramatic effect and looked at Sam to see if he was following before he answered his own question. “That’s right, the Church. We need to get to this one before they do this time, try to isolate and contain before they can make things disappear. Come on. We’re going to see some old friends of mine.”
He stepped into the car and tuned the radio so that the hum of chants was heard in the background while an accented voice spoke over it answering questions from callers. The whole thing had a feeling of a low budget station, similar to college radio.

“Thank you for tuning into Angel Radio, I am B. Freely your guide to the gospels. Today we’re talking about angelic dream walking. Our next caller believes that she has been visited by God’s messenger himself, one of the big four, please could you describe his visit and his message for us.”

Gabriel snickered under his breath as the woman started to describe the encounter, apparently the arch-angel had come into her dreams appearing as a young James Dean and was reminding her to bring in the plants before the first frost. The radio host listened to her story before offering his input and analysis on what the dream could have meant. This continued for a couple more calls before Gabriel pulled into the parking lot of a liquor store, he motioned for Sam to follow him in.

“Gabe, we’re still working.” Sam warned as they stepped into the building, the door setting off a small bell that alerted the workers to their entrance. They started to walk towards the center of the store, still not seeing any one else in the building.

“It’s not for us, unless you see something you like. We can’t go over unannounced without some sort of gift. Help me find the shittiest beer in the building, the bigger the pack the better. I’m going to track down a case of wine.” Gabriel sat before splitting up from Sam leaving him standing in the middle of the store.

Sam didn’t quite understand why they were there but he went along with it. He had been asked to do stranger things for less. Wandering to the side wall he found stacks of all the beers he had seen in college and then some more. He didn’t waste too much time comparing the different qualities of beer when he spotted one that came in a forty-eight pack. Lifting it up he carried it to the front where he met up with Gabriel who had half a case of wine already up on the counter. The young man behind the counter looked tired and rang up their purchase without asking for their IDs. Gabriel paid and they brought the drinks to the car before heading back out.

Gabriel took them down side roads and through neighborhoods until they made their way to the backside of town. The car came to a stop outside an old squat building, wires and dishes strung up around and on the structure. A red light was on just above the door next to a large sign that read ‘Radio in use when light is on’. He motioned to Sam to help grab the cases out of the trunk, lifting the wine out himself. Ignoring the red light he knocked on the door in a distinct pattern. The door opened a small amount several lock chains visible from the outside.

“What do you want?” the voice sounded familiar to Sam, like he had heard it before. He was having trouble placing it however, it was so familiar.

“Come on, Devereaux. Let us in. I brought drinks!” Gabriel rolled his eyes as he lifted the box into view. Sam mimicked his action moving the case of beer to where it could be seen through the crack in the door. He was feeling silly standing in an open parking lot holding a huge case of beer and being denied access to a shitty radio station.

“We don’t want any. And besides you burned your code phrase.” It was the same voice that he had spoken to over the phone prior to the vampire case. This time there wasn’t any distortion to alter the voice, but Sam was certain it was the same person. He didn’t have the best impression of this person from what he had experienced, but he was willing to deal with the unpleasantries if Gabriel thought it might help them with their case, he had dealt with worse before.

“Then you don’t have to have any you paranoid asshat. I’ve got to talk to Balthazar about a case. Let us in.” Gabriel didn’t have time trying appease the man on the other side of the door, and he didn’t
want to play twenty questions either. However he needed their help, and in order to do that he needed to get inside the building. He was hoping that requesting the other man directly and dropping the fact that it was for a case would get them in quicker.

There was grumbling as the door closed, the sound of several locks being unlocked came before the door opened up all the way. A short man with thick glasses stood to the side of the door, furtively glancing around the empty lot before motioning for them to step inside. He pushed Gabriel in before standing before Sam and looking him up and down carefully measuring him up.

“Turn off your phone.” The words were grunted out, it was clear that he wasn’t going to let him any further into the building until he complied with his demands.

“What?” Sam was caught off guard by the sudden demand. There were no introductions, he still didn’t know the man’s name and he was being gruffly told what to do.

“I said: Turn. Off. Your. Phone! Milton, I thought you said this one was smart.” He shot the comment at Gabriel who just tilted his head at Sam. “Dummy, they can track you through them, and I’m pretty damn sure they can also turn them on so they function like a spy radio, able to hear things said around them.”

Sam made a show of setting the beer on the ground, followed by taking his phone out of his pocket and powering it off, every movement visible to the strange man in front of him. Once it was done, Frank stepped to the side of the hallway no longer blocking the passage. He motioned for the others to follow him as he led them to the end of the short hall where he pushed a door open.

“Gabriel I expect that if you’re stopping by you brought-” A thin blond man wearing a t-shirt with a very deep V-neck took off a pair of headphones and stood up, turning to face them. Seeing the box that Gabriel was carrying his face immediately lit up with a smile. “Oh you did! And who is this majestic moose? He has the mane of Samson, I wonder if he has his stamina too?”

“Lay off, he’s not interested.” Gabriel’s tone aimed at Balthazar was almost a growl, his eyes flashing dangerously before his friend backed down grabbing a bottle of wine instead. Gabriel turned back to his partner his usual smile plastered on his face as he waved his arm at the two guys he introduced them. “Sam, you’ve already met Frank Devereaux, this is Balthazar Freely, and somewhere around here is Ash.”

“Did someone call for Dr. Bad-ass? Woo!!” A door down the hall swung open and out stepped a man who looked like he could have fit in perfectly at a Lynyrd Skynyrd show complete with an impressive mullet and a dirty denim vest. He sauntered over and took the case of beer from Sam ripping the cardboard open and cracking open a can.

“And there he is. Don’t let his looks fool you, he’s brilliant. Probably the smartest person in the room. Ash, Devereaux, Balthazar, this is my partner Special Agent Sam Winchester. Sam, welcome to Angel Radio.” He fell back into the chair sitting in front of the microphone and a panel of lights and knobs extending his arms to include the room and the three motliest looking guys he had met.

The sound board was covered in different dials and slides, everything looked both high-tech and retro at the same time. Things looked like had been put together and built from scraps of other machines. On one wall were several layered computer screens, some were running their own background programs while others were open to web sites and chat boards. There was what looked like a radar satellite screen, as well as what Sam thought were jamming devices, recording devices, data scramblers, and other devices were scattered around the rooms he could see into. It was clear to anyone who stepped inside that this was much more than just a religious radio station.
Meet my Lone Gunmen aka Angel Radio. I am really excited about this paranoid trio. Maybe almost as excited as I was about my face eating moths... maybe not. I did really like those moths.
“Get the hell out of my chair Gabriel. I’ve got to switch things over to a three hour hymn and gospel if you’re here.” Balthazar pushed past Sam’s gawking and unceremoniously pulled Gabriel out of the chair. Once it was empty he deposited his own lanky form into it his hands started flying across the dials and settings. He pulled a headset over one ear and held a hand out shushing everyone around him. Sam witnessed the quietest destruction of an empty beer can during that time.

“Thank you for tuning into Angel Radio, where you can feel His spirituality through His words. Find your inner peace and let the sounds of His gospel soothe you. You don’t need a church to open up and receive His blessings.” Clicking the radio’s receiver off and pulling the headphones off, he tossed them to the side and glared at them. He reached out and found his wine bottle, uncorking it and taking a drink.

“What is it that you want?” He was equally as gruff with his partner as Frank was with him. Sam was starting to question whether or not these people were actually friends of Gabriel’s or not. So far Ash seemed the most level of the bunch of them and he was busy opening another can of the crappiest beer he had ever bought like he hadn’t had anything to drink in days.

“See Balthazar, we got a case on our hands and-” Gabriel started to explain things, taking steps closer to the other man despite the pointed glare he was getting. In fact his movements and body language almost spoke as a challenge. Sam couldn’t help but feel like there was an entire other conversation going on that he wasn’t hearing.

“And you want our help?” The interruption came as if Gabriel had already asked the question and he was just trying to clarify things. His voice suggested that he was annoyed and his head lolled back with his eye-roll. There was a faint smile on his face that Sam thought he caught before it disappeared.

“Bingo! See Sam, he’s good!” He waggled his finger in the direction of the grumpy radio host. The smile on his face was playful, as if this was all a game to him. Balthazar stood up and wrapped his arm around Gabriel’s shoulder, dropping himself into a slouch to meet the same height as him. Suddenly breaking out in laughter, his eyes scrunched up as he pointed at Sam, wheezing something along the lines of ‘should have seen your face.’

“They’re always this bad.” Ash finally spoke up bringing the can of beer to his lips again. He had moved closer to Sam’s side during the exchange between the two of them. He had managed to do it quietly too, causing Sam to jump slightly in surprise.

“Sometimes worse.” Devereux joined in from his other side, making Sam wonder if he was just too overwhelmed by the strangeness of everything to be completely in tuned with his environment. Usually it worked the other way and he would be turning to every creak or bump that happened. “They’re basically brothers, say they met in college. And they pull this shit with each other all the time.”

“You should see them at the bowling alley. We’ve been banned from one because of Balthazar escalating things. Word to the wise, do not engage them in a prank war. Nobody wins in that situation.” He tilted the can perpendicular to the ceiling draining the last drop into his open mouth. Sam filed that warning away, it had been years since he had pranked anyone, things usually built up quickly between him and his brother he stopped after the Nair shampoo incident.

“Milton you brought us bribes, now out with it. What do you need our help with that your all
powerful government can’t?” Devereux asked with a bite to his question. He didn’t take any of the beers or move to grab a wine bottle either, so the bribes were a null issue for him. Sam assumed that he wasn’t actually annoyed with either of them stopping by and that it was more of his base personality.

“It’s angels.” The answer fell so simply from Gabriel’s lips. The other three nodded along as if this was a regular request and they were expecting it.

Sam rolled his eyes as he leaned back against what seemed to be a stable section of shelving. He made sure that nothing would get dislodged from his actions before settling most of his weight on the structure. If something were to fall over or collapse in here, it would probably be very expensive, very loud, and might trap them. He must have exhaled an exasperated sigh because all eyes were on him.

“So he really is your skeptic partner!” Ash’s face lit up and he looked Sam up and down, as if seeing him for the first time and measuring him up.

Sam didn’t offer an immediate answer, but he forced a tight lip smile out. He had experienced and seen things while working with Gabriel that he couldn’t explain, or had no easy explanation. However he was still a skeptic when compared to his partner or even the three men he had just met. There were somethings that he felt that he wouldn’t ever accept.

“If you don’t think that the Church has its dirty little fingers in every government then you’re blind. They’re everywhere pulling the strings, wiping their fingerprints, and covering their tracks.” Devereux wiggled his thick fingers, Sam could see the dust and dirt caked under his fingernails. He maintained the annoyed tone to his voice, as if he was explaining things that were things everyone should already know.

“I have no doubt that they have their influence but I honestly think you’re giving them too much credit.” Sam crossed his arms across his chest as he continued to lean against the shelving. Whether he had purposefully put a physical separation from the others or it was a subconscious effort he stood opposite the rest of the people in the room.

“Oh? These are a group of people determined to maintain their control no matter the cost. 1978, Pope John Paul the first died just a month after taking his place, some claimed that it was an internal assassination over something as simple as bank fraud and high levels of corruption. But we think it was much more than that. We do agree that it was an assassination of the new pope at the time, but the reasons have been altered. They were unable to come up with a timely death ceremony after the fact because we think they were scrambling to take care of things. Primarily he had been involved with what some call ‘the bishop in white’. Not much is known about this and suspiciously the Vatican records have all but expunged mentions of it from their files. We think that John Paul received a visitation from an angel in a near direct manner and the powers within the church saw fit to keep their secrets secret.” Devereaux unfolded a conspiracy theory from within a conspiracy theory, something both elaborate but beautifully simple. Sam could feel his brain swimming, there was a reason these men associated with Gabriel, their ideas were just as wild as his were.

“Alright, but even if it does fit your theories. What is it that they stand to gain from any of it?” Sam was willing to keep an open mind about these things, especially after the whole vampire case. He had been exposed to new evidence but he still had to maintain a logical outlook on things. Even with these stories and theories he was still looking for the reasons behind them, what they stood to gain and why these things continued the way they did.

“Continued power. They keep people in the dark and they can keep them as sheep, easy to heard and manipulate. Word of the paranormal gets out and suddenly the sheep can start to protect themselves,
and no longer need to rely on defense from the big bad wolf. So if things don’t fit within their specific narrative it is a potential threat to their ideals and we’ve seen them deal with dissenting voices publicly. So how do you think they deal with things privately?” Balthazar’s words were wrapped in velvet, it was easy to hear why he was the voice of the radio. Things he said managed to sound better and hold more meaning when he delivered them. Sam had almost forgotten that he was still there while the shortest of the three went on at length about their conspiracy insights.

“The rhetoric is engrained in everything, constantly brought up and visible at all times, it’s a subtle reminder they are there, and potentially watching. It’s all just PR for them. Every piece of this country’s currency has signs of it. Little things like receipts, plastic bags, fortune cookies, they all have it. They put it out there and let it become part of society, you don’t notice until it gets pointed out how heavily it’s being pushed.” Devereux finished the chain of thought with a heavy hitter, it made sense that they would normalize their agenda so that it wouldn’t seem like it was a real issue if it was ever brought up. Sam started to think back on how often he had heard phrases like ‘faith heals all’ and how often he had ignored religious mantras because of how normal they were. It was difficult to think of everything he hadn’t noticed.

“Not for nothing guys but think you can help us on this one?” Gabriel interrupted the lesson in conspiracy theories bringing the attention back to the issues they came with today. He pulled out a case file that he had stuffed inside his suit jacket.

“What exactly do you want us to do?” Balthazar leaned into Gabriel’s space, looking over his shoulder at the file’s documents. If there was something in there that meant anything to him his face didn’t give it away. He read the pages visible to him as if he was reading the lease agreements to a new apartment, as if it was important information but not interesting information.

“These are the details of the condition of the victims we’ve seen so far. I want to see if you can come up with a pattern and predict the location for our next one.” Gabriel handed the file off, Devereaux quickly reaching out and snapping it up. He skimmed it over nodding at a few things, his eyes widening and quickly flipping past the page that had the pictures of the state of the victim. Sam didn’t blame him for his reaction to them, death was a difficult thing to witness and when it was messy and gruesome it was that much more difficult.

“Alright so you need eyes in the sky for wings on the ground. That’s easy stuff, try to give me a challenge here Milton.” Ash smiled as he looked up from the chair he had taken. It sat in front of several computer monitors, each had different things up and processing. A couple of them seemed to feed into each other, Sam had no idea how any of it worked especially when he noticed that some of the scrambling equipment and satellite feeds were also hooked up to some of the computers.

“Ash, we’re talking end game movement, think you can track that?” Gabriel asked arching his eyebrows, his usual smirk was gone, replaced with a look of concern. That alone was enough of a signal that this was serious work that he was asking of them, that it wasn’t just a social call to show off his partner.

“Can I track that? You are talking to Dr. Badass, watch and learn as the master does his thing.” Leaning back and interlacing his fingers before stretching them, palms forward. Ash spun on his stool and his fingers were flying over computer keys as he flipped through screens of green on black. Sam watched in awe at the speed he was able to get through the data, entranced in his work. He pushed off the shelving and took a step so that he could watch the work being done.

“You’re going to let him watch you work, Ash? I would have blindfolded him at least.” Devereaux complained loud enough that Sam could hear him, he figured that he wasn’t being subtle about it so that he would know exactly how the older man felt. He ignored him the best he could and
concentrated on watching the data fly across the screens.

“And put earplugs in them too, Frank. So they can’t figure out your keystrokes. Let the kid watch, if he can keep up.” Ash chuckled as he worked at his own speed. Highlighting and pulling information from each screen into a master screen, he started compiling a map of information. Sam was impressed at how he was able to not only get all this information, much of which he assumed was gathered by questionable methods.

“What do you mean by that Gabriel?” Balthazar turned to Gabriel, his face full of concern. Grabbing him by his shoulder he pulled him down the hall a little bit away from the other people, giving them some distance and a small amount of privacy.

“We’ve got several empty shells sitting in the morgue, look like they were sprayed down with an acid squirt bottle.” Gabriel was able to explain, even if his friend had already seen the images in the files. There were things he wanted to go over with him, but he wasn’t certain of them himself and didn’t want to start spreading things without knowing the full details.

“Energy burn?” He whispered, his eyes growing big. If it was energy burn than it narrowed down the potential list of causes rather effectively. Balthazar was used to Gabriel coming by both announced and unannounced with bits of theories, or asking for help. They had a bit of an arrangement regarding him turning a blind eye to how they got their information and helping them remain in the shadows. It worked out for both of them best that way.

“That was my first thought too, but it’s different, like ice different.” Gabriel’s voice was low but it still conveyed the danger and fear of what he thought this could mean. He came to them in hopes that they could track down this incident before it got out of hand, but he was also hoping that they would be able to prove his initial instincts wrong. “You hear anything on the radio?”

“Actually, yes we have. But it wasn’t anything that sounded big enough to bring you in on. Just typical movement. You hear tonight’s bit on angelic dream walking?” Balthazar asked, they had received several calls that night. Like most nights he played the role of dream interpreter and therapist for people with overactive imaginations. However this night there was one that stood out to him.

“Yeah, apparently the messenger is a young James Dean.” Gabriel nearly snorted in laughter again at the idea of it. They had turned the radio on just in time for that particular caller to explain her situation. She was one of the more imaginative callers that Balthazar ended up interpreting for. He wasn’t sure why he had brought it up again though, since her call wasn’t in the vein that they were looking for.

“No a couple callers before that. Young woman has been having reoccurring dreams where she’s being asked to let someone in. Someone who claims they can assure her a place in heaven. It seemed pretty standard though.” Blathazar shrugged his shoulders, he was going to have to listen again to the recording of that caller see if there wasn’t something that he had missed while he was talking to her. He had new information now that would change his perception of the call.

“Lemme guess, is she from Bridgeport Connecticut?” Gabriel asked as if he already knew the answer but didn’t want to hear it. He looked back down the hall, watching as his partner stood engrossed with the actions of the two hackers at the screens. Smiling as he took in the details of how his face would alter between scrunching up in thought or confusion to lighting up in awe and excitement. It was beautiful and he wanted to take pictures so he could show Sam just how he saw him. At least he knew his partner didn’t hate him after how he had acted. Maybe Castiel was right and he should just go for it.

“Yes, but how did you…” Balthazar asked, his eyebrows knotting in confusion, he was used to
Gabriel just knowing things but it still caught him off guard at times.

“It’s where the last two shells came from. Or nearby. I need to know if he’s walking around.” He didn’t take his eyes off of tall agent, he knew he couldn’t ask him to sit this one out as much as he wanted to.

“GOT SOMETHING!” Ash called out, Sam had to quickly lean back to avoid being smacked in the face with an enthusiastic arm. Frank pushed them both out of his way and sent the current screen to one of the larger ones up on the wall so everyone could see. Then he set about working on an adjacent computer to pull up as much information as he could in the short period of time. Sam stood back letting him do his thing, yet again impressed with the work he was watching.

“Are these your cards?” Ash joked as the pictures of people started to pop up on the center screen, Balthazar and Gabriel walking over so they could see the images. Gabriel made sure to put himself at Sam’s side forcing Balthazar to stand on his other.

“How… How’d you do that? That’s every person we have in the morgue with these same symptoms. But not this one.” Sam tapped the screen on the face of a young woman. “She’s not in ours, where is she located?”

“She shouldn’t be in any morgue unless she works there, this person is still alive.” Devereaux pointed out that the last known location of this woman was a hospital that she had been admitted to earlier in the day. The records only indicated as much and nothing had been updated in regards to whether she was still alive.

“Hey Balth, what was the name of your dream caller tonight? Because this name looks awfully familiar.” Ash added, looking back at the three people standing behind him. There wasn’t much open space in the room, yet somehow they were managing five people behind the walls of computers, two of them sitting next to each other in reach of the keyboards.

“We’re picking up that same strange frequency listen here.” Devereaux fiddled with the speakers and a couple of the dials until noise started to come from the puffy headset. He lifted the headphones up offering them to his co-conspirator.

“Play it over the speakers. I want them to hear it too.” Balthazar gently placed his hand on the headphones pushing them away from him while making his request. The other man set about the necessary motions to redirect the sounds through the in house speakers.

A garbled static came through, it sounded like layers upon layers of noise. No one thing was standing out but there was a slight pattern to the crescendos and warbles. Sam leaned in over the two men at the keyboards, getting closer to the speaker. The visual representation of the sound on one of the screens spiked and dipped highlighting the patterns in the static.

“Can you slow this down at all?” Sam asked, his eyes glued to the screen, he thought he had heard something through the noise.

“This is slowed down.” Frank offered, although he reached out and turned a dial. A loud squelch came from the speakers before the same static continued from before.

“There!” Sam exclaimed pointing at the screen with an excited jab, “It sounds like a chorus… A chorus of something.”

Gabriel and Balthazar exchanged a glance as Sam pointed at the screen again. It wasn’t clear if they had heard anything other than the garble of white noise static.
“There again. It sounds like… Bees? I really thought I heard something, sorry.” He took a step back, apologizing for his interruption of their playing the frequency. Ash reached out and placed a hand on his shoulder reassuringly.

“We always think we hear something, that’s why we’re working on an algorithm to try cracking the code. We think these kinds of recordings are messages that have had their frequencies twisted and garbled before transmission. They could also be transmitted through filters and blockers, we’ve done similar.” He nodded getting excited to share some of the work they had managed in their study of the signals they received. “Actually we’ve gotten close in trying to recreate it with some effect on the radio, you know simple subliminal messages. The usual things, government is lacing clouds with chemtrails, the reptilians are taking control.”

Sam could only nod at him, he wondered how any of that worked in their favor or if these were just three people bent on seeding anarchy and free thought. He had a feeling that he was going to be leaving Angel Radio with more questions than answers. At least they had a location to start at and a face and name of a person to find when they got there. This den of crazy was enough for one night, they still had to put in request for travel and requisition either plane tickets or prepare for a long car ride up the east coast. It would depend on how immediate of a threat this case was shaping up to be. He looked to his partner for any sign of what their next move should be.

“We can catch the morning flight up to the Sikorsky airport first thing tomorrow. We’re going to want to be the first on scene to question this person since CDC won’t be involved we also carry their clearance for this one. And Samstar, we’ve got to be careful of the same kinds of people from our last case coming in on this one too.” Gabriel mentioned to prepare them for any potential encounters that might attempt to derail them.

An alarm sounded on one of the machines behind them, spewing out slips of paper with numbers on it. Ash was the first one to address the situation while Devereaux started typing away on the computers. The feed of sounds from the speakers came to an end and the screen with the faces of their victims was updated their most recent victim was listed as rapidly declining state of health. The addition of another face had appeared as well, a man with messy blond hair, his location or whereabouts were not listed, and he didn’t fit the same profile as the others as he was still healthy just active in a recent, and very strange, police report.

“I think you two should get going as soon as you can it looks as if your schedule just got sped up. Another body has just about dropped and it looks like you’re set up for another.” Ash had rejoined Frank at the computers and the two of them were going over the printouts alongside the new slew of information that was scrolling across their screens.

“He’s right.” Balthazar caught Sam’s attention, trying to be another voice of reason in the light of new bad news. Even he could tell that there was a certain level of urgency and danger to this case now. “Gabriel’s right, it’s only a matter of time before the Church moves in on this. They’ve done it before, similar cases easily wiped from history. The last time it was because of a single leper who had wandered out of their care. The only thing working in your favor this time is the scale, there’s been more people involved this time and close to a major city. We’ll work on trying to get into their systems to help you out along the way. I’ll be sure to call if there’s any news on the radio. And Gabe, if it is him, be careful.”

Gabriel nodded as he pulled his friend in for a hug, patting him heartily on his back. The embrace was short and as soon as it broke Balthazar turned back into the room and joined the orchestrated chaos of the other two. He quickly walked out of the building, unlatching a string of locks that they wouldn’t be able to relock from the outside. The cold air hit them harshly reminding them that fall was in full swing, Gabriel was on the phone the minute they stepped out of the building.
“Singer, we’re heading to Bridgeport Connecticut, a new body just came in. Same details. We’re going to swing by the office to grab overnight bags that we have stuffed under our desks and grab tickets from the requisition officer.” There was noise coming from the other side as their supervisor said something, but Sam couldn’t make it out. His own phone came to life at that moment with its jingle. “One more thing. Can you tell me if Novak and Winchester are still working late tonight? Good, keep them there.”

He turned his phone off and tossed it into the cup holder as he started up the car, clicking in his seatbelt he pushed the car into gear and hastily took them down different streets. The Hoover building came into view, lit up against the dull night sky, there was enough light pollution that very little of the actual night sky could be seen. He left the car running in front of the building, nodding to one of the several security guards that patrolled the area as he neared the entrance. Sam was right behind him, able to keep up with his log strides, he had been unable to ask the questions that were running through his mind since they left the radio station, but they would have some time once they got to the airport.

“Cassie!” Gabriel called out to the figure in a trench coat waiting near the stairwell for them, Dean wasn’t too far away, hands shoved deep in his pockets as he looked agitated and tired. “Hey I’ve got… We’ve got…”

“A case. I know, I heard the details and understand that neither you nor Sam will be able to make our dinner tomorrow. I am upset, but I can deal with it.” Castiel’s gravelly voice was hard to read, but the intent was truthful and sympathetic. He was also a special agent and knew just how tumultuous the work could be and how it could take you away at a moment’s notice.

“I can make it up to you Cassie, you know I will.” Gabriel pleaded while making promises he wasn’t sure he would be able to keep. He really just wanted to make sure that Castiel knew what was going on and personally apologize for not being able to make it to the dinner. He didn’t know that Sam was also invited but he should have expected it.

“That is not the point. But I understand the nature of this case, and Gabriel.” He grabbed the shorter man’s shoulders and turned that piercing gaze to him, their eyes meeting and neither of them blinking. “There is nothing wrong with a tactical retreat if necessary. We can call upon the garrison if needed.”

Gabriel didn’t break eye contact, his own honey tinted eyes bore into the blue of the other agent. Their staring contest could have continued indefinitely if the Winchester brothers hadn’t taken the time to interrupt.

“Cas, you’re doing the whole Eye of Ra thing again.” Dean announced, his voice tired and disinterested. It was clear that he had spent the whole day doing something tedious and boring and just wanted to eat something and pass out.

“My apologies Dean. We should be going home now.” Castiel immediately stood down and faced his partner. He nodded at the other agents before the two of them left, Dean leaned into Castiel’s side as they reached the end of the hall. Gabriel smiled softly as the two of them disappeared out of their line of sight. Turning to face his own partner he motioned to the door of the stairwell.

“You want to grab our bags or stop by the requisition desk at this late of an hour?” He gave his partner the option. The late shift was never the happiest group of people, but they were the ones who were most used to the strange and bizarre things that came with the dark. Sam opened the door signaling his choice.

It didn’t take long for them to gather their needed things and meet back up at the car, it was still
running from how they left it. One of the night guards was standing by it looking into the windows, he gave Gabriel a disapproving glare as the agent ran around the other side of the car. Sam opened the back door and tossed in their bags before taking his seat up front. Before he could open his mouth to ask the questions that were burning inside of him, Gabriel spoke first.

“I bet you’ve got like a billion questions Samuli, and I’ll answer most of them, but let me offer first that you do not need to do this mission. I’m giving you a free pass at this one.” Gabriel spared a glance at his partner, his eyes sad and worried. He didn’t want to risk him with something that, best case scenario, would kill him.

“No, Gabe. I’m going with you, we’re partners and we do this together.” Sam was not going to stand down on this point. He was tired of being pushed away by Gabriel, he was going to be there no matter the situation, and this was still his job no matter the danger.

“I was afraid you’d say that.” Gabriel grumbled, readjusting his grip on the steering wheel as he took them quickly to the highway that would eventually get them to the airport. They were lucky that flights in and out of the Greater New York City area were almost always available. And Gabriel was grateful that the airport was close by.
They were quickly moved through TSA and were boarding their flight without waiting at the gate for any length of time. Sam had tucked their bags into the overhead bin able to reach it easier, he knew the flight would be short and they would most likely jump right into things when they landed. That gave him just the time on the flight to work things out with Gabriel, he wasn’t sure if he would have time for all his questions to be answered, he was going to have to prioritize them as best as he could. He fell into the seat next to Gabriel, most of the plane was empty as it was a mid-week red-eye flight so while he could have chosen any seat he wanted, he stuck next to his partner. The empty flight also meant that they would be able to talk more about the mission at hand without risk of breaking any confidential agreements.

“You’ve got me cornered for at least forty-five minutes, I’ll answer what I can.” Gabriel said with some resignation, he knew it was coming, and it was honestly long overdue. He was surprised that his partner had managed to hold out his line of questioning for this long when he personally wouldn’t have been able to. He was also mentally preparing to distance himself from Sam emotionally as well if needed. His heart was breaking at the idea of having to push him even further away, he wanted out before the first question was even asked.

“Who were those guys? Angel Radio, and the three amigos?” Sam started with something that had been eating at him since he stepped into the station. Nothing seemed to fit with the idea of it being an actual radio station, they had way too much high tech gear for just that. Not to mention the level of paranoia they expressed was possibly the highest he’d seen.

Gabriel had to take a moment to process what the question was. He hadn’t been expecting something so simple to answer. “They actually are a radio station, if that’s what you were wondering. You heard them in the car and we can probably pick the station up again when we touch down.”

Sam gave him an exasperated look, he didn’t have time for stupid answers. Gabriel knew exactly what he was asking with that question and instead skirted around the answer. The look worked because Gabriel quickly picked back up with his explanation of the group that they had gotten their intel from.

“Alright, so they’re not a conventional radio by any means. They’re kind of a three person cyber-militia, and probably a national security threat. Ash says he went to MIT on a full scholarship, his computer skills don’t lie, he can get in and out of just about any computer system without being detected. Frank is just as good as Ash, but he is better at creating counterfeit identities and avoiding being tracked. His paranoia is his life. And Balth. Well…” Gabriel watched as Sam nodded along. He was spilling details on people who trusted him, he felt conflicted in betraying their trust and avoiding answering Sam’s question. He figured from their reaction to him earlier that the Angel Radio guys liked his partner well enough.

“He’s his own deal. Met him back in college, he was at seminary, I was just as surprised then when I found out. It didn’t seem to fit his lifestyle of excess, but he went through it and worked for the church for a while before witnessing something that caused him to leave. I think radio suits him better. Now the three of them work together to uncover the truth to some of the conspiracies going on, generally harmless stuff. At least they’re on our side?” Gabriel offered as Sam gave him a look of concern. He could understand the unease of working with known hackers, but they had always come through for him, and they hadn’t come up in any security briefings that he knew of. Also they
“Fine. If you vouch for them that’s all I need really. I trust you Gabe.” Sam nodded at him with a soft smile. Whether they had gotten good information or not from them still stood to be proven, however it was better and more than what they had prior to seeing them. Without their help they wouldn’t have had the name of the next victim and would just be playing catch up.

“Really that’s it?” Gabriel asked surprised at the ease with which his partner accepted it. They were a shady group of people at best and did things below the radar of what was legal. He didn’t think that Sam shouldn’t have accepted them so easily since he had a lawyer’s background. If he didn’t know them, he wouldn’t trust them. Sam was just willing to trust him on it.

“Second question.” Sam shuffled as he tried turning himself in the small chair so that he was facing the other agent better. Suddenly Gabriel was nervous again, the first question was so simple and easy for him to answer he was waiting for the hard questions to start. Sam cleared his throat, trying to keep his voice level as he asked his question.

“It’s a two part question. First part… What is your relation to Cas?” He had overheard some of their conversation in the records room and the brief exchange he witnessed earlier had him questioning things. There was something there but with Castiel being so difficult to read it was hard to tell exactly what.

“Jealous?” he asked with a wiggle of his eyebrows, it wasn’t what he was expecting for the question but he went with it, it was easiest for him to hide behind humor. Even if Sam had already figured out that Castiel and his brother were a ‘thing’ he couldn’t help but feel the surge of jealousy at the familiarity the two of them shared. Watching as Sam’s face flushed at the accusation Gabriel filed away the thought and softened his tone as he answered the question. “We’re… cousins, is the best way to put it. Related would be the best term.”

“I thought you hated your family.” Sam responded after a thoughtful pause. Once again Gabriel was impressed at how well Sam was able to pay attention to details and remember them later. He knew there was something special about his partner from the moment he met him although he still wasn’t sure the reason for this promising young agent to be partnered to a dead end department.

“Not all of them are major douche nozzles and bowls of soggy dicks, just most of them.” He said quietly, he told Sam that he was willing to answer questions but being asked about his family was something he wasn’t sure he would be able to do.

“Well that answers the second part of my question.” Sam announced with a small grin, Gabriel never talked about his family in any positive aspect. But he never had a bad thing to say about his brother’s partner. He doubted that Dean knew of this, but now that it was pointed out he could see some of the similarities. The intense staring was one thing, Gabriel wasn’t as

“That my family is bowl of soggy dicks?” Gabriel asked incredulously, not following Sam’s line of questioning.

“No, why you were invited to dinner tomorrow.” Sam nudged him gently, “I figured Dean wanted to talk about something or had something big he wanted to tell me from the way he asked. If you’re family for Cas then it must involve the two of them. Huh, I’m happy for them.” He leaned back in his seat with a big smile as he figured it out for himself. He really was happy for his brother, he worked hard and had cared for him as they grew up, and it was good to see him with someone who would care for him too.

“You know, you’re not a bad detective Sam-o.” He pointed at him, a smile crossing his own face.
He had already known about it but he didn’t figure that Dean would have wanted Sam there too, he should have though.

“Just one more question.” Sam was nearing the end of his interrogation of his partner for information. He knew he was given a free pass to ask whatever he wanted and he was about to take advantage of it.

“Only one more?” There were so many other things Gabriel could imagine that he would ask if the roles were reversed. He wasn’t sure how he could only have just a single question to ask, maybe a million questions, but not just one.

“Depends on how you answer this one. Do pick-up lines work on you?” Sam asked with a devious smile, a slight bite to his lower lip, and lifted his eyebrows.

“What? No. Usually I’m the one telling them, and trust me they really don’t work.” He was still confused, Sam had just one question and it was that? He could have asked about the plague or the men in black or more about his conspiracy theories or just about anything.

“Ok then I’ll be direct, go to dinner with me?” He had cornered his partner and wanted an answer this time. He had been running around feeling pushed and pulled, sometimes he thought he saw a small sparkle of something behind those honey colored eyes. Something other than sadness and guilt that he caught every time he pushed him.

Gabriel wasn’t sure how to react to how smooth that was. His mind stuttered before he finally grinned up at Sam. Why not give it a try? It seemed to work out for Castiel, maybe he should give it a chance, what was the worst that could happen? He didn’t let himself finish that line of thought or he would be pushing him away even harder, maybe try to make him leave the case and head back.

“Yes.”

“I’m tired of you flirting and then running off, why can’t we try without you… wait, did you say yes?” Sam had to ask, he wasn’t sure that he had heard him correctly or if he had just heard what he wanted to.

“Yes, S’amore. I will go to dinner with you.” Gabriel chuckled at Sam for preparing to defend himself and try to get him to say yes, he really was persistent. Well he could be too, and if it meant being stubborn about keeping him safe he could definitely do that.

“What no more questions?” Gabriel teased him, poking him in his side, trying to get him to react.

“No, I’m good for now. If there’s anything really important I know you’ll let me know. Besides, we’re nearly there.” Sam sat back comfortably in his chair a warm smile spreading across his face. No matter how the case panned out, he knew he at least had an honest date to look forward to now.

The plane pulled into the gate nearly half-past midnight, Sam had gotten their bags out of the overhead bin using his height to their advantage. They made their way through the small and eerily empty airport to the rental facility, as they passed closed and locked up gift shops and cafes Sam started to feel a twist in his stomach. There was just one person working all three rental facilities and Gabriel was able to get them a car with enough legroom up front that Sam wasn’t squished with his knees against the dash. They had the pick of the lot with no one else present, everything seemed surreal as they walked through the lifeless lot to their car.

“My hesitation is strong today, the indications all point away. To something better, for everyone. Has something gone astray!?” The radio came to life loudly, startling Sam as Gabriel reached out to
turn it down. The tribal-like rhythmic claps, snaps and stomps accompanied the vocals and trumpets singing out of the speakers. They faded away as the volume was turned all the way down, leaving the two agents to calm after their initial jumps.

Even driving down roads lit up from overhead lights without another car present on the roads was strange. Sam felt like something just wasn’t right, this was just a stone’s throw away from New York City, there should have been a lot more action than they were seeing. They were grateful that rental cars came with a full tank because every gas station they passed appeared abandoned, some had their lights off, and others had theirs on but still gave off the vibe that they were unattended.

Things remained quiet as they pulled into the local police station, lights were off indicating that the building was closed. Something else that didn’t sit well with Sam, he had never known a police station to close, there was always a night shift present to deal with late night emergencies. He motioned for Gabriel to park the car while he got out. His footsteps echoed on the pavement as he crossed the lot to the large doors. Pulling on them he found that they were locked, going around the building he tried the other doors finding them all closed tight.

“We’ll check again in the morning, let’s get over to the hospital check in on the lady.” Gabriel offered as he returned to the car. He was also worried about how empty things were, this was very unusual and frustrating. For being so close to a major city it was strange how much things were closed at one in the morning, they hadn’t even passed an open bar on their way there.

The roads to the hospital were just as quiet, they seemed to be the only things ghosting around the town. Nothing else was moving, however they did pass places that had their lights on, and they could see the flickering of tvs still on late in the night in a few windows. The flickering of the lights should have been a relief to see in the windows but Sam couldn’t help but feel like they were wrong too.

The parking lot to the hospital seemed like it was trapped in a moment of time, cars were parked haphazardly in and near spots. While emergency vehicles lights flickered under the hospital’s entrance awning. They could see movement inside the building where the lights were on, taking in the whole building Sam saw that there was an entire wing of the hospital with its lights off.

Stepping into the building they were met with the scene of triage chaos, they pulled out their badges as a haggard nurse approached them. He thrust facemasks and gloves at both of them before moving on to attend the wet coughing of an elderly person in one of the waiting chairs. The air was filled with the smell of disinfectants, rubber, and copper, they pulled the mask down muting some of the scents. Sam wasn’t sure if the activity in here was any better than the inactivity around the town. There was still a twisted feeling in his gut as they walked towards the nurse’s station.

“You two look too healthy to be here, leave before it’s too late.” The nurse behind the station had a gaunt sunken look to her face. Her words came across as a morbid warning, Sam was ready to leave this building, but remained at Gabriel’s side as he took charge of the case.

“We’re looking for someone.” Gabriel leaned on the curved counter, removing himself when a withered gaze was cast in his direction. He casually brushed the front of his suit, the rubber of the gloves pulling at the fabric with every motion.

“Everyone is.” The reply was just as charged and mysterious as they warning was. She slowly stapled papers together and placed them in corresponding files. These files were then placed on the desk for another nurse to take them and run off towards another patient.

“She was admitted yesterday and may have passed away last night? We’re hoping that we’re not too late to either talk with her or the doctor that handled her case?” Gabriel pushed again, she was the
last person to display the symptoms they were tracking. They needed to know more about what led up to her contracting whatever this was. And he was particularly interested in what her dreams had been about after talking with Balthazar.

“She’s not here. And neither is the doctor. They’ve been moved.” She spoke as if she was no longer present in her own mind, as if everything was just going through the motions. She did recognize their request but her answers were just as cryptic as they had been. They weren’t getting anywhere with this nurse, but all the others were busy moving quickly between people sitting in chairs and those propped up or laying out on gurneys.

“Where? Please we’re agents with the FBI and they could have important information that would shed light on our case.” Sam finally found his voice and spoke up, trying his best to ignore the slow measured movements of the person behind the desk. They seemed to move as if in a dream, he made eye contact with them and immediately regretted it. Their eyes were cloudy as if covered with smoky cataracts, a small welling of red liquid spilled over their tear duct and a tear of what appeared to be blood trickled down her face.

Gabriel made a motion of wiping under his own eye, the nurse caught the action and repeated it. The blood smeared across her cheek, looking down at her finger now colored red by the action, she slowly looked up and met their stares.

“I’m sorry, you can follow me now. Dawn? I’m clocking out now.” She called out to a fellow nurse who only nodded sadly as she saw the smeared blood on her coworker’s face. Pulling her badge off she tacked it up on the bulletin board along with a few other badges, they were all placed under a hastily scrawled label that read ‘Final Shift’. It was all very ominous and Sam didn’t like the feeling.

The nurse walked through the busy lobby towards a hallway that had people that seemed to be in the worst conditions. Gabriel and Sam stayed close to each other, occasionally brushing against the other as if to reassure themselves that they were still there. The wet coughs seemed to be more common and more frequent, the smell of copper and blood was more pronounced. People’s hands and forearms were smeared with a fine layer of blood, their mouths were ringed in caked blood around their lips. Blood had dripped onto the floor in some places where people were coughing the heaviest.

They turned down the hall and the sounds of people hacking were slowly distanced behind them. Lights in rooms were off and the lights at the end of the hall were flickering on and off intermittently. As they approached the end of the hall all sounds were left behind them wrapping them in an eerie quiet with just their footsteps. Passing through a set of double doors the nurse stopped them and pointed at bio hazard suits hanging just inside the door.

“You two are too healthy to be here.” She repeated before shuffling into the section where the lights flickered heavily leaving the two agents behind. They stared at each other as she disappeared in the gloom of the end of the hallway. Her steps faded away, the sound swallowed by the darkness.

“Do we have to go down there?” Sam asked even when he knew the answer. There was something about this whole thing that was off for him, he hadn’t felt right since they started driving from the airport. He knew that they would most likely get answers to several of their questions if they just went down the long and poorly lit hospital corridor where their cryptic nurse disappeared.

“You want to use your ‘Get out of Jail Free’ card now?” Gabriel teased him, although he could also tell there was something off about this, it was calming to turn back to humor. If he could make them laugh going into this maybe it would help them deal with whatever they might find.

“No, but Gabe. There is something really, really weird about this. First I thought it was because of how late it was that the town seemed empty, but we’re close enough to New York that there should
still be *something* going on. And the police station was closed, police stations are never closed.” He hadn’t missed the teasing but he needed to get out how he was feeling in words. He needed to explain that something was very wrong with this case. “Also this place, it’s like everyone has tuberculosis of the soul.”

“That’s not a wrong way to put it.” Gabriel was surprised at how well Sam had put the feeling of the hospital into words, these people were sick with something. It was similar to what initially brought them in on the case but was still very different. “But this is where we’ve got to go, at least it seems that way. Come on, suit up. Let’s get ourselves some answers, Samwise.”

With the hazmat suits on they shuffled their way into the darkness, Sam had been smart enough to take the flashlight out before putting his own on providing them some illumination as they entered into the section where it appeared power was out. They could feel eyes following them as they walked past darkened rooms full of shadows. The hairs on the back of his neck raised as Sam thought he heard the sound of something being dragged across the floor behind them from one room to another. Despite the feelings and the sounds every time they looked into a room it was always empty, machines unplugged and sheets draped over the beds.

Gabriel grabbed at his elbow and pulled him against the wall of a side corridor, his finger held up in front of his face signaling for quiet. He reached down and covered the beam of light from the flashlight with the palm of his hand muffling the light. They stood like that, Gabriel nearly pressed into Sam’s front, until he was able to hear the squeaking of a wobbly wheel coming down the hall they had just been in. As it got closer he was able to make out the soft sound of someone humming to themselves, it was a cheerful little ditty and seemed very out of place in that moment. Sam’s body tensed up as he watched a gurney pushed past where they were standing just moments earlier, there was a body stretched out over it, the lesions on it were visible from where they stood. The feet swung in rhythm to the tune, the arms were moving as if motioning to an invisible orchestra. The sight was surreal and the sounds faded as the person was pushed down the hall.

“I think that was her.” Gabriel’s whisper was barely audible through the two layers of bio hazard suit, but Sam was able to make out every word. The person they were looking for wasn’t dead, in fact she was more alive than the others who had shown the same signs. All the others were dead. He pulled away from Sam and the wall uncovering the light in the process.

Sam followed him as the resumed their walk down the dark corridor, now they had a target which gave him something to ground himself with. He was no longer walking aimlessly through a post-apocalyptic location. That was enough to get himself to move forward again, if they had a purpose and Gabriel was with him he knew he was ready to walk into whatever was coming next.

A soft light flickered at the end of the hallway from inside a room. They pushed forward, the sounds of footsteps retreating away from them the closer they got. Windows were blocked with blankets or boarded up in places, shadows danced in the dark as the small light flickered like flame. Turning into the door frame they were greeted with the sight of a doctor slumped over in a chair his eye sockets burned empty, skin erupted in lesions, and a small candle set beside him on a table. The bed was occupied with the woman from the pictures they had seen on the screens at Angel Radio, this was their person.

Sam knocked gently on the door frame to get her attention before they walked into the room with her. She looked up, her eyes were shadowed in a dark fog, red around the edges as if she had been crying. The nearest waste bin confirmed that assumption with tear and blood stained tissues in it.

“Hello, you two are very healthy for being in this part of the hospital. Have you come to see me?” Her voice picked up cheerfully at their appearance. She leaned forward in her bed and waved them
in, motioning to the chairs nearest to her for them to take a seat. “My doctor is sleeping right now, always so tired after we go for a tour of the wing. Everyone is always so tired here.”

“Miss? I’m Special Agent Sam Winchester and this is Special Agent Gabriel Milton. We just had a few questions for you regarding your illness?” Sam rocked back and forth on his feet, not wanting to touch anything in this room, even with the hazmat suit to protect him. Darkness seemed to cling to things here like tar.

“Gabriel? Like the angel? God’s messenger, he brought the news to Mother Mary as well as spread the word to Muhammad. Is he also not the angel of judgement? Are you here to judge me for letting him in and giving to him what he so greatly desired for the small gift of seeing my daughter once again?” Her face turned to Gabriel her eyes staring unblinking at him as if she could see into his very soul. He broke the eye contact first, looking instead to Sam who was trying to not get agitated with this person. There was something wrong with her, her mind seemed fragmented and was grabbing out at anything that could bring her a piece of normalcy.

“Miss, who is ‘he’? Who did you talk with? Is he the one responsible for this? We need you to help us if we are going to try to solve this.” He tried to direct her thoughts back to his questions and the reason they were there in the first place. This illness that people were contracting was killing, and it was now spreading from the looks of it. They were going to need more information if they were to isolate this and possibly prevent the further spread of it. She was their only lead at the moment. The only living person who might have come in contact with their patient number zero.

“Have you ever encountered an angel before? They are pure light and energy. Having to share a body with one is like being strapped to a comet. Everything is gorgeous and sparkles, but it is intense energy and overwhelming presence. The best you can do is hold on for the ride and try to enjoy.” Her mind blissfully ignored his line of questioning instead following its own path. Her face broke into a soft smile as she explained what seemed to be the most incredible experience. She lifted her hands her fingers wiggling as if she was trying to illustrate the comet of energy.

“Are you claiming that this was a result of angels?” Sam exhaled deeply as he tried again to push her to answer one of his questions. They weren’t getting anywhere with her, but they needed to or they would be back at square one. He could feel Gabriel brush into his side as they stood just inside the room, it was reassuring that his partner was right there.

“No, just one, and he was beautiful.” She sighed wistfully, for her this was much more than a dream-like memory but something real. Tilting her head in a way that reminded him of Castiel she asked him a question directly, somehow he knew it was for him and not for the man at his side. “Do you remember your first white Christmas? Where the world was bathed in a blanket of pure white, the snow looked flawless, the outside was calm and quiet? And the way the lights from the rest of the world left it to sparkle as if it was made from crystals? Did you want to preserve its beauty for what it was and enjoy the gift, or were you ready on childlike nerves to get out and destroy the face of perfection in an act of chaos and expression?”

“What does this have to do with-” He was cut off from continuing his outburst.

“He is the perfect snow, sparkling under the lights, able to sparkle without any light at all. And we, we are the chaotic children spreading destruction. He showed this to me. He opened my eyes to the truth. We are destruction, and he is willing to stop all that for us.” Now her smile seemed to exceed the natural stretch of her mouth. It didn’t reach her lifeless eyes, the flicker of the candlelight extinguished with sputter of smoke. Shadows grew stronger with the lack of natural light, filling the corners and spilling out from under the furniture.

“This is all fine and great lady, but where is he now?” Gabriel finally spoke up, letting the light of
Sam’s flashlight replaced the soft candlelight in keeping the shadows from reaching them. He was done with this, they needed out and he was going to ask direct questions until they got the answers they needed.

“Where would you go if you sparkled with or without lights? The stage, he’s gone to the old theater on Pleasure Beach. Said he was waiting for someone important before starting the show. New York will soon be blessed, can you imagine what the city would look like under a layer of sparkling snow?” With that she closed her eyes and leaned back into her bed, they watched as tendrils of dark reached up from under her and wrapped her in their silence. They quickly retreated back out of the room as the shadows made the room appear empty to their eyes.

“Samattack? We need to get going. We can’t let this spread, especially not to a city as large a New York. It’s a world travel hub, whatever this is will be at pandemic levels in a matter of just days.” He said as he let go of Sam’s arm, unaware that he had grabbed it while they were in the room.

The trip back out of the hospital felt like moving through a dream, sounds seemed muffled and people appeared to move in a fog. They kept their suits on until they stepped out of the building, shedding the bio hazard suits and leaving them on the back of one of the ambulances. The feeling of the brisk air washed over them in relief, putting distance between themselves and the hospital they had come from.

The motel pulled into view and they were relieved to see that there were lights on in the office.

“Gabe. The bridge might be out, but I bet we could cross during low tide. We need sleep anyways, we’ve been running around since yesterday morning. Whatever is on the other side can wait the ten hours until low tide.” He knew he was acting as the voice of reason in this case. If the tide was starting to come in, they had just missed low and they wouldn’t be able to cross unless they wanted to swim. The water was cold enough and it was nearing early morning. He knew he wouldn’t be able to react to whatever they came up against to the best of his abilities. So far he was running on nerves and he had the feeling that as soon as his head touched a pillow he would be out. With that thought a yawn surfaced and he brought up his other hand to cover his mouth.

“You’ve got a point there. Ok, man with a plan, lead the way.” Gabriel tossed the car keys to Sam moving around to the passenger side and opening the door. He collapsed into the seat and childishly kicked his feet in all the room he had while Sam was trying to adjust the seat so his knees weren’t wedged into the steering wheel.

“Seriously, Gabe how are you this short?” He announced once he was able to get the seat moved back far enough that he wasn’t feeling cramped in the space.

“I could ask the same Samsquatch.” Gabriel said kicking his feet again for emphasis.

“Already used that one.” He pointed out with a laugh, avoiding the unasked question. The motel pulled into view and they were relieved to see that there were lights on in the office.

“Well I like that one, it fits you.” He had gone through so many nicknames without repeating any, the car rumbled to a halt and shuddered at it was turned off.

They were able to get a room, the colors were muted in the dark, but it was typical beach side décor inside. A single bed sat in the middle of the room, Sam shrugged and started peeling his layers off as he made his way to the bathroom. Gabriel was changed into those red shorts and undershirt and was
flipping quietly through the tv channels when he came back out in a pair of flannel pants. He looked over when Sam flopped heavily on the other side of the bed causing him to bounce with the mattress.

“You sure about this? Don’t you think we’re moving a little fast here Samillion? Haven’t even had our first official date yet.” He teased softly, voice just slightly louder than the volume on the tv. He turned it even lower, the sounds barely reaching the bed, just loud enough to keep the quiet at bay.

“Don’t care. ‘M tired.” Sam grunted into the pillow, he could feel his eyelids getting heavier and sleep creeping closer. He was asleep within minutes, Gabriel smiled fondly as he pulled the blankets up higher around his shoulders. After checking the tides and setting an alarm he slipped between the blankets and willed himself to get some sleep, too. He hoped that tomorrow wasn’t going to be as bad as he thought it would.

Chapter End Notes

Song:
Where Do All My Friends Go? - Oingo Boingo
Music went off, jarring Sam from his sleep. He groaned, not ready to get up or leave the warm and comfortable bed. Stretching his arms out he wrapped his arms around something and pulled it closer, pushing his face further into something feathery soft, breathing in a sweet smell that he couldn’t quite place, but it was nice and triggered comforting memories of home. The music continued and then suddenly stopped, seconds later a loud chirp rang out. Then silence.

He started drifting off again, wrapped in comfort it was easy for him to fall back asleep. The music went off again causing the thing in his arms to stir with a grunt. Sam tightened his grip, not wanting to lose the warmth and comfort it was offering.

“I always feel like somebody’s watching me. And I have no privacy. Whoa-oh, I always feel like somebody’s watching me. Who’s playing tricks on me?”

“Sambear… Can you let me go so I can get my phone? It’s the guys from the radio.” The voice was muffled and tired and familiar. Sam bolted awake and in his efforts to untangle himself from both his partner and the blankets, he ended up on the floor. Gabriel chuckled softly as he reached out and answered the phone putting an end to the music. Quickly pulling it away from his head and hitting the button for speakerphone he let Sam in on what he was hearing.

“-been trying since we knew the plane landed. There’s some kind of electronic fog covering the area. It’s a dead zone Milton. Haven’t seen anything like this in a while, it’s like the iron curtain has gone up just around Bridgeport.” Franks’ voice came out through the small speakers; they could hear the noises of computers and the pings of machinery in the background. This struck Sam as odd since he was introduced to them he knew them to all be hyper-paranoid people who would never make a call unless it was filtered and masked.

“How are you getting this through then?” Sam asked loudly as he stood up off the floor, finally able to unwrap the sheets from around his legs. His embarrassment was lost already, replaced with cautious curiosity. He was surprised that they hadn’t gotten a hold of them sooner, and this electrical fog, or whatever, was an interesting twist.

“Not important right now… Is that Winchester? Same room Milton? Government’s choice or yours?” Sam’s face flushed as they were called out, although nothing had happened he still looked over at his partner who was sitting on the edge of the bed still in his white undershirt and red sleeping shorts. He caught a wink and a confident smile sent in his direction.

“Don’t believe everything you see on TV Devereaux, the government’s cheap; the same gender, same room. Besides, I’m figuring you only have limited time before this connection goes down too?”
Gabriel was quick to defend them both and turned the conversation back to matters at hand all in one swoop. Sam smiled, sometimes the government’s policies worked in their favor. He walked out of the room to get them coffees from the office; they didn’t have a coffee maker in the room, but he had seen one when they checked in.

“Damn right. Balthazar needed you to know that the radio has been buzzing loudly and off the hook, something big is going on in there. But we’re flying blind. Can you shed us any light so he can stop panicking more than his usual? Milton, he’s gone full tinfoil and has started painting sigils on the station walls.” Ash’s voice could be heard clearly as he piped in, the worry about his friend was obvious in his tone. There was muttering in the background that he could barely make out but it sounded as if they were being pushed out of the way, and things were being pulled away from the walls.

“Hey! Watch it! That has my first scrambler on it!” there was a pause in the sounds before the voice was picked up again. “I have a sentimental attachment to it…”

“Can you get Balthazar on the line?” Gabriel tried, it didn’t sound like he was in any condition to be talking on the phone, and if he knew his friend he was probably avoiding it too.

“No can do Milton; he’s not touching anything that can broadcast his voice in any way right now, which means Dr. Badass hour on Angel Radio… I’ve got hours of old broadcasts queued up based on an algorithm I designed to track popularity. My predictions are higher than usual ratings for repeats.” Ash was proud of being able to whip up programs on the fly, sometimes the programs did nothing but track things and collected data. He always insisted that they were good for something, though. There was no such thing as a useless code, Gabriel often questioned that, but he didn’t know the next thing about computers that’s why he went to them.

“ASH! Listen I need to talk with Balthazar, if you can’t get me that can you put the phone up to the radio?” Gabriel needed him to focus; he didn’t care about the radio’s rating, what he needed to know was what sent Balthazar into a panic. It had to be something big if he was painting sigils and avoiding transmissions.

“We still haven’t broken through with the signal; it’s just static.” Ash tried to explain; he knew exactly which radio Gabriel was asking about too. He didn’t understand why he wanted to listen to it there wasn’t a point in putting static up to the cell phone, they had already tried that, and it didn’t help the signal at all. “Do it, Ash. If Balthazar is as bad as you say he is I need to hear the radio.” Gabriel’s voice got gruff; he was starting to lose his temper over this; they didn’t have the time to jerk around. If there were a chance that he could make anything out through the transmission, he’d take it.

The sounds changed as the phone was moved through the station and the static got louder. Soon the only sounds coming from the phone were the screams of the static; it was the same static they had heard just the other day yet there was something very different about it. Sam returned with two steaming cups of coffee, the saccharine smell of large amounts of sugar wafted out of the one he handed to the other agent. He tilted his head at the static, glancing between the phone and Gabriel’s face. The muscles of Gabriel’s jaw were flexing as if he was clenching and unclenching; his brows started to furrow in possible anger as the static continued.

“Gabe, are their voices in the static this time?” Sam asked, he wasn’t sure, but he thought he could make out voices. It sounded like there were hundreds of voices talking at the same time through the static. It wasn’t pleasant listening to it, and he was under the impression that if he listened for too long he would develop a nasty headache.
That simple question startled Gabriel and had him blinking his eyes as he tried to make sense of what Sam had just said. No one should—should hear anything but static; that was the problem with the signal. And if he was that meant something that he wasn’t ready to face what that was.

“I swear I hear voices…” Sam said his face twisting in confusion; there were voices in the static. He could make them out from time to time. Hundreds of voices are talking over each other. Saying the same thing over and over.

“What are they saying, Samael?” Gabriel’s voice was barely above a whisper; he didn’t want to think about what it meant if he really heard the voices through the static. His heart started pounding in his chest; he didn’t want to hear what Sam was hearing; he didn’t want to face that.

“That’s it,” Sam said, matching Gabriel’s volume, “I think they’re repeating Samael.”

Gabriel’s eyes suddenly went wide, and all the color dropped from his face, he all but threw his phone as he tried to turn it off. The movement caused him to knock over his coffee, the scalding liquid spilling on his arm and over the bed. There was a fluty panic to his movements; he wanted to check on him to see if he was alright after the coffee spilled but the fervent motions were too much. Gabriel’s hands kept twitching; his first two fingers would slide jerkily against his thumb before he would pull them apart and close his hand into a fist; this motion was repeated nervously until Sam grabbed his wrists. Gabriel’s gold eyes looked up and were locked in the worried gaze of his hazel ones; Sam could see that his thoughts were whirring a hundred miles an hour behind them.

“Gabriel, calm down, what’s wrong?” Last time he saw his partner get this anxious over a case they were nearly eaten by hungry caterpillars. He didn’t think that was the case this time. However, it made him think that they might be stumbling into something that was life or death, leaning more towards death. As if the hospital of leprosy wasn’t creepy enough.

“You can’t be here; you have to go back.” The panic was full blown in his eyes; there was honest fear, and Sam knew it was for him. He was going to get pushed away again because Gabriel was afraid for him. He was a grown man, a full agent, and capable of handling things himself, he started to feel himself getting angry.

“No. You are not doing this again to me. What can I do to convince you that I am not going to be tossed away?” Sam gritted his teeth, restraining himself from yelling at him. There was high tension going with this case, and the last thing they needed was a fight to weaken them right before a chance to close it. “You need to stop keeping secrets from me, Gabriel. We’re partners in this, if I don’t know what we’re going up against, we could both get hurt.”

“That’s the last thing I want, Sam. That’s why you need to go; you’re already tangled too deep in this. I can’t… I can’t bare it if I lost you. Don’t you get it? I can’t lose you; I care too much.” The hurt was etched into his face; he looked much older than he was with the pain and worry coloring his features. He looked tired and weary like he was done fighting but still wouldn’t give up.

“Then let me be with you, at your side. Together. We can face this.” His words were honest and sincere, and something that he felt that Gabriel needed to hear, to have reaffirmed to him that he wasn’t going to be alone. That someone willingly wanted to be with him, not just during the good but when things got tough too. “But first what is it?”

Gabriel fell silent; he really didn’t want to do this. Not now or ever. It was one of a few things he hated talking about or even thinking about, but Sam was giving him a masterful bitch-face. He didn’t stand a chance against it, besides if he wanted to bring him into his life, he should know, right? He
felt his resolve to maintain his secrets crumble. For the first time in years he found himself not wanting to spin stories to protect himself, maybe he was just tired of it all, maybe Sam had managed to wedge past his defenses.

“Fine!” He fell back on the bed, “Remember when I said I had a big family that I didn’t want to see? Yeah. I’ve got a feeling this is my brother.” The words hung heavy in the air; he should have listened to Castiel and waited for reinforcements. He should have taken Balthazar’s words and treaded more carefully, but it was past that. He had a feeling from what the woman had said yesterday that he knew he had found him. Best case scenario he was the only one he found.

“Your brother? How is that possible, can a single person even do what we see here? Gabe, the city, is nearly abandoned, the people are suffering from a plague that can easily spread further. Is your brother some kind of super villain?” The words might have sounded ridiculous if the circumstances were any different.

“You could say that.” He grumbled down into his lap. Super villain was almost a huge understatement for the things his brother was capable of.

“Well, be my superhero, Gabe. Let’s bring him in and stop this.” Sam had an endless source of optimism and Gabriel envied him for it. He was scared, nothing about this plan had him winning, and he had been mentally running the numbers, he should just run away while he had the chance. But that bright smile Sam was giving him, he would challenge the world for it. He could feel his heart flutter at his words and from his smile, maybe they did have a chance.

In the light of the day they were able to see the charred remains of the old bridge. It clearly wasn’t something new as they could see barnacles and muscles growing on the wood that was down in the water. The town had been just as quiet as they made their way through what little portion stood between their motel and the coast. No morning traffic from commuters heading into the city for work, no one out jogging with their dogs, or kids waiting as bus stops. It was just as empty as it had been.

“You really don’t have to do this Sam, go back. Go home, take the car, leave me and take the first flight anywhere out of here.” Gabriel pleaded as they looked across the broken bridge. The tide had receded through the morning and as at its lowest, leaving just a small, shallow expanse of water in the middle.

“I’m not going anywhere Gabe, we’ve gone over this. I’m going to be by your side as we face whatever this is. We’re going to make it through this because I have a date with a smart and funny secret agent when we get back.” Sam grinned at him, hoping the reminder of their date would spur him on. He was actually looking forward to an honest date with him, something that had the chance to go further.

“I’m sorry.” He mumbled as he stepped down the embankment, his shoes crunching against the pebbly bottom of the channel. Low tide exposed most of the ground allowing them to cross easily where they hadn’t been able to before. Jumping over a stretch of water running through the center Gabriel was happy to note that the algae-slicked rocks hugged the sides of the channel. Sam followed him making the jump look easy.

The other side of the channel was just as bleak looking as the bridge; storms had not been kind to the former vacation spot. Crumbling houses and shops dotted the streets of the island town, knowing that this town had been long abandoned didn’t stop them from feeling the same level of unease they had before. There was more than just dust and memories here; there was a dark power radiating from the center of the dead town. Sam didn’t know what he was expecting, but being an island he thought there might be some gulls around, maybe some crabs, but the place was just as empty of animals as it
was of people.

The dilapidated theater seemed to loom over the town, and the energy felt heavier here. The old marquee was falling, a few broken letters sat crunched in the mud. Most of the metal on the outside of the building appeared to have been looted, the old turn styles having been removed from their vase leaving only a pale impression of where they had once been. Sam felt himself faltering in front of the crumbling building; they had been told that he was waiting here for the woman in the hospital. He had found out that it might have been Gabriel’s brother in there, now that he was standing toe-to-toe with the location, he found himself wanting to turn back. There was some innate fear response to the situation at hand that had him wanting to run instead of standing up. Squaring his shoulders and setting his feet in place, Sam stood tall and stared down the building until the feeling passed and he was ready to take on the evil that lurked within.

Gabriel watched as his partner squared off against the theater, even knowing what awaited them he was still impressed by his bravery. Maybe Castiel was right, and they were more resilient than they appeared, he could only hope. On the other hand, he was terrified with what was next, terrified and furious. This was his life now, and just as it was starting to go his way one of his brothers had to come in and ruin things for him. He knew he couldn’t leave the threat as it was, he had to deal with this; he just needed the incentive to risk everything.

He grabbed at Sam’s collar pulling him down roughly to his level, catching the taller man off guard. Bringing their lips together in a rough kiss, he closed his own eyes prepared to be pushed away. Sam’s eyes were wide with surprise before he softened and brought his own hands up, one threading into Gabriel’s soft hair gripping at it as he deepened the kiss. Gabriel moaned into the kiss, his mouth opening giving Sam access, his tongue swiping across his teeth. They kissed as if they were starved for touch, clinging desperately to each other. Sam pulled away from the kiss fist, breathing hard, his eyes dark with desire a lopsided smile playing across his face.

“What was that all about?” Sam ran his fingers down the side of Gabriel’s face, his fingers catching under his chin, tilting his head up. His golden eyes seemed to glow for a brief moment; Sam figured it was the sunlight catching them, but the look was magical. He could feel himself falling into those eyes, and was willing to do so. He kissed him a second time, this one soft and chaste. “Not that I mind, but any reason?”

“I’ve wanted to do that for a very long time Samare. And something tells me it might be my only chance, so I took it.” His smile faltered a bit, replaced by a sad shadow. “Last chance to head home and not see what’s behind door number one.”

Sam didn’t want to leave him to whatever was in there; they would do this together. Instead of responding to Gabriel’s dumb remarks he let his hand slide down his neck to his shoulder and further down to where his fingers interlocked with his partner’s. There seemed to be no words that would convince him, but he responded well to actions, they held more weight.

“Just promise me that when we go in there, you will follow my lead? If I ask you to do anything, you will do it?” Gabriel’s flexed his hand squeezing Sam’s fingers between his; their hands fit together in a way that was more comforting than he could have imagined. Having someone by his side was helping to wash away some of the fears he had going into this. It was giving him a reason to stand up and fight; Sam was going to be his reason to risk everything.

“As long as you don’t ask me to leave again, yes.”

They stepped through the dry doors, wood crumbling to the ground at their touch, the hinges protesting loudly at use after sitting for so long. The building had an otherworldly stillness to it; dust motes danced in light beams coming through in places where the ceiling had collapsed. Old red seats
were grayed under years of neglect, instead of posters for the newest play or movie the walls had mildew spots decorating them.

A single spotlight came to light, the click of it turning on ringing loud in the quiet. Slow, steady clapping emanated from the shadowed wing of the stage, footsteps bringing a blond man into the light. His features were marred by the same sores that were present on the people in their files. In fact, this person looked very much like the last person to have been added to the list by the guys at Angel Radio. Sam felt Gabriel tense up, his hand tightening around his own.

“Well, well, well. What a surprise, you actually showed up. Nowhere left to run and hide?” The voice was smooth, like silk, but held an edge of danger like a sharpened dagger. Sam could feel power rolling off of him in waves, this person was trouble and wasn’t even trying to hide it. “Oh this is cute, you brought your boyfriend.”

Gabriel bristled as the figure stepped down off the stage and started to make his way towards them. He let go of Sam’s hand and put himself between the two of them. The guy casually walked up the aisle and stopped just a few feet away from him, he was almost a head taller than Gabriel and used his height to talk down to him.

“Hey Gabriel, miss me, bro?” He winked with his words, a sexual energy coming off him mixing with the danger, the toothy grin could have been alluring if he didn’t ruin it by running a forked tongue over them. Gabriel squared his shoulders and made sure to maintain his posture as a human shield, preventing him from getting too close to Sam.

“So what are they calling you these days?” Gabriel’s voice was sharp and forceful. He wasn’t standing down to the posturing the other was giving. He was going to give as good as he was going to get.

“This model is called Nick; I rather like it. Too bad it won’t last much longer, they deteriorate so quickly.” He held his hand out, stretching and flexing the fingers, as if examining for the first time. Nick looked back, with a twinkle to his eye and a sharp, toothy grin. “What I want to know is how is yours holding up so well after all these years?

“What-?” They had managed to lose Sam, and he had found his voice just in time to try clarifying. Not that the other guy was going to let him actually get a word in edgewise, he liked to dominate the conversation, Sam got the idea that he liked being in charge and didn’t take well to being told otherwise.

“Oh! Does your boy toy not know? Have you told him of your secret? Does he know how old you really are? Or how you’re a colossal fuck up? Should I tell him; air your dirty laundry?” He leaned into Gabriel’s space leering, a pleased grin spreading across his face. He was getting joy from talking down to Gabriel, and the idea of exposing his flaws and failings.

“Lucifer, your fight isn’t with him.” Gabriel gritted his teeth, trying to bring the fight and his attention away from Sam. His anger was growing with his frustration, his body starting to vibrate with the emotions, energy pulsing around him. Sam took a few steps back once he realized that he was being given the opportunity to place more distance between them. His thoughts were bouncing around with no direction, too many things were coming at him at once, was his name Nick or Lucifer? Either way, he knew there was more danger here than he had anticipated and it didn’t look like something they were ready to handle.

“Oh, but it is baby brother. It’s with all of them!” He snarled angrily, spittle threatening to fly as his features twisted. “Worms, unfit to be under the heel of my boot, and He wanted us to love them! Well, I see you took His words to heart. It’s a shame really; I thought you had better taste. Take Kali
for example.”

“They’re worth our love…” Gabriel wasn’t going to let his brother ruin something good, he knew there weren’t many who would actually stand up for them. But he had and he would continue to. He wanted to look behind him to see where Sam was, and how he was dealing with this situation, but he knew he couldn’t trust to take his eyes off of Lucifer.

“And she wasn’t? At least she had power, nothing compared to you or me, mind you. But more power than these hairless apes. But she never loved you, did she? You were too soft for her; she desired destruction and fire. She didn’t laugh at your jokes, you were the joke, always were. The smallest and weakest of us. No wonder you run and hide, you disloyal dog.” Sam was starting to get an idea of what was unraveling before his eyes. He could clearly see why Gabriel didn’t like his family, or why he didn’t want to talk about them. Lucifer was cruel and was trying to get a reaction from his brother, Sam could see that he didn’t want to avoid a fight, he just wanted Gabriel to start it so his fight would be justified.

“He was right about them; they are better than us. They forgive, they care, they support each other, they believe, they love, they inspire, they try to do better, they create as He did, they have music.” Gabriel sent out waves of energy with each reason he stated. The pulses of energy pushed Lucifer back a couple of steps, for Sam they felt warm and enveloped him like a brief embrace.

Gabriel plucked his pen from the inside of his jacket; the simple object shimmered before taking the shape of a silver blade. The blade was about ten inches long and tapered to a point, he held it in front of himself more as a shield than as a weapon. Adjusting his stance to ready himself for an attack, prepared to stand his ground.

“So, you would fight for them? Even the ones who bring evil into their midst? Because not all of them do as you so wishfully claim they do.”

“It’s what Dad wanted, Luce. I followed his words in my own way; it took time for me to do so but I came to it. I love them. They are worthy of that.” He turned his head just enough to look at Sam, he didn’t linger long enough to study his face and read his emotions, but the look was just enough for him to be assured that his partner hadn’t been whisked away from him. It gave him the resolve to stay his ground and continue to stand up for what he believed.

“I see that I can’t persuade you otherwise. I’m sorry it comes to this, I was hoping that you stand by my side as a family once more.” His words were betrayed by his eyes, he held no remorse for his previous statements. He was trying to play on Gabriel’s emotions, to use his desire for companionship against him.

“You sure didn’t make it sound like you wanted me here, you made this whole thing a provocation, and there are other ways to get my attention.” Gabriel nearly spat the words out, he could tell what his brother was attempting and it only made him angry. He wasn’t going to go back on his words now, he chose his side and it was humanity.

“Yes but this was the best way to get your attention. You always were the softest of us, always cared about His creations more than your brothers and sisters. I figured if I broke some of His toys it might get His attention, but it got yours, and that’s practically a consolation prize. What would happen if I broke this one?”

He pulled Sam towards him with a flick of his hand; his body slid across the floor by forces unseen. Sam started grabbing at the dusty seats trying to stop himself from moving forward; his feet planted, but he was still being dragged closer to Nick. Gabriel’s eyes widened before they narrowed dangerously, lifting his hand he snapped his fingers. Sam was no longer sliding down the aisle
against his own will and was suddenly in the arms of his partner. Gabriel’s arm was tight around his waist in a protective and possessive grip. Sam looked down and caught the look in his eyes; there was fury in them like he had never seen, his jaw was set in anger and his lips pressed into a thin line. Lightning crackled outside despite the weather having been clear moments before, the thunder punctuating their square off.

Sam was overwhelmed and honesty afraid for the first time since they stepped inside the theater. He was seeing and experiencing things that shouldn’t be possible; there were displays of power that just shouldn’t be real. Thousands of questions were flying through his mind; he felt so small in this interaction. The energy in the room was palpable; Sam could feel his hair standing up on end as if the room was full of static. Lighting spidered across the sky, visible through the fallen ceiling, the light and shadows dancing across the battlefield.

“You were always a bully of a brother, Lucifer. These are not just toys to go around breaking; they are humans, living creatures, and things to love. I will not let you continue your temper tantrum. Sam, get behind me and close your eyes.” There was a level of vile to his tone that Sam had never experienced before, there was true anger there and it radiated from him along with power and energy.

“Gabe?” Sam didn’t want to leave him, despite the feeling of being in way over his head he still wanted to provide support. And despite the anger and power surrounding Gabriel, he still felt like safety to him.

“I said close your eyes. Sam… I …” Realizing just how he might sound or look at the moment Gabriel softened, the anger melted from his voice. His eyes shimmered, a glow behind them was faintly visible, Sam knew that glow; it was sunshine on a warm afternoon, warmth from a fireplace in winter, the subtle changes of leaves in fall, perfectly melted grilled cheese, that glow was comfort.

“How sweet, little Gabey fell in love with the trash. You always were an outsider even in our own family, an abomination even in His eyes. The time you ran away was heralded as the greatest since they cast me down, even I heard it!” He let his head fall back in laughter, it was like everything about him a twisted laughter. It echoed strangely in the abandoned building, bouncing off half-crumbled walls, and Sam let Gabriel push him backwards behind him again.

“SAM GET DOWN! NOW!” Gabriel shouted, he knew he wasn’t going to be able to hold himself back much longer. There was only so much he could deal with from his brother, and he was running pretty thin after having Sam threatened like that.

Sam threw himself behind a row of seats, covering his eyes. A bright, searing, golden light erupted along with a shrill piercing sound that dug into the back of his skull sending tingles down his spine. The light was overwhelmed by a second blueish light, twice as bright and the sounds only got louder. Sam felt as if his skull was being pulled apart, his eardrums ruptured from the intensity of the noise, and he could feel the trickle of blood down the side of his neck. Within the shrill sounds, Sam would later swear he heard a song, something that pulled at his heart and warmed him.

The sounds of fighting were lost to the deafening sounds, but the results of the fighting were not. Theater seats that had been bolted into the ground were being tossed around as if they were plastic chairs in a hurricane. The smashed into other chairs, creating craters in the rows, a few being knocked into the walls where they took out more of the crumbling plaster and in a few places created holes to the outside. Pieces of the ceiling came down, shattering once they hit the ground. Despite all the destruction and chaos, Sam only occasionally felt a stray pebble of the rubble hit him.
He risked it and went against Gabriel’s orders, opening his eyes and peering around the seats that still remained in place, shielding him. Sam gasped at what he saw. Gabriel was beautiful, golden light emanated from his body, large shimmering wings were spread out in a display of aggression. Somehow he still stood between Lucifer and himself. With a snarl the smaller man launched himself at the other, a clash of noise that didn’t sound unlike thunder and explosions resulted from the collision.

Lucifer must have been caught off guard because Gabriel was able to knock him down to his knees. He remained stunned for just long enough, Gabriel snapped his fingers, a crackle of thunder mirroring his action. Power surged from his body, now visible as golden light, lancing towards his opponent it burned a mark into Lucifer’s chest. He looked down, dumbstruck that someone was able to get the slip on him, his eyes widening as he recognized the sigil seared into his flesh. Gabriel stepped closer, now standing over him, placing a hand on the mark he spoke a few words, nothing that Sam could make out, the chorus of song was still screeching loudly in his head. Lucifer grabbed at Gabriel’s, both hands wrapping around his forearm, a look of anger as his lip snarled back, and then he vanished.

Gabriel was exhausted and staggered a few steps, lifting his good hand to wipe sweat and blood off his face the other dangled limply at his side, he looked around. His eyes are connected with Sam’s, his heart shattered when he saw the fear and astonishment on his face. Sam scrambled to his feet, pulling himself up with the help of the seats. Gabriel backed away lifting his hand in front of him as Sam stepped closer.

“Gabriel?” Sam tried to reach out to him, only to have him stumble backwards over the rubble. With the end of the fight the skies gave in as well, a soft light rain began to fall coming into the building where the ceiling had caved in.

“Why, Sam? I told you to close your eyes…” There was sadness and regret in his face, and what looked like tears ran down his face as the rain continued to fall.

“Gabriel?” He didn’t mean to break his promise to him, he just had needed to watch to make sure he was safe. The sounds and vibrations of the fight were more than he had expected and with the amount of energy thrumming through the place he had needed that small bit of reassurance.

“No, please, don’t get any closer.” His hands were shaking as he brought them up, index and middle finger resting against his thumb.

“Gabriel…”

With the soft snap of his fingers, Sam stood alone in the theater, dust settling in the new rain. His own hair being flattened to his head, his suit beyond saving. These things didn’t even register to him as he stared at the spot where his partner had been standing just seconds before. He felt his heart break. He was alone now, and would have to travel back without the witty and pleasant company of his partner. It looked like he wasn’t going to be getting that promised date after all.

Chapter End Notes

Fun Fact: I wrote Jucifer instead of Lucifer no fewer than three times while writing this.

Song used: Somebody's Watching Me by Rockwell (Ft. Michael Jackson)
He slammed his fist against the wall, leaving a dent behind. He knew the repairs would be coming out of his deposit but at the moment he didn’t care. In the past 48 hours his life had been completely flipped and he felt helpless and alone. Hating the feeling he was just getting frustrated and angry with himself. Reaching for his phone again, he checked to see if he had any missed calls or messages. Nothing, he was ready to throw his phone across the room, where it would probably make contact with the opposite wall and shatter. In an act of perfect timing it rang as he held it poised to throw.

“Gabriel?!” He asked frantically into the phone. He didn’t look at the caller ID in his desperate desire for it to be him. The brief wave of hope crashed when he heard the gruff and near emotionless voice on the other line.

“No, I am sorry Sam. This is Cas.”

“Oh, hey Cas.” Sam’s voice cracked a bit as he tried to control his emotions and not lose himself, he needed to stay focused. “Have you heard from Gabe at all?”

“No, I was trying to reach him myself. I was calling under the impression that he was with you, he is not answering his phone and I had reason to speak with him.” Castiel wasn’t expecting to hear that as an answer. The confusion was something that Sam could actually hear in his voice, he wasn’t sure if he was learning to read the other man or if the emotion was just that strong. “Do you know where he might be?”

“Actually, Cas, I have no idea. He just disappeared during our last case.” Sam’s voice found a level ground where he was able to talk without wavering. The last thing he wanted right now was to have either a break down or explode over the phone at his brother’s partner. He knew this wasn’t Castiel’s fault, it was his, and he should get mad at Castiel for it.

“He left you during the case? That’s not like him, he likes to see a case to the end.” There was a pause on the other side, the silence was thick Sam couldn’t hear him breathing over the phone. The silence was broken when Castiel made up an excuse for the other agent. “He probably just followed a lead and forgot to tell you. I’ll try his phone again, he should be back in a few days.”

“I don’t think so, he disappeared as in, poof, snap of his fingers and gone. Right in front of me too. Cas… He’s not coming back and I think it’s my fault.” His voice cracked as he admitted it aloud. It was something that he had repeated to himself over and over since he got home, but was the first time he actually said it. It hit him even harder hearing it, he had somehow driven away his partner. He could feel the burning as tears threatened to well up, he clenched his fists angry at his own weakness.

“I, uh, see. Would you like it if Dean and myself came over tonight? I am not much of a cook, however your brother makes these fantastic things called burgers.” The offer was something he couldn’t pass up, he knew he needed to talk to someone about what happened, he wasn’t sure his brother would understand but Castiel might.

“I’ve had burgers before Cas, but yeah. It would help keep my mind off of things. Thank you.” He forced himself to smile slightly at the innocence of Castiel before he hung up. He stared at the phone as if it was going to ring again any moment. In his heart he knew that Gabriel wasn’t going to reach
out to him, he had broken his trust with the simple action of looking. It was like the story of Eurydice. Frustrated he tossed his phone away from him into the couch.

To keep his mind occupied he started to clean things around the apartment. There wasn’t much as he barely spent any time in it between cases, but he could at least try to tidy it more. Before long he found himself standing next to the record player, music was usually an escape of its own, but he couldn’t shake the words Gabriel used when he stood up to Lucifer. “…They have music…”

Picking up the golden album that they had played when he had come over for dinner, he found himself tracing his fingers over the wings of the stylized angel. They really didn’t look like that… Sam felt the surge of anger hit him and he wanted to smash the record. He was overwhelmed with the things he had witnessed recently. Things happened that shouldn’t have been possible, things that put such a spin on his life that most people wouldn’t have been able to comprehend and were likely to go crazy. He went from a solid agent with a promising career and a possible date, to witnessing a battle of powerful and otherworldly beings and knowing that he was something infinitely small on a cosmic scale.

Before getting too lost in his thoughts there was a knock on his door. How long had he been zoning out with Toad the Wet Sprocket? Placing the record on top of the others he crossed the small apartment and opened the door. Castiel was standing there alone, Sam peered around him to see if his brother was lurking just behind his boyfriend, but the hallway was empty.

“Sam. I am alone. Dean thought it was best if he did the shopping himself and that I stay with you. I think you’ve had a rough day, anything I can help with?” The man stood there at the door, wearing the same tan trench coat Sam had always seen him in.

“Thanks Cas, come on in.” He closed the door as the other man passed through the threshold, Sam found himself watching Castiel in a new way. Gabriel had told him they were related and now he wondered how true that was, what else there was that he didn’t know. He got the feeling that he had just been thrown into the deep end without any help. He wanted to ask but didn’t know how to bring it up.

“I’m sorry if this is difficult to talk about, but can you tell me more about what happened? I know you were investigating a possible outbreak of some sort, and not much more.” Castiel motioned to Sam to take a seat on his own couch while he moved into the kitchen and made himself at home looking through the cabinets for glasses.

“Alright, look. I’m not even sure anymore. The outbreak could have just been a side effect of what we ran into. And… uh, this is gonna sound pretty friggin nuts, but I think we ran into Lucifer.” Sam’s eyebrows scrunched up on his forehead perplexed, he still wasn’t quite sure what exactly it was he saw and he wasn’t sure he was ready to believe it either. His hand instinctively reached out when the glass of water was offered to him as Castiel took a seat beside him.

“No I believe you. There have been signs that he was back.” Castiel said it with such conviction that it surprised Sam, he wasn’t expecting that reaction at all. He had been preparing to be told that he was crazy, lost his mind from seeing the horrors of the illness, and wasn’t fit for duty, any of the above but not for Castiel to so easily accept what he saw.

“Seriously? Just like that? How are you and Gabriel even related? He would have had a field day hearing this kind of news, this is a gold mine for the X-Files, he would… He would…” Sam realized that he was unable to finish that train of thought without getting himself upset. He fell quiet letting himself slump forward on the couch.

“I have always been different from my brothers and sisters. Gabriel even more so. He is one of the
oldest in our family, however he always had a kind word of encouragement for the younger ones when they needed it. It pains me to know he has left again. I’m sorry for you Sam.” He reached out and laid his hand on Sam’s shoulder, trying to console him.

“Does Dean know?” Sam asked.

“No he doesn’t, but please continue, what else happened Sam.” Castiel herded him back to the topic and continued to listen, his blue eyes were a source of calm, anchoring Sam. He wondered if this was what his brother saw every time he looked into his eyes.

“Gabriel stood up to him and I saw things that still don’t make sense. He told me to close my eyes, but I didn’t listen Cas. I didn’t listen and he’s gone, it’s my fault. It wasn’t supposed to happen like this…” Sam’s voice trailed off quietly, he dropped his face into his hands.

“You said he disappeared after snapping his fingers? So he did not die during this confrontation. Sam it was not your fault, Gabriel is used to running. What did you see?” Castiel was pushing him to share, he knew it was one way that people could heal or even learn things that would help them further their pursuit.

“It was like looking into the sun. Pure golden light, Cas he was so beautiful. He had these massive wings spreading out from his back, the way they sparkled, and even though they were transparent I swear they were solid and real.” Sam looked up from his hands, his hair having fallen forward like a curtain. He knew he sounded like a love struck teenager but he had no other way to describe it. The sight was something that he was still in awe of, there was nothing like it in the world. And in saying it out loud he knew that he wanted to see it again, he could feel the ache in his heart when he knew it would never be.

“They fought, but only because Lucifer threatened me and used some sort of power to drag me to him. Gabriel was only protecting me. Their fighting was crazy, I think they were causing a storm too. And then he drove Nick, or Lucifer, down to his knees and marked him before sending him away. And that’s when he saw that I had watched the fight…” He looked to the other man for some sort of reaction. He knew he sounded crazy, before working with Gabriel, he would have thought he was crazy too.

“I see.” Was all that he said in response to Sam’s story.

“Do you? ‘Cause I sure as hell don’t!” Sam suddenly stood up in a quick motion, his hand flying up to his hair, fingers running through as he started pacing. He couldn’t stand still rethinking the fight, it made him fidgety when he realized just how close he had come to the end of everything. There was no possible way that he should have survived without being hit by any falling debris while the fight was going on. Things were hitting all around him, yet he came out with just small pieces of debris in his hair.

“He’s not dead, and yet you are morning him. I don’t think you’ve realized your unique situation.” The way he was able to stay calm and level through the whole thing was frustrating for Sam who was feeling a turmoil of emotions.

“Which is? Come on Cas, you owe me at least this much.” He stopped his pacing to stare down the angel sitting on his couch. Even knowing what he was, Sam was upset enough to not care if he was upsetting or threatening him.

“Sam you are an agent for the FBI, and from what I understand, you’re incredible at research and used to work missing person cases. You could use those abilities—”
“Are you suggesting that I treat Gabriel as a case?! No, no way.” Sam was standing in front of Castiel, practically looming over the other man, who continued to sit calmly on the couch, unshaken by the display of intimidation.

“Back down Sammy.” The voice came from the door, Dean had let himself in and was staring his brother down. There was a bag was hanging off his arm with things for burgers clearly visible through the flimsy plastic. He was glaring at his brother from across the room, a stare that could be taken as a challenge.

“Cas is suggesting that I treat Gabe as just another case! He is not a case number! I will not lose him this way!” Sam dramatically waved his arm at the couch as he turned to face Dean.

“So instead you’re going to sit around and feel sorry for yourself? Jesus, Sam! Get a hold of it man.” He stepped into the room, raising his voice. He wasn’t going to stand down in a fight against his brother, not when it was something that he felt could be solved.

“You know what Dean? You and Cas can just get out. Yeah, just leave.” Sam stepped closer to him, putting distance between him and the couch. He pointed towards the door his brother had just come through. He was pissed that he was being bossed around in his own house, this wasn’t supposed to happen this way.

“No. You listen to me. I’m not leaving, neither is Cas. I’m gonna make you burgers and you’re going to eat them.” Dean thrust his finger into Sam’s chest to drive the point. Without waiting for a response he stepped further into the apartment and made sure the door was shut behind him. He moved into the kitchen and started to take things out of the bag spreading them out across the counter top.

Sam knew he was lashing out, but he didn’t care. He was upset and burgers weren’t going to fix his problems. However they had come over for him, and his brother usually didn’t go for these kinds of hallmark emotional displays, so he started to feel bad for trying to kick them out. The sounds of grease splattering in the pan along with the smells of beef cooking had filled the apartment. Sam’s stomach apologized before he did with a loud growling.

Dean looked up from his cooking with a big grin and a raise of the eyebrows, the grumbling sounds were something that he found pride in. He finished up the burgers, plated them and brought them over to the other two. Sam took his plate with a simple nod in thanks. Castiel hummed happily as he took a bite into his, the juices dripping out the sides. The whole thing was feeling very domestic, like something a family would do, that thought made Sam smile. They maintained the silence while eating, only the happy noises from Castiel as interruptions.

The atmosphere shifted during their meal, Sam was no longer angry at his brother or his partner. It gave him time to rethink the idea of searching for Gabriel, he had the resources and skills, even if he knew that Gabriel would probably be better at hiding than he was at seeking. Talking things over while Dean cooked up a second batch of burgers he was able to start building confidence that this was something that he could do. By the time they had finished Sam’s mood had sifted considerably, Dean offered him dinner at their place tomorrow night if he wanted it.

“Alright, I’ll think about it Dean. ‘Night guys, and Cas? I’m sorry.”

“It’s fine Sam, and take care.”

The door shut behind them and Sam was alone. The emptiness of his apartment seemed to cause his thoughts to echo louder in his head. He needed to start his search somewhere. Walking across the room he pulled his laptop out of his bag and brought it with him to his room. Flipping it open his
fingers flied through a series of usernames and passwords until he was in one of the many FBI databases. Skimming through the personnel records he stopped when he came across the name he was looking for.

“Gabriel Milton. Let’s see what else you’ve been hiding.” Sam said double clicking the file.

He wasn’t surprised to see that a lot of his personal information was redacted, he had probably made most of it up or just snapped up his qualifications when he needed them. There were somethings that weren’t censored from the files though, things like his Quantico training, and recommendations and awards, mostly though the thing that stood out the most was the list of complaints filed against him. There were dozens upon dozens of them, he was surprised that no formal actions had been taken against him before. Opening them one by one Sam started to notice a pattern, aside from the occasional complaint of him dismissing cases given to him, most of them were for wasting bureau funds and time with ‘wild goose chases’. Grabbing a note pad, Sam started to go back through the filed complaints and wrote down the corresponding case files. He was certain that he would be able to find copies of these files in the cabinets behind Gabriel’s desk, he would find out in the morning.

His alarm went off, a blaring and repetitive sound. Sam reached his arm out and slapped down and around until it made contact with his phone and turned it off. Frowning at his phone he wasn’t sure why the alarm was bothering him more than it used to, but he found himself grumbling as he got up. Getting ready he made sure that he had the notebook from last night as well as his computer before leaving the apartment. There were few others walking around at this time, folks getting café shops open, and a few others heading in for early shifts. He nodded at the guard standing at the side entrance, flashing his badge quickly the guard only nodded back.

He was used to the stairs at this point, what he wasn’t used to was just how quiet his office was. Opening the top drawer of Gabriel’s desk he found several sets of keys along with a wide variety of fun sized candy bars. He shook his head, trying to keep the smile off his face and failing. He gave a quick look at the keys he was able to set a couple aside for being extra’s for houses or cars. Trying the others he was able to open the cabinet and found every file that was referenced in the complaint reports as well as many more that never got further than the initial filing.

Sam started to skim through them, most of them were really small cases of strange things but nothing big. An out of body experience here, a near death experience here, news articles accompanied them most of them were claiming these as small miracles. Sam stopped in his movements as he stared at the latest news clipping in a case file. He marched across to the other side of the office and stripped the bulletin board clear, as well as pulling whatever Gabriel had posted over his map. Pinning up articles and pictures form the cases where they corresponded on the map he knew he had some kind of pattern. Each one was listed as a small miracle; that was the key for him. He just needed to find out what they meant and what he was unlocking.

Looking at his new pin board of Gabriel’s old cases, he rubbed a hand over his face. There was something linking these things together; all of them started small enough, Gabriel had made cases of them, and they all ended on dead ends. Yet Gabriel kept all the cases in his office instead of letting them sit in the records room. They meant something. Sam was certain of that. He crossed the room again, back to Gabriel’s space and turned on his radio unable to stand the silence any more.

“-And how I wish, I wish it weren’t so. So take this wind and drink with me, and let’s delay our misery. Save tonight and fight the break of dawn. Come tomorrow, tomorrow I’ll be gone.” He quickly changed stations on the radio, the lyrics hit too close for comfort. Sports updates began filtering through the speakers creating some sort of noise to combat the quiet. Turning back to his board, he caught something on Gabriel’s desk a print out from one of the evangelical sites. That simple reminder sent him back to his computer.
Not only was he a THING agent, taking on cases with stranger than usual circumstances. He was also active in conspiracy groups, especially those surrounding the church and other religious groups. In this he would frequent religious chat boards, Sam remembered him admitting it over lunch. Turning his computer on he wanted to see if any of the dates from the cases matched up with any posts on the forums. Going through page after page of online chats and conversations, Sam found himself rubbing at his eyes. He checked the clock and it was two in the afternoon, he had been at this for hours without a break.

Sam stood up to take a break, step out of the office, and grab a bite to eat. He bumped his keyboard while he was getting his jacket on, the computer screen jumped to another page. There was something that caused Sam to pause and look again, there was a match to one of the cases hung up on the wall. His excitement of finding the clue caused him to sit back down and print page after page out from the website as he matched threads in the forums to the cases. Instead of leaving the office for food he dipped into Gabriel’s candy stash, giving himself a small boost of energy to continue his researching. Not all, but most of the cases that Gabriel had been written up for were paired off with a story from the internet. It was enough for Sam to start establishing patterns. He knew he needed to call in an outside source to help him out with this.

Taking the other sets of keys that he had found in the desk drawer, he turned off the radio and flipped the light switch off. The office door locked behind him and he left, up the stairs and into the car lot. He sent a quick text to his brother that he wasn’t going to be stopping by for dinner because he was busy. The old car that he was looking for stood out with its bumper stickers, he found the key among the collection he was carrying around easy enough. He started up the car his hand instinctively flying to the volume knob to turn it off before the blast of sound from the radio.

Gabriel’s row home came into view after Sam had driven down roads he thought he remembered. He parked the car, looking through the keys he found a couple that could have doubled for the house. Taking the steps to the door, Sam found himself looking around to see if he was being watched by any neighbors. He didn’t have the proper paperwork, hadn’t created a file, or gone through any of the steps to legally gain access to his partner’s residence. It didn’t matter to him though, he was willing to do what he felt was necessary to find out more. The tumblers clicked into place as he inserted and turned the key.

Sam had been inside the house before, but he was seeing it in a new light now. There were framed pictures on the walls of religious motifs. He exhaled through his nose in a quick snort when he realized that several of the pictures were depictions of the archangel Gabriel. The idea of his partner collecting images of himself was amusing for some reason, it just seemed like something he would do, not out of vanity but for the amusement of it. Sam shook his head, a small smile ghosted across his face. He moved further into the house, despite the appearances of the office, his home was surprisingly neat and organized.

The mail sat on a table unopened, they appeared to be bills and credit card statements, nothing that would help his searching. There seemed to be nothing that would be any help, no personal letters or address books, no photos of family except the paintings of angels that were scattered throughout. One bookcase had shelves of different versions of holy texts, but none of them seemed to show any signs of wear. Circling around the living room again he saw something behind a chair placed near a window. Two pieces of tape crumpled in a wad were sitting on the window sill, Sam tried to un-crumple them but they were too sticky. There were signs of adhesive on the glass in the shape of an X. A roll of masking tape sat not too far away, Sam ripped off two pieces, marked the window and waited.

Sam’s eyes shot open, faced with darkness, he realized he had fallen asleep. There was an uneasy feeling of being watched that made him sit up slowly and look around the room. Adjusting to the
dark he caught the shape of a figure standing in the doorway of the kitchen. It moved to one of the cabinets, opening it and pulling out a bottle as well as a cup from another.

“I see he remembered to get the good stuff.” The figure spoke out, pouring a generous portion of drink for himself.

“What are you doing here?” Sam pushed up out of his chair. He recognized the figure in the kitchen as the man who had helped cover after the case with the vampires. Sam didn’t trust him even if he had helped them out, there was something about his that didn’t sit right with him.

“You know, not the best question to start with. And I should be the one asking you questions. This isn’t your house. So what are you doing here?” He swirled the glass before taking a drink, remaining in the shadows of the kitchen.

“I’m trying to find Gabriel and the clues led me here.” Sam didn’t want to give too much information, however he had the idea that this man knew more than he was letting on. He could either be a hindrance on his search or he could have information that he would need.

“To his own house? You must be a top notch detective there mister.” He pointed out with a lift of his glass.

“Yeah, I am. You wanna know why? Every time there is something involving the church’s men, you’re not too far away.” Sam snapped at him, he was agitated and it was easy to get under his skin, and the sarcastic barb had hit home.

“So you startin’ to think like Milton now? The church’s dirty fingers in every pot and behind every shadow? Well ya ain’t wrong there. But as for your search, I think you’re looking in the wrong area. Find a Dr. Samandriel and talk with him, you might find him more interesting than your internet browser history.” He put the bottle down on the counter and turned the sink on to rinse out the cup he had emptied earlier. Rubbing it dry with a cloth he sat the glass to the side. “And Winchester, don’t ask me to help again.”

He turned and left through the front door, leaving Sam standing in the dark all alone again. He wasn’t sure if he should he trust what this mystery man was offering him. It gave him an alternative path to search, he could check out this doctor and if nothing came from it he could return to his picking through online chat boards with a fine tooth comb. He wasn’t ready to admit that he wasn’t sure what to look for in the threads that Gabriel was able to pick out and take them on as a case. The alternative was looking better as he stood in the dark thinking it over.

Chapter End Notes

Save Tonight – Eagle-Eye Cherry
The tuneless alarm went off, an annoying repetitive thing that left Sam grumbling as he rolled over. He decided that his alarm had to be one of the worst ways to be woken up and made a mental note to find a way to change that. Maybe there was a way that he could get his alarm to play music instead of the presets available. He silenced the alarm on his phone and shuffled into the bathroom, rubbing at his face as he got his shower running. The hot water cascaded over him and he was reminded of the otherworldly thunderstorm as the sounds of the water hit the sides of the shower.

Breakfast was a simple affair of coffee, he had some things that Dean had left but he didn’t feel like trying to cook. Pouring the rest of the coffee into a travel mug he stepped out and down the stairs when he saw Gabriel’s car parked on the side of the street. His heart jumped before he remembered that he was the one who had driven the car after taking it out yesterday. Patting his pockets, Sam turned back to his apartment when his phone rang.

“What do you want?!” Sam growled into the receiver, he was expecting to hear either his brother or Bobby, and he wasn’t in any mood to talk with them about his cases and paperwork due.

“Damn, Winchester. I was going to ask you for a code word but I think that might set you off.” It wasn’t either of the people he was expecting, the voice was gruff and direct. There was a bit of playful sarcasm behind the annoyed tone.

“Devereaux, this is not a good time…” Sam could feel his anger subsiding a bit. There was something for someone standing up to him and calling him out. He still wasn’t sure he was ready to talk to the others about what had happened yet, he was still trying to follow the leads he had come up with himself.

“No shit Sherlock. The radio is going bonkers and we can’t get a hold of Milton. Tell me he’s with
you.” Frank sounded a bit more frantic after snapping at him. There was something wrong going on at the station, something that they wanted to bring Gabriel in on. Sam was feeling broken again, they weren’t looking for him because they knew he couldn’t help them, he could barely help himself.

“Uh, actually, that’s the issue.” Sam’s voice came out smaller than before, he knew was going to have to explain things eventually. If Gabriel could trust the three of them, then he could too.

“What do you mean? Winchester, we need to talk with him. He’s either with you or talking about you, so put him on!” His voice flipped between confusion and aggression.

“He’s not here. He’s been gone and I don’t know where he is, but I’m treating it as a missing person, I’ve got a few leads I’m looking in on.” Sam had to switch over to a more professional tone in order to keep himself from getting upset again.

“Anything we can help with?” Sam was surprised that they had even offered, he wasn’t expecting that from them. He should have expected it though, these were his only other friends, even if they didn’t always act as them. They were probably going to be worried until they could get a hold of him too.

“Actually, yeah. Can I stop by later and explain things?” There were other things he wanted to talk to them about, but he knew he was going to have to go over most of the story. Somethings he was going to have to omit but he was certain he would be able to tell most of the story. It was something he was getting practice with.

“Sure thing Winchester. Hey, keep safe and trust no one.”

They weren’t a bad group he decided, a little strange but still good. Besides they were friends of Gabriel’s and anyone that associated with him was bound to be a little bit odd. He got the distinct feeling that he was not only able to trust these people but he would need their help. They had access to their unique sets of skills that he could only see as beneficial in the search for his partner.

The lights flickered to life as he stepped into his office, his desk stood surrounded by boxes of files and cases lay open on his desk. Things remained untouched from where he had left them yesterday. The boards where he had pinned things that he thought had greater relevance to his case, were decorated with pushpins and yarn. He passed the boards only giving it a quick glance over as he turned on his computer. There were dozens of unread emails that he ignored as he opened other databases that would allow him to look into the lead given to him by the mystery man.

“Dr. Alfred Samandriel. Archivist for the Smithsonian. Contractor and specialist for various government agencies. You were easier to find than I was expecting.” Sam closed the files after writing down some of the more pertinent information. There wasn’t a whole lot of information present but there was enough for Sam to be able to know that the doctor was an academic doctor and had been working with the government for a few years. Most of the cases he had been called in as a specialist for were closed or were with other departments so there wasn’t much that he could gather. The few cases that he did have access to had listed him as a forensic specialist and had called him on as an expert witness on trials.

Looking again at the work he had surrounded himself with there wasn’t anything he could possibly bring to this person that would require his help. Maybe he could grab a case from another team and bring it to him. Or he could just go over and talk with the guy. Sam wasn’t sure when he had started thinking that he needed work related information in order to do anything. He was working a case that wasn’t sanctioned and still hadn’t turned in anything in regards to his last case. Sam grabbed his jacket and left the office, the walk was just a few blocks and would give him time to think a few things through.
The weather was pleasant out and the smells of food carts wafted up the streets. Crossing Constitution Avenue he started seeing children standing in loose groupings, talking and laughing loudly, no doubt on field trips. They were smiling and happy, unaware of the politics and shadows that were occurring all around them. His phone rang as he passed the children, it was the same as this morning, blocked ID. Sam answered it anyways hoping for an answer this time, but was greeted with the same soft static as before. He strained to hear if there was anything else that the static might have been covering; coded signals, background voices, music, anything but there was nothing else he could make out. Before he could end the call his phone died, the battery drained already.

Sam could feel eyes on him as he walked past the front of the building. Scanning the crowds and the windows of the buildings, he wasn’t able to pinpoint who was watching him or where they were watching from. Slipping through the entrance to the museum and tried to melt into the crowds of tourists. He stood taller than most of the people in the crowds and he found himself ducking in attempt to hide. When he no longer felt the prickling sensation of eyes on him, he quickly walked around a corner and pulled at a door.

He was thankful to find it unlocked as the door swung towards him. The hallway was mostly white and cool, there weren’t any signs back here to help direct him so he just picked a direction and walked. Steps echoed and as he rounded the corner he nearly ran into a small old woman. She gasped and grabbed at the clipboard she was holding, pulling it against her chest.

“You shouldn’t be back here!” She hissed at him, surprised at his presence.

“Sorry, I’m looking for Dr. Samandriel. I was told I could find him in the archives?” Sam found himself lying to the volunteer. He led a soft smile cross his face as an attempt to both calm her nerves and present himself as someone who was supposed to be back there. He didn’t feel like pulling out his badge, as Devereaux’s words echoed in his head. There wasn’t a high chance that this woman was spying on him, but he didn’t want to take the risk after feeling like he was being followed.

“Oh, Alfie!” Her face lit up at the mention of his name. She motioned for Sam to follow her as she happily trotted down corridors leading the way. “He’s such a sweet heart, always has time for the volunteers like myself. He’s also a brilliant young man, since he’s been here he’s been able to help place some of the unknown specimens of the collections. And you should see the restorative work he’s able to do on some of the little ones! Just amazing.”

Her praise continued until they reached an unmarked door that looked like so many of the others that they had passed. Unless he opened every door he didn’t think he would have been able to find the right room. The woman smiled at him with a nod and turned around, leaving him alone once again. Sam knocked on the door after some debate with himself, and opened the door. Dr. Samandriel did not look like what he was expecting. With a name like Alfred Samandriel, he was expecting some older, portly gentleman with a manicured beard, not some baby-faced kid who looked like he should still be in college.

“Uhhh… C-c-can I help you?” The kid stuttered as he looked at Sam with big blue eyes. A collection of jewel colored beetles lay spread out in drawers on the table in front of him. Several notebooks were open with hand written notes and small sketches. Archive tags were scattered across with a few pencils where he had been cataloging things.

“Dr. Samandriel?” Sam asked, he wanted to make sure that he wasn’t talking with some college intern who was just there for credits. He had been told that this guy could possibly hold the key to finding his partner and he didn’t want to waste any of his time. The probability of finding a missing person went down the longer it took.

“Yeah… Yeah, most people just call me Alfie though. So is there something I can help you with?”
He set aside a magnifying lens along with a block sporting a pinned insect. Standing up he moved around the table to shake his hand, there was a jolt of static as they touched. The way Alfie was staring was unsettling, but familiar. Sam wasn’t quite sure where he had seen that look before but he knew he had and recently too.

“I hope so. You ever work a case for an Agent Gabriel Milton?” Alfie’s already large eyes seemed to widen even further at the mention of his partner’s name. He started to bring his hands up defensively while he backed away from Sam, fear now clearly evident on his face. The kid had an awful poker face and Sam knew something was up.

“Nope. Never heard of him. Can’t help you. Gotta go.” Alfie tried to turn around and run out of the room, but collided into Sam’s chest. He had moved quickly around the table to intercept the archivist. Grabbing him by his shoulders Sam spun him so that he was pinned to the wall. Leaning into him with his arm barred across his chest, Sam’s eyes narrowed.

“An innocent man doesn’t run, Alfie. What do you know about Gabriel Milton? Where’s is he?”

“Nope. Never heard of him. Can’t help you. Gotta go.” Alfie tried to turn around and run out of the room, but collided into Sam’s chest. He had moved quickly around the table to intercept the archivist. Grabbing him by his shoulders Sam spun him so that he was pinned to the wall. Leaning into him with his arm barred across his chest, Sam’s eyes narrowed.

“I’m not playing around here. I’m going to ask again, where is my partner? Where is Gabe?” He growled out the words through clenched teeth. Sam was angry with him, he was expecting answers and wasn’t getting any. He felt like he was just getting jerked around and that his time was being wasted, time that he could be using going through old cases and trying to find if there was a place Gabriel might be hiding out. Or better, a way to contact him.

He was pushing hard against the other man, pinning him in place. Sam towered into his space, not allowing for much room between them. Jaw clenched and breathing heavily through his nose, his lip curled as he tried to contain his anger. He was ready to slam him against the wall again in attempt to get him to talk.

Dr. Samandriel’s eyes lit up with a bright glowing blue light and Sam lurched forward suddenly, the other person was no longer there between him and the wall. Hitting his head he brought a hand up to rub at the spot as he looked around the room. Across the room, with the table between them again, was the young doctor. He held his hands up defensively, but didn’t move to run or attack.

“You can’t hurt me Samuel. But you could reveal my position, please, he worked hard to keep me and the others hidden from them. Don’t undo his work just because you are in pain. Please just leave, and forget I’m here.” He tried to reason with the agent, his voice steady and free of emotion. But his eyes were scanning around them as if to make sure nothing else was watching or listening. There was still a flighty quality to him like he was ready to disappear at any moment.

“Hold up. You’re an angel too? Should have figured, the whole unblinking thing seems to be a common trait.” Sam’s hand went up to his head, his fingers pushing into his hair. He should have known that he was going to keep finding more now that he had seen the other side of things.

“Isn’t that why you sought me out? Oops, it appears I have misjudged the situation.” Alfie continued to look around nervously, his eyes settled back on Sam who was still across the room. “He spoke of you often. He would try to teach us compassion but the way he spoke of you was more than that. He cared greatly for you. And if you cared for him you would leave me alone.”
“I can’t. I can’t do that. Not now. I need to find him.” Sam swallowed at the lump forming in his throat. He knew he was giving the puppy-dog eyes, but he didn’t care, if it had the chance of changing his mind so that he could find Gabriel and try to fix things, it was worth it.

“If he’s missing, something has gone wrong. Listen to me carefully Samuel, do not pray to him. They will hear that and he will be put at risk. If he isn’t already.”

“I actually hadn’t even thought of that, can you really hear prayers?” Again Sam was struck with something that should have been a first thought.

“Some of us yes, but most of us who he’s helped have “turned off” our ears.” He used finger quotes something Sam found as an amusing action from an angel. Sure Gabriel was full of surprising actions and idiosyncratic motions that made him seem human, but he had figured that was from practice. He was great at reading people so it made sense that he was also good at mimicking them.

“You said he helped you.” Sam didn’t ask out right but the question was still there.

“Gabriel loves his family as much as he loves his freedom. And when those of us left the Host because we didn’t feel like His word was being followed truthfully, he was there to help us. However it wasn’t always him, and he was very careful to make sure we weren’t one of Michael’s spies. Which is why it’s dangerous for you to be asking or looking for him.” Alfie was pleading with him, he knew he had shared too much but the human was persistent and he didn’t want to threaten his own wellbeing. He thought that perhaps with some explanations Sam would understand the risks and futility of continuing his search for the other angel. “And now with rumors of Lucifer out, things are only more dangerous.”

“Wait, so let me get this. Gabe was working some kind of Witness Protection agency for run-away angels?” Sam was hit with new information and pieces started to fall into place.

Alfie nodded hesitant to verbally acknowledge anything. The worry was evident on his face as he chewed on his lip, he just wanted Sam to leave him alone and to end his search. There was a lot at risk here and he was not prepared for it.

“So that would mean there are others. And not just him and Cas. He might have helped them through his work. Alfie! This is perfect. I think I know a way to find him!” Sam said out loud as he walked his way through his thought process, thinks clicking together for the first time. A light flicked on in his head and lit up his eyes. A big smile caused dimples to form on his cheeks, Sam had just put together how he could find and track Gabriel down.

“No! Sam! This is… shiiiiit.” Alfie kicked at base of his desk, sending the whole thing across the room, scattering the pinned insects and notes around. Sam was already out the door by the time Alfie was able to react to him. He knew he couldn’t pull another trick without attracting attention. So he did the only other thing he could think of, he contacted the only other angel who knew he was on the ground.

“Castiel. He somehow found me, he’s not giving up. I think he will endanger Gabriel, what should I do?” Alfie spoke into the phone, his voice low. “Are you certain? I still think he is a danger, but if you are certain, I will.”

Sam ducked through the crowds again, making sure to try masking his movements. While he didn’t feel the presence of being watched it didn’t mean he wasn’t. He knew there would be more people looking for him after what he had just learned. He had stumbled into something even bigger than he had imagined. Gabriel must have done an incredibly good job of laying low this long, finding him was looking like an even more daunting task, but Sam had just found a way that would make things
easier. He just needed to do it without drawing attention to himself or his work. Something that he figured was easier said than done. He found that he needed to go talk with Angel Radio more now than ever, they would know how to hide all his tracks.

The Hoover building loomed as best as it could for a low rise building as he rounded the street corner. Each window seemed to have eyes that followed him as he got closer to the building. Sam was feeling like there was someone in wait for him and he quickly changed his direction to one of the side doors he hardly used. He flashed his badge and ducked through the doorway, looking around he wasn’t familiar with this part of the building, but he walked through the hallways as if he knew exactly what he was doing. Grabbing some papers from a printer as he walked past it, he knew the psychological effect of walking around with a clipboard. He was ignored the whole way to the stairwell, quickly closing the door behind him he let out a sigh of relief as he descended into the basement.

“Winchester.” The low growl of a voice came from a man leaning against his desk, his arms crossed over his chest. He stood there in the low light of just a desk lamp, eyes narrowed in a judging glare.

“Jesus! Bobby what the hell man!” Sam jumped back in surprise hitting his head on the low clearance of the door frame. His realized that his hand had flown to his waist where he normally kept his holster. Clenching his fist and opening it again he brought it away from his hip and up to rub at his head.

“That’s my line boy. What the hell is all this?” He waved his hand at the growing pin board. Several pieces of yarn had actually extended off the board to cases that he had taped to the wall itself. The roughness of his features softened as looked Sam in the eyes and saw the pain pushed behind his eyes. “Never mind I don’t want to know about your newest obsession. I’ve got a case for you. Help you take your mind off things.”

“I’ve got a case.” Sam snapped back at the Assistant Director, his voice harsh and taking on an edge not wanting to give up his search for his partner. Not after the breakthrough he had just pieced together.

“No, you’ve got this case. Don’t be some idjit wasting their life on some fool’s task.” He pushed the case file into Sam’s chest with emphasis. His voice softened again after the gruff outburst as he went on to explain the new case. “It’s in Sioux Falls South Dakota, and you’re doing this, for me. It’s a friend of mine calling in a favor and the case is weird enough that I’m giving it to you. And don’t screw this one up.”

Bobby looked back at Sam just once more, concern and worry briefly ghosting over his face before he turned away from the basement office. His footsteps echoing down the hall, the noise fading only to be punctuated by the closing of a heavy door.

Sam took the case file and threw it down on his desk with a loud smack as he rubbed at his face. He looked at the pin board, he finally had a break in his personal case. Now he was being called away on a different case because he had an actual job to do. He didn’t want anything that would delay his search for his partner. Something on the pinboard caught his attention, Sam stood up and crossed the small space and lifted an article uncovering a photograph of a young man with big eyes in a t-shirt with stylized insects on it. A huge smile crossed his face and he grabbed the case file as he tucked his phone into his pocket and rushed out of his office, taking just enough time to turn off the lights and lock the door.

Taking the steps two at a time he was on the main floor of the building in no time. Struggling to get his arms into his jacket while juggling his files he ran into another person. Nearly losing his papers as he was knocked back on the ground. He started to blindly apologize before he was cut off.
Woah woah. Hold up Sammy. Where’s the fire?” Dean’s hands were on his shoulders as he helped his brother to his feet. His hands lingered extending the contact between them.

“Don’t call me that.” Sam grumbled back, jerking his arm out from under his hand. He didn’t want to stand around any longer than he needed to, he had to get going. The more time slipped through his fingers the further away the answers slipped.

“Whatever man. You want to come over for dinner?” Dean tilted his head trying to make eye contact with Sam. The offer still stood from the first night they had gone over to Sam’s and made him burgers, but Sam had come up with excuses since then to avoid sharing any meals with them.

“No I can’t Bobby set me up with a case.” He waved the case in the air while he looked around the room, thankful for the first time that Bobby had set him up with a perfect excuse to get out of dinner.

“Don’t you leave in the morning for that?” Sam rolled his eyes when his brother pointed out the one flaw in his plan. Of course he would know the schedule of the case, it was probably Castiel’s idea to hand the case over to the X-files in the first place. The idea of it was making Sam grumpy, he didn’t like the feeling that he was being played or manipulated.

“Yeah but get this, Gabriel had some friends in town. I’m gonna go talk with them see if they can help me out at all.” He left the answer short as he pulled away from Dean. He made it clear that he was finished with this conversation and didn’t want to continue it.

“Yeah ok. Good idea, Sammy, just yanno, remember to eat something.” Dean tried to pass along the request, worry for his younger brother seeming into his tone. He grabbed at the back of his head in an act of helplessness as he watched Sam push past the front doors and dodge into a passing crowd head ducked low.

He started up the old fleet vehicle and left the parking garage merging into city traffic with ease. The radio stayed silent as he took backroads and roundabouts. He doubled up on his own path a few times continually checking his rear view mirror. He thought he was being followed by a white truck for about three miles until they took a turn into a construction site, leaving Sam driving alone again. He took a shortcut through a bowling alley parking lot to catch an empty road that looped back to a small run down radio building.

“Password?” The word was a single paranoid demand after he knocked on the door, a small yellowed light flickered overhead.

“Damnit Ash, just let me in.” Sam leaned into the wall next to the door, clenching his teeth and rubbing at his temples. His head was pulsing, so many things had already happened that day and he was ready for it to be over and for the next to begin.

“Geesh, alright alright. Frank, he’s just as grumpy as you said he was. Come on in.” Ash opened the door allowing the agent to enter. He stepped back as Sam pushed in, the door closing at his heels.

“You make sure no one followed you?” A second paranoid voice piped up from around the corner. Sam looked into the dark room letting his eyes adjust to the poor lighting. Several computer screens and other various devices shedding light where the overhead light was blocked by overstuffed shelving.

“What do you think Devereaux? Here.” He tossed his dead phone towards the hacker who caught it in surprise. Sam continued further into the station office, checking out the new addition of various symbols written on the walls. “I keep getting calls from a number I can’t track, there’s nothing on the other line either. They started this morning. Two calls and they ate through my battery, I figure you
guys can get something.”

“What else have you got?” Frank asked watching as Sam dropped his case folder down on one of the shelves. The three of them moved through the building to the back room where the bulk of the computers stayed. Surrounded by surveillance equipment and tracking programs Sam was actually feeling safer. If he was doing all the watching than it would be easier to find who was watching him. He was starting to think he knew why the hackers kept a healthy level of paranoia.

“Not sure yet, but I think I figured out a way to track Gabriel’s past movements. Maybe we can-” Sam was cut off.

“Create an algorithm that puts together all the signs to find his next movements? That’s the exact kind of thing that Dr. Badass is best at! Hit me, Winchester.” Ash plopped into a chair letting it spin in a circle as he cracked open a beer.

“Alright, there’s a connection.” Sam pulled up chair ready to tell his theory to the hackers. “Gabe would look into these cases, things like you guys do. Supernatural, other worldly, angelic. These cases were dead ends or so he made them seem, not the Church, Gabriel. I got a feeling that he’s not gonna stop with these cases.”

“You’re not wrong there Winchester.” Balthazar stepped out of a side room, with a snap of his fingers the word stopped around them. “Somehow you’ve gotten in deeper than you realize. Although I shouldn’t be surprised, you were his favorite for some god forsaken reason. Still don’t know why.”

“Not you too… I assume you’re part of Gabe’s feather relocation program?” Sam closed his eyes hoping that when he opened them the flow of time would return to normal. He was getting tired of angels snapping their fingers and altering his reality.

“You think that up all by yourself?”

“Balthazar, I’m not going to mess up whatever you’ve got going here. I want to find him, and talk with him, and maybe see if we can’t work things out.” Sam tried to ignore the biting sarcasm as he tried to condense his plans into a quick sound bite. He had the impression that Balthazar was not going to be patient with him.

“Want to get your hands on some angelic mojo?” He stalked closer to the agent eyeing him up, measuring his worth. He had every right to be paranoid and to protect his friend and their work efforts.

“No, I just want my partner back.” Sam looked at him with puppy eyes. He wanted his friend back, he had been promised an actual date and he still wanted it. To him Gabriel was a good detective, a smart and funny man, and he had grown into a good and dear friend in the time they had spent together. He missed the million dumb nicknames and the bad flirting, he was even missing the best of 90’s alternative rock being played from every conceivable music device.

“Fair enough. Just one thing.” He snapped his fingers again everything starting back up where it had left off once he was certain that Sam wasn’t a threat to their efforts. Gabriel had trusted him to a point, but with Gabriel missing he knew they would need to rock together. “I need you to listen to this.”

The loud static came out of the speakers, the familiar buzzing layered static. Sam tilted his head as he furrowed his brows in concentration.
“I can hear them. There’s voices in the static.” He said just above a whisper. He wasn’t sure what it meant that he was able to hear voices where before it was just a soft static similar to a white noise machine. He received a strange look from the two hackers who were busy playing with the agent’s phone and busily clacking away at the keyboard of one of the many computers.

“What are they saying?” Balthazar leaned in closer as Sam concentrated on the static. This was his final test, Sam was almost certain of it, there was something he was looking for that he already knew was there.

“That the Messenger has made himself known by binding the Morning Star. There are so many voices talking it’s hard to make things out.” Sam grumbled in frustration. Trying to single out phrases from the chorus of voices was difficult.

“What else Sam?” He gently guided him to listen further to the static. The sound pulsed, an audio-visual meter tracked the soundwaves but producing no defining traits.

“It sounds like they’re calling for a bounty. Is Gabriel the Messenger? Balthazar he needs our help, we can’t let him fight this alone.” Sam was suddenly much more worried for his partner’s safety, finding him was becoming more than just a personal need. He should be there with him, no matter the reason.

“Good.”

“How is that good? That is the opposite of good!” He tried to push back on his chair in an attempt to stand up, his efforts were halted by a single hand resting on the top of the chair.

“He’s left an impression on you, a link otherwise there is no way you’d be able to hear anything on this. And so long as this station is playing static your boy Gabriel is alive. Something we both want to keep hearing.” Balthazar removed his hand from the chair moving back to rummage through some of the boxes on the nearest shelf.

“What do you mean by ‘a link’?” Sam followed his motions as he continued searching for something.

“Just that, a link, a connection, a bond. It’s something you two now share, and while it’s proving helpful to us right now it can just as soon cause issues for him. It also does a few other things, or so I’m told. Ah ha! Here it is!” He exclaimed as he pulled a necklace out and quickly had it clasped around Sam’s neck. There was a misshapen lump of metal about the size of a quarter hanging off of it. It seemed to vibrate with a musical tone when touched.

“It’s silver from the trumpets of the Levites. Now you don’t need to make a sacrifice for these to work anymore, just tap the metal and it’ll call out like it once did. One hard tap to call assemble, several short taps to break camp.” Balthazar explained as Sam examined the ancient piece of metal. His partners were busy dissecting a phone and had a second phone next to it, they were in their own world ignorant of the exchange of the artifact.

“Where did you get this?” Sam was flipping it over, watching as the light caught on the old metal. There seemed to be very little oxidation present despite its claimed age. It was smooth and felt warm in his hand, the edges worn with time. He let go of the amulet allowing it to fall again his chest.

“When I left I made sure to grab a bunch of toys when I did. Didn’t want them coming after me with any of them.” The answer was simple and came with a short burst of laughter. “Frank, Ash. You got anything for our pet FBI agent?”
“Nah man, this thing is a mess, no encryption on it at all. Is this really an agency standard?” Ash complained as he continued to take apart the phone, setting pieces in specific piles.

“Nothing yet on your mysterious caller, but I’ve gone ahead and transferred your phone number to feed through one of our systems before forwarding it to this dummy phone. Which is gonna be your phone, dummy.” Devereux handed over an old flip phone. Sam grimaced at the limitations he knew were being imposed on him with it. He wouldn’t be able to access his emails or the internet with this old thing. It was going to be good for just the basic phone calls and text messages.

“We’ll be able to monitor every call you get or make with this baby. And as an added benefit it scrambles the GPS signal, so you won’t be able to be tracked. If you get that call again we’ll get it too.” Ash tapped the side of his head while giving Sam a smile.

Sam wasn’t sure if he was pleased or not that his conversations were going to be listened in on. It was some kind of consolation that he couldn’t be tracked, that was one less thing to not worry about. He knew he was still going to be leaving a digital trail with his business card, that was going to be unavoidable. The amount of help he was getting was something he was grateful for and he found himself thinking what it would be like to have more friends than just his brother and his partner. He let himself smile at the thought moving towards the door, picking up his case file as he reached out for the handle.

“Oh, Sam. You’re gonna want this. I took the liberty of peeking look at your case. And remember. Salt and burn, baby!” Ash tossed a small electronic device his way as he stepped out the door. Sam caught the device and looked it over, it was a simple box with several lights and a meter of some sort. It looked familiar like something he had seen on tv before. He tilted his head and waved in thanks at the radio trio before he ducked into the fleet vehicle.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to My_untold_lies (Krisn5) for reading this through while it was still just half ideas stitched together.

Might take a short break on updates to focus on the KoC BigBang.
There had been ample time to think about his situation during the flight. He had been voluntarily stripped of his phone; ways access to email, games, music, and other distractions also stripped. Instead he was left to read over the case file several times before he resorted to reading the inflight magazines and whatever else was left behind by previous passengers. There wasn’t much to the case, the file was actually pretty thin and what was in there was vague and incomplete, this lead Sam to believe that he would be filled in during a briefing with the Sheriff once he got there.

What was in the files created a vague yet disturbing picture. The incident was isolated to a single location, a large old manor on the edge of town. The entire family had been found dead throughout the house, but there were no signs of a forced entrance and the doors were still locked from the inside. They had a comment in the file that they had to break down the door because the deadbolts were still in place. No fingerprints were found, no footprints, there were multiple weapons and causes of death but there was no suspect and no leads. The whole thing was a real mystery case and he could understand why Bobby passed the case to him.

Sheriff Mills was an old friend of Bobby’s and had apparently called in a favor on this, it was mysterious and challenging but not something that usually warranted a visit or consulting from the FBI. Sam didn’t care what the reason was; his plan was to get in, solve the case, and get home so he could get back to his own search. This was just an unnecessary detour meant as a distraction. Something he didn’t want or need.

The plane landed and he rushed to get off it. The quicker this was over, the quicker he could get back to his personal case. It was a small airport and it didn’t take long to get from his terminal to the rental facility. The receptionist popped her gum loudly turning her head to face the door, the bell chimed when Sam stepped through, drawing attention to himself. She had a distant and glossy look to her eyes, the look of someone who had gone well past the point of bored. Her work speed left something to be desired and the machines left to aid in the process only seemed to slow things down further. Sam reached across the desk and into her work space to grab at the final paper as it was churned out of the printer, in an effort to speed thing up a bit. He scribbled his signature on the documents, not waiting to be told where to sign or initial; he had done it enough times that he knew what needed to be done without being told. Grabbing at the keys on the counter he was out the doors before she even had filed the paperwork away in the flimsy plastic organizers.

Sam cursed under his breath when he saw the vehicle that he had gotten. A small two door coupe, it was a sporty looking thing but he could tell wouldn’t have the leg room. Popping the trunk he tossed his bag in the back with a grunt, the hatch wouldn’t let him slam it shut letting an automated system take over. Denied the pleasure of slamming a door shut he huffed as he slung his computer bag and the case file into the passenger seat. Sam struggled with sorting out the paper directions he had printed, once again reminded of all the wonderful and helpful features he had given up when he turned his phone over to the guys at Angel Radio. Keys in the ignition the car turned over with a single whining complaint for the cold outside.

The directions were pretty simple and got him out of the airport and to the major roads of the area. Once he reached the highway and knew he was going to staying on it for a while he finally relaxed a bit. Setting the directions down on top of the case file, he reached out and turned up the volume knob letting music fill the car.
“-You see, I’m tired of feeling this pain. I’m tired of living my own little lie, and it makes me wonder. When I see you in my dreams, does it mean anything? Are you trying to talk to me?”

The sounds of acoustic guitar and a soulful bass accompanied by a rich voice filtered through the car. The scenery drifted pass in a blur as one song bled into another. By the third or fourth song with no interruption Sam checked the radio with some mild suspicion. The display screen confirmed his thoughts as it read out track number and artist instead of a channel number. The previous renter had left behind a CD in the car and in some serendipitous act the rental company hadn’t checked or removed it. Sam was smiling as the music continued and the distance ahead only got shorter, the melodious tunes doing wonders for his nerves.

He had seen many towns like this one as he rolled into it. Small comfortable pieces of Americana that were struggling and fading at the edges. Locally owned shops forced to compete with the introduction of a large superstore somewhere on the edge of town. Diners that held claims of best “blank” in the county or the state. Motels where time stood still and things seemed like they were kept in a capsule, preserved slices of years long gone.

The wallpaper was tinted with age and was peeling in the high corners, however the carpet was plush, deep, and clean, obviously a newer addition to the décor. The bed was older, almost antiqued looking, whereas the sheets and linens smelled fresh and recently cleaned. Sam looked around the room taking in the aged look of the appliances; the TV still had knobs on the front of it. He left it alone instead crossing the room to wash his face and attempt to appear a little more put together and less ragged after all the traveling he had just been through. As he turned the water off, he heard his phone ringing with an unfamiliar ringtone. He lifted it up with a still wet hand taking a look at the caller ID before flipping it open. “Unregistered number”, well at least he hoped that the guys were also getting this.

“Agent Sam Winchester.” He said bringing the phone up to his ear. He waited for a response hearing what was becoming a familiar empty silence of the other line. “Hello, you’ve reached Special Agent Winchester.”

He tried again, the light static of nothing was the only sound emanating from the speaker. Sam hit a button, turning the phone on speaker mode and leaving it on the edge of the bed so he could still listen to it while he finished getting cleaned up and refreshed. A burst of crackle in the static broke the silence followed by an audible click of the call ending. Sam stared at the phone, waiting to see if he would get a call from Ash or Devereaux regarding his mystery caller. After about ten minutes of waiting with nothing to show from it he tucked the phone in his pocket and grabbed the case file, leaving the motel room locked up behind him.

The station wasn’t too far away and it seemed centralized in the town along with the library, a courthouse, and a pharmacy. Heads swiveled as he stepped into the building, he stood out in his suit. It was a stark contrast to the uniformed officers and clashed with the plaid and camos of the civilians. He might have blended in and almost looked like he belonged had he gone in in his own plaid shirts and comfortable clothes. However he would have lost the impression he made with the suited look of an agent. A woman with steely eyes and a close cut black hair style was watching him from across the waiting room. She got up and walked towards him with a sense of purpose and ownership of the surrounding area the way the others parted for her made it clear that she did own the place.

“Sheriff Jody Mills. You must be one of Singer’s boys. Bobby called me to let me know you were on your way.” She introduced herself with a firm handshake. Turning and walking into the precinct she led him past the front desk and through the low and open desk plan that he officers and detectives shared. Her office was near the back of the station, large open widows allowed for natural light to brighten up the room more than the dim overhead lights could. Ducking his head Sam
stepped through the door letting it click shut behind him, she leaned against her desk looking him over.

“Normally I don’t bother Bobby with our shit out here in the boonies. But when things got weird I remembered something he drunkenly rambled on about, something about a special division that he oversees that deals in the really weird crap. So I called in a favor for this one. You got the case file…?” She left the question open knowing that she hadn’t given him a chance to introduce himself yet.

“Agent Sam Winchester, and yes, I got the file and read it over a couple of times. I noticed that there were parts of it that weren’t-”

“He never mentioned your name, it was always an Agent Milton and all the bullcrap he made up. But it sounded like the guy got the work done, or so I heard.” Sheriff Mills interrupted him, her eyebrow arched staring him down with a questioning glance. She wasn’t expecting someone so young or so tall to have thrown their career into a strange and shadowed division.

“He is, or was, my partner.” Sam swallowed at a lump that formed in his throat at the mention of his partner, trying to keep his emotions in check. He could feel his anger rising up as he was reminded that he should be out there looking for him instead of poking around a murder case. Clenching ad releasing his fists in attempt to maintain composure he found himself mumbling. “He, uh, won’t be working this case with me. I’m working this case alone.”

“Great. So Bobby thinks he can stick me with the B-team for this? What a load of bullshit.” She pushed off her desk and circled around it, falling backwards into her seat. Picking up paper work and additional files, she pointedly ignored the tall agent still in her office.

“Miss-” Sam forced the word through his teeth, trying to get her attention so he could try to get back in the case. As much as he wanted to just throw the case on her desk and storm out, he couldn’t go back without finishing this one, Bobby had all but threatened him. Besides he hated leaving work half done and he knew he could handle the case as good as Gabe could.

“Sheriff.” She corrected him with a sharp reply. She had an air of no-nonsense around her, and everything was strictly business. If Sam hadn’t known that type of personality he might have taken offense to the short and curt way she was treating him; but he recognized it as a woman’s coping technique when put in a traditionally male position, something to garner her the begrudging respect of her peers without putting herself down.

“Sheriff Mills,” he tried again counting down from ten in his head. “Bobby sent me because he knows I can help you on your case. And I promise you no matter how weird you think it is, I’ve seen weirder. But the case file didn’t have all the details did it?” He maintained a professional and knowing composure about himself. His eyes met hers and he could see the curtains of stress and worry drop with his promise of help. There was clearly much more to this case than was let on in the file and she needed the help.

“Alright, yeah somethings were left out, but only because it’s a strange case. There are guys who’ve been on the force most of their life who are refusing to deal with this, something about superstitions. Are you fine if I take you to check out the scene while I tell you the whole story?” Jody grabbed her hat off the stand behind her and moved back to the door, jingling her keys she looked back at him. Sam got up and followed her back out, making a quick stop back at his car to pull out the box that Ash had handed him. Tucking the device in the inside of his jacket he sat shotgun in the patrol car.

“Time to make the world a better place. Why must we hate one another? Well, no matter what we gotta live together. Just that you don’t look like me.” came from the car speakers before Jody reached
over to turn the volume down so she could explain some of the details of the case that were left out.

This wasn’t the first time that an unexplained murder had taken place in the house, this was just the worst. The house had been empty for a couple of decades only recently being put up on the market as a family home. Up until this point, all other deaths inside the house had been single or occasionally double deaths, thrill seekers trying to spend a night in the “haunted house”. Most deaths accounted to suicide or accidental death in an old house.

“So my guys won’t step foot near the property because they think there’s some kind of curse on the house. That these deaths are all a result of a ghost.” Jody snorted back a laugh as she pulled up the driveway, the house stood tall and imposing as they approached it. Sam couldn’t help but shiver while looking it over, there was a feeling to the place that left him chilled. He thought he saw movement in one of the windows, as if someone had been watching their approach and stepped back away from the windows.

“Why can’t they be?” he said, it was something that would have surprised him a couple months ago but now after the things he had experienced it wasn’t the strangest thing that could have happened. At least for this case the men in black wouldn’t be showing up for this case, Sam figured he would have gotten at least a heads up from Balthazar if they were sniffing around.

“And if it was, who am I supposed to call? The Ghostbusters? Yeah right, try to explain that one to the good folks of Souix Falls.” She gave him a look before she walked ahead to unlock the door of the house, she clearly didn’t want to entertain the possibility of this being anything other than a normal murder, if that was even such a thing.

The house was old and while that could explain the creaking and groaning of things settling and the occasional cold spot from drafts, it still left the history of death unexplained in the house. From what he learned there were over a dozen deaths that had occurred inside the house, including the family of four that had just recently died. He was starting to find himself wishing, not for the first time, that Gabriel was right there with him to come at this case from his unique perspective while he would try to side with the Sheriff over the whole “haunted house” story. Instead he was finding himself thinking more the way that his partner would have done. There was something about this whole story that wasn’t adding up to a clear cut and human crime.

While Sheriff Mills was pointing things out as she moved through the rooms, Sam ducked out of sight and pulled out the device he had tucked away in his pocket. Turning it on a set of lights on the top started to illuminate as a gauge below them rocked its needle back and forth. He moved slowly, room to room, watching for the lights to react with whatever it was detecting. And the lights were constantly reacting, but only with little jumps. The first couple of lights never went out as he moved through the house. The basement had the lowest level of activity despite it being dark, damp, and creepy.

“Agent Winchester? What are you doing down here? Nothing happened in the basement, not in any of the reports.” Jody called down as she began to descend the stairs. She came up behind him and watched the lights flicker on the device in his hands. “What is that?”

“It’s something a colleague gave me, he thought it could help me out on this case.” He quickly tried to hide the detector inside his jacket again, startled by the sheriff and embarrassed that he had been caught looking for ghosts.

“I could have sworn it was one of those EMF detectors from those ghost hunter shows, but if you say it’s some fancy FBI tool by all means.” Her sarcasm told him that she clearly didn’t believe him. And it was valid because she was right. He just happened to have been thrown through a door that wasn’t meant to be opened, he knew that things that went bump in the night could actually be
monsters. Sam was starting to see why Gabe would try to prevent this from getting out all at once, but this sheriff seemed to be more on the ball than others.

“No, I’m sorry, you’re right. It is what you think it is. I shouldn’t have insulted your intelligence by lying like that. This case is more than what it seems, which is why it was handed down to my department. You heard Bobby talk about how we handle the weird stuff, well this is the weird stuff.”

Sam apologized, taking the detector out again, the two of them watched as it sat silent in the dark. “Something goes bump in the dark, and it’s not your typical burglar or bad man, that’s where we get involved. There are monsters out there Sheriff Mills, real monsters.”

“Ookay. So not only did they send me the B-team but turns out the B-team is a grade-A nutter. I think that’s it for today, mister FBI agent.” Jody closed her eyes, her lips tightly pulled back in a smile forced so that she wouldn’t start screaming in anger and frustration. She turned around and went back up the stairs ready to just leave this behind and continue with her investigation after calling up Bobby with a laundry list of complaints while downing a whole bottle of wine.

“Just give me a little bit more time here Sheriff.” He asked, she gave a wave of dismissal as she got to the top step. Sam lost sight of her as she rounded the corner.

He walked around the perimeter of the basement one more time, carefully watching the lights on the EMF detector for any spikes. Once he reached the base of the stairs without a single spike he made his way back up the stairs. Back on the main floor the hand on the detector started to move again. The hand spiked all the way to the right, all the lights lit up and the machine let out a shrill whine as he stepped into the kitchen.

Thinking back to the report breakdown that Jody had told him on their ride over, two of the four most recent deaths had occurred in that room, and the evidence tape still clinging to where things were found and photographed backed it up. Pulling his phone out of his pocket he scanned through the contact list, noticing for the first time that his imported list had been altered with the names of his contacts. Pressing the button for a “DR.BADASS” he waited, a chill of air hitting the back of his neck sending shivers down his spine.

“Ash I need intel. What can you get me on the history on a house?” Sam shared the address over the phone and listened as Ash rattled on about how they weren’t able to get anything from his phone. The thing was apparently scrubbed squeaky clean even though it had never left Sam’s person, he didn’t mention the mysterious phone call at all. Sam listened hearing the distinct clacking of keyboard in the background as Ash worked to get him the information he hoped would help him wrap things up here. Putting the call on speaker phone, Sam continued to walk around examining any potential clues. Everything in the kitchen seemed to be a hot spot for the EMF.

“Alright. Winchester get this. All the deaths of the house, and hoo boy are there a lot, they all are targeting people who have spent long periods of time in the house, or were trying to alter the house in some manner. But nothing much solid in way of names or dates for numero uno. Looks like you might need to spend the night in the Bordon Manor to find your Lizzy.” Ash’s voice finally rang out over the rhythmic clacking of him typing away. Sam thanked him and closed the phone, tucking it into his pocket. He moved onto the next room and watched as the meter dropped down to about the mid ranges. The squealing dropped down to a quiet whine.

He got similar reactions as he moved to the upstairs bedrooms. A couple of spikes here and there, especially where crime scene tape still clung to the floor or marked where blood splatter was evident on the walls. Sam closed his eyes in a cringe as he was able to witness some of the brutality in the way the family was killed. He had certainly been exposed to worse things but it didn’t change the fact that he was standing in a house were two parents and two children were killed.

A loud slam of a body slamming into the door followed by a sting of cursing made Sam return to the
top of the stairs. Looking down from the landing he watched as Sheriff Jody struggled with the front door. It shouldn’t have been locked, and they were on the inside so even if it was she should have been able to easily unlock it, but he was witnessing her struggle as if the door was being held shut against her. The sky outside was darkening as the sun was setting behind the trees, giving the situation an ominous feeling.

“This was a great prank Mr. FBI, lock the backwoods sheriff in a murder scene at night, not really my idea of romantic. How’d you do it?” She grumbled angrily up at him.

“How’d I do what?” Sam asked making his way down the stairs, she stepped to the side as he tried the doorknob as well, it was firmly shut against them.

“So you’re telling me you don’t know how this door is locked and won’t open?” Jody had mastered the art of sarcasm and was using it in new and creative ways that Sam had never witnessed. Even Dean would be impressed with her.

“Is it just that door that’s locked?” he was now wondering if this was work of the spirit, locking them in the house and preventing them from stopping it. It would fit the bill of a vengeful spirit, Sam just hoped that he was wrong. He ran to the back door and found that one was also locked and held shut by some unexplained powerful force. He tried the windows as well, finding them all to be the same. A gun shot rang out loudly causing Sam to throw himself at the floor. Crawling back to the front of the house he saw Jody pointing her gun at an empty kitchen, her face pale with terror.

“What did you do, Winchester? What is going on here?” Jody’s voice was shaking in fear. “There was a woman in here, she just came at me with that.” She pointed out the ax that was laying on the floor just a few feet from her.

“I think we’ve got an angry spirit. Someone who’s got strong connection and history with the house and doesn’t want people to get into it.” Sam said it as if he believed it himself, but at this point he didn’t have very many other options. He had to face what they were given and do what he knew Gabe would do about it, without any divine intervention or angelic tricks.

All the cabinets rattled menacingly as the spirit manifested behind Jody, long bony fingers reaching out as if to grab her around the neck. Sam grabbed Jody’s arm first jerking her body towards him before sending a round into the spirit, the form rippling in a static around where the projectile tore through the ghost like nothing. It let out an ear splitting screech causing the glass windows to shudder before rushing through Jody and pushing a wave of force into Sam knocking him back into a counter a few pots and pans getting thrown to the ground in the process.

“Don’t let her do that again.” She said through chattering teeth as she leaned back against the sink. Jody’s face was pale and her lips were blue, her breath was visible as she exhaled. Frost formed on the dark window behind her and Sam watched as eyes burning with hatred stared at them through the glass.

“You should step away from the sink if you don’t want that to happen again.” He said as calmly as he could while raising his gun in the direction of the forming figure. Pushing up from the floor he remained trained on the area where the face was staring them down before it blinked out of visibility.

It blinked back right in between the two of them, a knife from the butcher’s block gripped tightly in its fist. Jody let out a surprised scream and tried to maneuver away from the sudden ghost. Sam yelled out at them, wary to shoot into the area worried about hitting the sheriff if the bullets just passed through the ghost again. However he wasn’t given a choice when the spirit turned its head in a quick and jerky motion towards him, the hollow eyes seemed to look through him as he felt the rush of energy at him again.
His gun was knocked out of his hand and out of his reach as he was flung against the wall. With a grunt he pushed himself off the floor, his fingers curling around the frying pan that had fallen to the ground earlier. The spirit was pressing further on Jody, herding her into a corner cutting off her ability to escape. She screamed out in pain as the spirit brought down the knife on her, the blade slicing into the flesh of her forearm, defensive wounds. Sam wound up and swung at the spirit as it prepared to strike at the sheriff again, the metal of the frying pan slammed into the spirit and caused it to disperse with an unearthly scream.

“Still think I’m crazy? Come on, we’ve got to find her body and dig her up. It won’t stop until we end it.” He said reaching down to help her up off the floor, handing her a dishcloth so that she could wrap it around her arm to try stopping the flow of blood. He led them both out of the kitchen and into another room. Sam looked at his new weapon in wonder. “Either our ghost is terrified of frying pans or the iron somehow hurts it. Arm yourself.”

Jody tied off the cloth around her arm, the cut was thankfully shallow and wasn’t in need of immediate medical attention. She looked around the room and grabbed at an old candle stick, the metal was heavy but real in her hands. This was something that she had never encountered in any of her years on the force, but with its reality she was now questioning some of the other strange cases she had seen or had heard about.

“There’s a rumor about this house. Something I never took much stock into because it just sounded like something someone made up to give the ‘haunted house’ idea some credibility. But there’s a story about a woman who had moved here with her husband and their kid years and years ago, we’re talking like Oregon Trail times. Anyways he died during their travels leaving her to raise the kid on her own as well as get settled in a new town, have a house built, run a business or whatever she needed.” She told the tale with a flourish of the candlestick in place of hand gestures. Sam leaned back careful to maintain his grip on the frying pan.

“Story goes that as he kid got older she got resentful and angry towards the town. The kid was died under some pretty sketchy circumstances and she only got angrier and shut herself in her own home. Anyone who tried to help her was attacked and driven away. Eventually the idea that she had gold in the house took root and people started trying to sneak in, some escaped with horror stories about the woman being a witch, some were never heard from again. If she died it was probably somewhere in the house, if she existed at all.” She was quick to add at the end, she still wasn’t certain that this was really happening to her despite the reality of her wounds. There was just so many ways that this couldn’t be real, but it was all too elaborate to be a prank.

“You know a lot about a ghost story you don’t believe in.” Sam teased her, but the information was useful. It was more than he had before, and it gave him an idea of where to start looking. The house was old but certain areas of the house were older than others, and all the area’s where the energy spikes had occurred there had been some cosmetic changes. But the footprint of where a hearth had been located at some point was clear, the area had been incorporated into the newer kitchen layout.

“All the energy spikes were in the kitchen so that’s an obvious spot to start. But that’s also where a lot of potential weapons are located.” Sam reasoned out loud for Jody’s benefit.

“Don’t most ghosts hang out around in basements? Or graveyards?” Jody asked quietly, turning the piece of metal over in her hands. “How many ghosts have you killed?”

“Uh, honestly? This will be my first. But if it makes you feel any better, I’m pretty sure I’ve gone up against a ghoul and a couple of vampires now.” Sam answered, wisely leaving out the angles and demons and he had no idea how to classify the caterpillars.

“So I get to be a Junior Ghostbuster for the day. Not exactly what I was planning on today, but let’s
go gank this bitch. I don’t let anybody get away with hurting me.” She had pulled herself together and had tightened her grip on the candlestick. Her head was tilted up defiantly, ready to return the damage.

The old house creaked and moaned as they planned their attack. Footsteps paced the upstairs hall, as doors slammed loudly. Everything quieted down to a dead silence as they agreed that they shouldn’t separate so they could watch each other’s backs. Jody took the lead back into the kitchen, taking meaningful deep breaths so she could watch for the puffs of cold.

“MINE! … LEAVE! … MINE!” an angry voice called out from all around them, the volume of it shaking the house. Cupboards shook and windows rattled, the floor beneath them shifted as if in an earthquake.

“Oh, sweetheart you’re long dead and this ain’t your place anymore.” Jody called out, taunting the spirit. She was trying to get its attention away from Sam as he started to pull the stove away from the wall exposing the original masonry work. She felt the air chill around her and watched as the silverware drawer opened and the forks rose up.

“Not on my watch.” Jody swung at the area near the cutlery, her candlestick becoming a bat in her hands. A loud clanging rang out as she made contact with several pieces the others shooting forward on a path towards Sam.

The commotion drew his attention allowing him to dodge most of the forks a couple mad contact with his shoulder. Wincing, he pulled one that had managed to punch all the way through the layers of his suit to the meat of his shoulder. He saw a puff of his breath appear in front of him and felt the icy touch of a bony hand push through where the forks had hit. Sam swung the frying pan awkwardly upwards at the sensation passing harmlessly through the air.

“Behind you!” Jody called out, watching him miss the spirit that was pushing her hand through his body. He swung the pan up over his shoulder, the pan hitting him square in the back after passing through the ghost with a scream. “She’s not pleased with whatever you’re doing.”

The oven pulled away with a bang and Sam was able to see that the mortar around a couple of the bricks had crumbled away. Setting the frying pan down by his side, he started working the bricks loose. The pan flung backwards across the room loudly slamming into the wall, leaving a dent where it connected. A brick fell to the ground exposing a small, hidden cubby. There was a worn picture of a small smiling boy clinging to the large skirts of his mother, several letters, and a locket but no bones. As he pulled them all out of the hole an otherworldly wind picked up inside the house; plates flew off the shelves, shattering against the walls as they became angry projectiles. Inside the locket was a portrait of the small boy grown up and a lock of hair.

“SALT! JODY I NEED THE SALT!” He shouted above the din of the kitchenware tornado in the room. He had the lighter that Dean had given him years ago as a way to meet people but only remembered the need for salt last moment. She looked around frantically as she tried to avoid being hit by mugs and spatulas. Grabbing a novelty shaker from near the fridge she threw herself to the ground and reached it out to Sam. His fingers wrapped around hers as the salt was passed off. Breaking the top off he poured salt over the lock of hair before setting it on fire, the stench of burning hair filling the room.

The spirit materialized for a final time in the center of the whirl of kitchen. Her face was sad, tear tracks visible down her cheeks as her body slowly burst into flames and she disappeared. The wind coming to a sudden halt and items dropped as if remembering that gravity was a thing. Sam stood up and handed the items from the cubby over to Jody after he helped her up off the ground.
The dawn sky seemed a little brighter when they stepped out of the house together. Jody smiled as she bumped into Sam on the way back to the patrol car, he grinned in return. The ride back was quiet as they digested exactly what they had managed to accomplish together. The letters and photo were tucked neatly into one of the case files with promises to make copies for the other.

“Hey, don’t be a stranger now Sam. You ever need an escape from the city life to bumblefuck nowhere just give me a call.” Jody called out as she leaned on the open door of her cruiser.

“Can I call you if I ever need backup on another Ghostbuster case?” He asked as he ducked into his compact car.

“Oh? Are you promoting me from Junior Ghostbuster to full Ghostbuster?” She laughed before shaking her head. “Nah, I think I’m good but if I get another bought of weird in my neck of the woods I know who to call.”

They exchanged waves as Sam drove off towards his little motel. He hadn’t scheduled his return flight yet but he was ready to catch whatever rest he could after that case. Picking up his phone he noticed it was dead, with a sigh he dropped it into his pocket. He pulled into a parking spot, his car crooked and over the lines, jingling the keys as he tried opening the door to his room.

Plugging his phone in, he made his way to the bathroom. A quick shower was the perfect thing to help calm his nerves and soothe his muscles after his recent fight. The water washed away some blood and grime as the sound of falling water pounded on the top of his head. A chirp from the other room caught his attention and he twisted the knob to the water off with a squeak. Wrapping a towel hastily around his waist, Sam looked down at his phone. Six missed calls, two messages. Five of the calls were from the radio station, but the first one was from an unidentified number.

Playing the messages over the speakers, Sam set his phone back down giving him time to towel dry off and get dressed. The first was the expected static, it seemed to go on for nearly a minute before the call ended with a click. He assumed that was what had drained his battery down. The second was a frantic message from Frank, Sam could barely make out any of his excited chatter but got the part where he needed to call them back right away. Placing the call he sat down on the bed, pulling his socks up.

“FINALLY WINCHESTER! We thought we’d never get ahold of you.” Frank’s voice shouted out of the small speaker. Sam was glad that the phone wasn’t near his head with the volume of the man on the other side. “Take the thing off speakerphone and I’ll talk.”

“Phone was drained by the empty call.” Sam explained weakly, as he picked up the phone changing it over. He was still amazed with their ability to read electronics along with their level of paranoia.

“Yeah that’s a tricky bastard, we still don’t have anything our end regarding that. BUT not the point of this call! We know where he’s going to be next.” His voice was quieter, but he still spoke quickly with excitement.

“Who?” Sam didn’t want to get his hopes up, but he could feel his nerves calling out to him. His heart singing with the possibility of it being Gabriel.

“WHO!? Our boy Gabriel! Heart of Ohio, one of those Joan of Arc deals showed up. She’s the sole survivor of a mysterious car crash; amnesia and a wicked case of hearing voices. Claims she’s talked with the big man himself. She’s on lock down in a facility right now. But this is hitting all the flags, Balth says if he’s gonna show it’ll be for this.”

Sam was already on his computer making the necessary plans for an immediate flight out. The phone
was balanced between his shoulder and ear, his hair getting pushed up and out in funny directions. But he didn’t care, this was exactly the break he was looking for. The call ended and he was throwing his bags back into the small rental car. Tearing out of the parking lot with a peel from his tires, he gave little recognition for the legal speed limits as he aimed the car back to the airport. Music played from the cd player as the distance between him and Ohio shortened.

“With a little love and some tenderness, we’ll walk upon the water, we’ll rise above this mess. With a little peace and some harmony, we’ll take the world together, we’ll take ’em by the hand. ‘Cause I got a hand for you. ‘Cause I wanna run with you. ”

Chapter End Notes

The CD left in the car was Hootie and the Blowfish’s Cracked Rear View. Same cd that the song in Jody’s cruiser was from.
Not Even the Trees
Drowning
Hold my Hand
Sam slammed his hands down on the steering wheel in frustration. He was stuck in traffic about forty-five minutes away from the institute indicated in the tentative report cobbled together from Ash’s intel, and he still hadn’t slept from his last case and was running on coffee and hope. Things had come to a standstill shortly after the lanes had narrowed down from three to two because of construction. The signs had been up and the orange pilons indicated that there would have been some traffic but nothing like this. Sirens and flashing lights of emergency vehicles had slowly made their way past using the shoulder about an hour ago and traffic still hadn’t moved. Sam had an inkling that further up they narrowed down to just a single lane and that’s probably where the accident had occurred. It would just be his luck; the rest of his trip had been more of the same.

His initial flight had been grounded due to storms, and his connecting flight was late, even after he had run from one side of the terminal to the other to make sure he didn’t miss it. The cars at the rental facility were dirty and small, the only one that would have been moderately comfortable for him smelled like a fire had taken place inside of it. He was forced to take the car that gave him no leg room after the smoky car’s engine stalled out just as he was pulling out of the parking lot. Where he had thought he had a considerable lead on the case it was ripped from his grasp. Now he would be lucky if he would get there before the church, if things were as big as Frank made them seem Sam had no doubt that the men in black would be there to pick her up and he knew he had to get there before them. Keep her safe and out of harm’s way at least until Gabriel showed up, if he showed up, Ash and Frank seemed pretty certain on that still.

All the information he had on his case wasn’t a whole lot. Bits and pieces from websites and radio stories that had covered the initial accident and even less on the follow up of the sole surviving member of the crash. The most pertinent information had come from the garbled and sporadic texts from Ash. Each text came from a different phone number that claimed to be out of service or never having been activated when he tried to respond or follow up with a question. Sam could only hope that the texts coming in were all from the same source, the lengths that Ash and Frank went to ensure that they weren’t being tracked, traced, followed, or monitored was still something that surprised him. The level of paranoia they expressed was past tinfoil but still seemed healthy now that he knew some of what they were facing.

However, the information that he received through multiple texts was still good information, he was careful to get as much of it recorded on anything he could. Written on napkins, receipts, a couple of sticky notes, and the folder of his last case, bits of information scattered over whatever was within reach when the texts came in. He missed the information in the first text only because he wasn’t expecting it to be purged from his phone, when it was he remembered that the guys had remote control of his phone from the radio station. The information stopped coming in after he received another call from the mysterious blocked number, again an empty call with soft static at the end, the call draining his phone down to nothing in the short duration. Yet, he had just enough information to treat this as if it was an actual case, and until he found his partner he swore he would continue to do the same work he had left behind.

Sam was heading to an institution where a young woman had been taken after being released from the hospital. She had survived a serious car wreck, the only survivor. They were still waiting on dental records to identify the remains of those who hadn’t made it, although the current theory was that they were a group of students from one of the nearby colleges. The eye witnesses of the crash claimed to have seen a streak of light that originated from the sky collide with the two vehicles right as they connected. On scene forensics had put the probable source of the light as a transformer exploding right after the first car collided with a telephone pole and before it spun out of control and
into the second vehicle. Sam couldn’t help but smile with that piece of information, remembering the discussion about alien-angel crossover theories he had with Gabriel.

The survivor was still a mystery, with no form of ID on her and any that she might have had burned in the wreck. Her memory was still out of her grasp and they weren’t sure if it would even return, the only things she spoke of were false memories of grand delusion. Since waking from her coma she had gone on and on about how she had spoken with God, capital G, and was talking about how the heavens were thinning and angels were abandoning their posts. It certainly wasn’t the usual ‘angels speak to me in my dreams’ that Balthazar got on the air, there was something more to this one. Sam knew it fit the pattern that Ash helped him find.

He just had to get through the traffic first. Another five minutes passed and he was seriously tempted to park the car on the shoulder and just walk the remaining distance. Right as he was ready to aim his car for the side of the road a tow-truck drove past with their lights flashing and it was only a couple more minutes before traffic was moving again. The exit came into view and he jerked the wheel going around the two cars in front of him to take the exit. Horns honked as he swerved past them, his hand was out of the window, saluting with a single finger.

The institute came into view and Sam scrambled to come up with a plausible story for why the FBI was needed on this case. He knew Gabriel would not only have had an adequate story but he would also be able to charm his way into the place making friends along the way. Sam was, not for the first time, wishing his partner was by his side again. There would be little time to come up with something convincing as he easily found a parking space. Grabbing the file on his last case he walked into the building, purpose behind his strides, carefully nodding at each person he passed. He started thinking of ways that he could just sneak in and bypass protocol all together when he had trouble coming up with a believable story.

“I know she’s here! I saw her face on the TV, please Anna’s my sister. I need to make sure she’s alright, I need to take her home!” Sam could hear someone talking loudly as he stepped into the waiting room, the voice was familiar and his heart jumped before his mind could place why. He held his breath as he rounded the corner where he could see the receptionist trying to argue with a shorter man who was set on getting in. His honey colored hair curled at the base of his neck, bouncing slightly as he slammed his hands on the desk forcefully, leaning into her space probably threatening her if he wasn’t taken to see the woman they were holding. The receptionist wasn’t moved by his display and only reacted by calling for orderlies to remove the man by force if necessary.

“Agent Milton.” Sam called out tentatively, hoping to get his attention without causing him to flee again. The man at the desk spun around, a flash of panic crossing his face before his eyes locked with Sam’s, his hand twitched before he shoved it into the pockets of his worn jeans. He looked away as Sam’s long strides eliminated the gap between them. “Is she really here? I wanted to be with you when you picked her up.”

“And who are you?” the receptionist glared at him over the frames of her glasses. She was in no mood to be playing around especially after having to deal with the shorter man’s antics. The two large men stepped closer in the off chance they were needed, ready to deal with either of the agents.

“Special Agent Sam Winchester and this is my partner Agent Gabriel Milton. He all but ran from the offices when he saw Anna’s face on TV, he’s been on edge since she missed their weekly call while she was out on that trip with her friends. I had to catch a different flight after filing leave of absence paperwork for him because he ran out so fast to get here.” Sam found the lies fell easily from his lips as he built on the small bits of story he heard Gabriel weaving. Flashing his badge seemed to help soothe the receptionist enough that she waved her hand dismissing the orderlies. She turned back to her computer, her polished fingers quickly tapping across the keys as she went about her business,
“Why are you here?!” Gabriel hissed, pulling Sam down by his elbow. The gold fire in his eyes searched the human’s face looking for the answer. He had been very good at covering his tracks and had millennia of practice when it came to hiding, how was it that a human was able to find him in a week when his own family couldn’t find him? Even those who knew about his presence Earth-side couldn’t find him unless he wanted them to. Sam’s soul soared with the simple touch, his partner was at his side again, and he was ready to do what it took to keep him there this time.

“Believe it or not Gabe, I want to be here. My plan was to get here, find the girl, or angel, or whatever she is, and keep her hidden from the church until you showed up. And if you didn’t I suppose I would just bring her back to Balthazar.” He really didn’t have much of a plan if Gabriel hadn’t shown up, he realized just how much he was relying on Ash’s algorithm to be right, relying on his own case work that he had come up with the right clues and followed the right path to find his partner. It had all worked out in the end, but he knew they had to work quickly. With his phone dead, he couldn’t get any updates including the movement of the shadowy church figures, but he knew they would be on their way.

“You want to help? But why?” Gabriel was floored by the offer, it wasn’t often that he was offered help. Most people wanted something in return or expected a favor from it. Even among his family there had been only a few that didn’t expect anything and had helped regardless, Castiel was the only one he could name off the top of his head that was truly altruistic. And here Sam was not only offering help, but going through with it without being asked.

“Because this was, is, important to you. Which makes it important to me. I told you that I’ll be at your side no matter the case, that’s still true.” There was love behind those hazel eyes, Gabriel had to look away from them or he would lose his resolve and his ability to run. He knew Sam was telling the truth, but he still couldn’t understand why he wasn’t hated and being pushed away. He was as much of a monster as the vampires or ghouls they faced during their X-files, his brother was proof enough of that. Sam didn’t understand how much danger he put himself in with his little stunt back at the theater, how much danger he was putting himself in now. Gabriel wanted to put distance between them again to keep him safe; Sam was too good, too pure, to keep putting himself into these kinds of trouble.

The receptionist looked up from her computer staring harshly at the pair of them as if she could mentally will them away from her desk. With a theatrical sigh, she hit a button on the computer printing two badges out for them. A doctor came around the corner and she spoke in hushed tones with him, indicating the two agents with a motion of her hand. He simply nodded to her before motioning for them to follow.

Sam’s hand rested at the small of Gabriel’s back as they were ushered down the hall, his fingers spread out against the rumpled fabric of his green jacket, he needed the contact to reassure him that his partner was really there and wasn’t a hallucination from his lack of sleep. He could feel the tenseness of Gabe’s muscles as if he was ready to jump and run at the first sign of something wrong. Leaning down so that his lips brushed the feathery softness of his hair, Sam whispered into Gabe’s ear.

“Stay with me this time.” The request sent shivers down Gabriel’s spine. He wanted to obey those words and take Sam into his life but he knew that to do so would put Sam in incredible danger. It wasn’t a risk he was ready to take, even if his human was willing to look him in the eye after he had left him like that. He wasn’t sure he wanted to learn how Sam was able to track him down; he had proven himself time and time again just how intelligent he was and now Gabriel was finding out just how stubborn he could be as well. Almost as stubborn as himself.
He didn’t have much time to think it over because the doctor stopped them in front a room with a plain wooden door. The white paint was flaking near the edges where the door scraped against the wooden frame. A small window that was in sore need of some good cleaning looked into the room. Gabriel didn’t even have to look in to know that Anna was on the other side, he knew he could do this, he had done it dozens of times before yet he waivered for a brief moment as the hand on his back pulled away. Something in him wanted Sam to be part of this.

The door swung in and the woman on the bed looked up, her eyes flaring wide with panic as she took in the two strangers. She moved herself further up on the bed until her back was against the wall. Her doctor tried to say something soothing to her, to get her to calm down, but she looked past him like he wasn’t there. Her eyes were locked on one person.

“Gabriel?” her voice was rough, as if she had talked herself hoarse. The admission of the agent’s name seemed to be enough for the doctor, as he looked back and nodded to the two men looking in at his patient. Stepping aside the doctor gave them space, his patient had shown no signs of memory prior to the crash except this.

“Yeah, Anna. It’s really me, your big brother Gabe. Well really, you’re still taller than me, but you know.” He held his arms out to her, a warm grin spreading across his face as he tried joking. Sam was watching them both carefully unsure of how this interaction would take place. He did notice that neither of them blinked for the duration that they stood in the door. It was almost as if Gabriel was trying to communicate through his eyes. Finally the tension was broken when Anna stood up from the bed and flung herself across the room, barreling into Gabe’s ready arms with a sob. Sam excused himself once he knew that he wasn’t needed in their little reunion, moving away and giving them their space.

“You’re here to help me?” Her voice was muffled as she spoke into his shoulder, but the question was clear.

“Always, little sister. Always.” Gabe murmured softly into her hair, his hand running smoothly down her back as he tried to help her calm down. His motions seemed to help as she stopped shaking and just held onto him. He continued to whisper to her until she had calmed enough to remove herself from him, only her hand remaining in his.

Sam was standing, watching the security monitors behind the nurse’s station, his eyes scanning each screen as they rotated through cameras. A trio of figures in suits caught his attention as they moved down the hallways, they walked with purpose and seemed to turn the attention of others away from them. There was something about them that felt familiar and dangerous to Sam. Very dangerous. A camera caught them as they rounded a corner, light flashing off something metallic falling around one of their necks, and Sam knew what it was. Tapping frantically on the counter trying to get Gabriel’s attention, he quickly moved out from behind the desk. Taking a few steps towards the family reunion he grabbed Gabriel by the shoulder and wrapped his other arm around Anna’s shoulders, leaning between them he whispered loudly.

“As touching as this is guys, we should really get going. Gabe, take Anna out the back, here’s the keys to my rental. I’ll try to stall here and buy the two of you some time.” He was holding the keys out to his partner while his other hand reached into his jacket, fingers curling around the butt of his gun. They didn’t have much time before they would be here and he knew he could at least put up a fight and give his partner some time.

“No can do big guy, you take my sister. Go with your plan B and take her to Balth or Cassie, they can help set her up here.” Gabriel knew what Sam was doing and he wasn’t going to let it happen. Sam heard what wasn’t being said, Gabe wasn’t going to come with them. It was something he
wasn’t going to allow, he had worked so hard to find him again, he couldn’t do it.

“I’m not leaving you, Gabe, not again.”

Voices called out from the end of the hallway as the three men in suits rounded the corner. Sam didn’t have time to argue with his partner instead he grabbed at both angels near him and pulled them towards a stairwell. They both protested but Sam wasn’t listening, he was trying to get them away, keep them safe. Grabbing what was in reach he started to jam things through the door’s handle as an attempt to bar it in place. He pushed the remainder of the things in the path as he urged them to leave the building.

Equipment clattered loudly and shouts were heard at the top of the stairs as they reached the exit. Sam shoved Gabriel towards the final set of stairs as he stood his ground waiting for the first of the assailants to reach him, trying to give them time to put distance between them and the people he only assumed were with the Church. Sam was out of his sight when Gabriel heard the first sounds of a fight, heavy thumps of fists contacting with bodies and the following grunts of pain. A scream made him turn around right before they reached the door, a body tumbled over the railings, falling to their level. It wasn’t Sam, and that’s all Gabriel cared about in that moment.

Pulling open the door, Gabriel held a tight grip around Anna’s wrist, as he made a run across the parking lot hitting the panic button on the key-fob trying to find the car. The door blew out behind them, sending Sam flying into something. Gabe spun his head around to see a tall, wide person step through where the door had been moments earlier. The man was confident, arrogant even, in his motions as he stalked closer to Sam. Gabriel could feel anger flaring up inside him the moment the balding man reached down and grabbed Sam, fingers curing around the collar to his shirt and lifting him up so their faces were nose to nose. Sam spit at him, the action startled and disturbed the offender enough that he dropped Sam giving him time to scramble to his feet and face him down, gun ready in his hands trained on his target.

“Anna, we don’t fight unless we have to, let me deal with this.” Gabriel pushed her behind him, closer to the car. She carefully moved closer and opened the door, getting in without drawing attention to herself. Gabriel took a couple steps closer to the two figures bringing his hands together in a slow clap. Sam’s eyes never left his opponent however the other man’s head whipped around looking directly at him. His eyes widened in fear and surprise before a wide predatory smile crossed his face.

“Oh ho ho! Looks like I hit the jackpot here! Michael is going to be so proud when he hears how I not only brought back one run-a-way but two, and the other being none other than The Messenger himself!” He was clearly too excited about the potential for praise and ladder climbing that he was ignoring the danger of the situation. Or he really thought that highly of himself that he didn’t have to worry about being outnumbered.

Sam hadn’t met many supernatural creatures but there wasn’t the strum of energy coming off this man that he had felt that night in the theater. He flicked his eyes over to where Gabriel was, trying to take in their environment and see what his partner was doing. He caught a glimpse of Anna’s face peeking up over the back of the seat in his rental car, something inside him surged with relief, he would be able to focus on this new threat without worrying about the woman they came to help. Gabriel had stopped several yards away and was standing in a relaxed pose, but one that Sam noticed would be quick to change from in a moment’s notice.

“Zachariah … You got a little something right there.” Gabriel said rubbing at the tip of his nose a smirk playing at the edge of his lips. He didn’t bother to hold back the small laugh that shook his shoulders. Of course Michael had sent someone in his place, didn’t want to be caught slumming
around with humans. He was just as bad as Lucifer when it came to their father’s creations, their fighting had been legendary but they were still very similar to each other. Maybe that was why they fought so hard.

"Why are you following Michael anyways? He just wants the end game to start, to destroy everything, for what? To prove he was right?" He didn’t want to fight another brother, didn’t want to be the cause of so much pain in his family. That’s why he did what he did, he helped those who found their own happiness instead of forcing choices on other. Their Father had given his creations free-will, and he was going to continue to honor his father’s decisions.

"You know we used to look up to you when we were fledglings, you were the fun big brother. But now I can see just how stupid we were to want to follow you." Words laced with venom were spat out. Zachariah was trying to rile Gabriel up, take his attention out of the fight, he knew he couldn’t survive an honest fight with an archangel. He pulled his angel blade out from under his jacket, the metal glinting angrily in the light.

"Good to see that you’re just as dumb as you always were. A millennia of living and you’ve learned nothing.” Gabe pulled his own blade out, his eyes tracking Sam who was trying to put himself on the other side of Zachariah. The other angel held humans in such low regard that he was underestimating them. Sam was setting himself up to flank and split the attack, ready to give Gabriel the advantage. Zachariah launched himself at Gabriel throwing the unspoken plan to the side, their blades coming together with loud clashes, the sounds of thunder in the distance echoed their movements. Sam continued to move around their fighting keeping Zachariah between himself and Gabriel, his gun trained on them, hands steady.

"I’ve learned this.” Zachariah snapped, flicking his wrist sending Sam flying as a powerful wave of force slammed into him. His body was tossed across the parking lot like a rag doll, gun going off as he collided with the side of a van. The impact set off the alarm of the van as well as several cars surrounding it. Gabriel winced as he watched his partner slide down from the impact site, a huge dent left behind in the side panel. Zachariah took advantage of Gabriel’s state of distraction, sweeping his foot behind his ankles and causing him to go down, his angel blade flying from his hands and clattering on the blacktop. He stomped down between Gabriel’s shoulders causing him to bite back a cry of pain. “You’ve grown weak here Gabriel.”

Sam grimaced as he started to move, a low hiss escaping as he sat up forcing his body to ignore the pain of strained muscles and possible broken bones. He stopped when he saw the scene in front of him, Gabriel was laying on his stomach where he had fallen, the sharp toes of a long dress shoe pressing down into his spine. The glimmer of metal caught his eye, and he saw Gabriel’s blade not too far from the nose of the van. Moving slowly he made his way to the weapon, fingers wrapping around it bringing it close to his body. Zachariah was ignoring him again, and Sam was ready to take that for his own advantage.

"You are just as bad as him, abandoning heaven and tempting others to fall to earth. I bet Michael won’t mind if I return you to him a little worse for wear. Hmm? I could rip out your wings.” Zachariah sneered down at Gabriel, grinding his foot further into his back. Sam knew that was right around where his wings would be, he could only imagine the pain. Gabriel had his eyes closed and his face set in stone so not to express any weakness, but he was trapped, pinned down with little room to wiggle let alone escape.

"He’s nothing like Lucifer!” Sam shouted out through gritted teeth, Zachariah’s head snapped up, his eyes glowing as he stared the agent down. Setting his shoulders, he was ready to square off against a being that was immensely more powerful than him without standing down. His fingers flexed around the grip of the blade he held behind his back, the cool metal grounding him, keeping him from
realizing how stupid of an idea this was. “Gabriel is doing exactly as your father told you, to love his creations and-”

“For you hairless apes!? HA!! That’s rich!” He pushed his foot hard into Gabriel’s back as he stepped off to face the minor annoyance that was the human. He spun his own blade in his hand, the motion meant to be threatening as he approached Sam. “You apes were the second worst idea our Daddy dearest ever had, the first being that we had to bow to you. I’ll take joy in making you bow to me.”

He raised his blade and in an instant Sam had blocked the intended strike with Gabriel’s blade. Zachariah’s eyes flew open in surprise, caught off guard that someone would stand up to him like that, snarling he pulled back and swung again. The slide of metal on metal rung out as Sam deflected the second strike, each motion only causing a rise in emotion from the angel opposite him. The strikes were coming harder and the motions were getting sloppier.

Gabriel pushed himself into a sitting position, his whole body singing out in pain from how he was being held down. The mere idea of his wings being stripped caused him to go into a bit of shock, even when he was fighting against Lucifer, neither of them had even entertained the idea of going for the wings. To have a lower angel threaten him with it, and have the chance to follow through was something that froze him. He watched with awe as Sam fought almost on an even level with Zachariah, using the angel’s emotions against him, Gabriel was tempted to call out and use the same underhanded tactic that got him.

“Hey Zach! I’m ashamed to have been your teacher, you didn’t learn anything from me. Can’t even hold your own against a mortal.” It was just enough to throw Zachariah’s already thin attention from the fight. His next attack was easily projected and Sam should have been right there to deflect and turn the blade, however hearing Gabriel’s voice call out in the midst of their fight caused him to look up as well. He caught the tip of Zachariah’s blade in one of the grooves near the hilt of his own, a twist of his blade had the other one straining before a hairline crack formed down the metal. The metal cried out before shattering, shards of the broken blade glittered from both the sunlight as well as the ethereal light emanating from where splinters cut into Zachariah’s flesh. Anna ran out of her hiding spot, rushing to Sam’s side as he collapsed in pain dropping Gabriel’s blade in the process.

“There’s something different about this one, no human should be able to do that…” Zachariah grumbled as he slumped to the ground, blood starting to pool under him. Footsteps of someone approaching him had him looking up, Gabriel was right there in front of him squatting down to his level. Golden eyes bore down on him with pity and distaste. Zachariah couldn’t maintain eye contact with him any longer, looking anywhere else his eyes locked on Sam, who was pulling bits of metal out of his own skin, Anna healing the wounds as soon as the pieces were removed.

“You bet your ass he’s different. He’s mine.” Gabriel had leaned into Zachariah’s space, words snarled through a twisted smile. Sam was more than capable of holding his own, he had proven that yet again and this time there was no way he could deny it. Patting the fading angel on his cheek, Gabriel drove his own blade into his chest bringing his suffering and slow death to an end. Lights flickered in his eyes before they went out forever, an outline of wings burned into the ground beneath him.

Anna had Sam leaning on her small frame, supporting his weight as they struggled to get back to the car. She didn’t have her full strength and healing him as much as she had left her drained. Gabriel helped Anna into the front seat and he took the keys ready to drive the three of them back to
Washington DC.

“Gabriel, he’s just a human.” She whispered, looking back at the sleeping man in the back seat. Leaning his back against the door and window, his head had rolled to the side, hair covering his face. His arms were crossed over his chest as it rose and fell with a steady measure in his sleep. Several small bruises and cuts had remained after Anna had tired out from healing what she could. No fragments of the broken angel blade had been left in his skin.

“Exactly, and that’s why he’s so special.”
Mini-Muffins are Home

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Sam was slow to wake, his body wrapped in warmth and his head resting on something plush and soft. He was more comfortable and felt more rested than he had been in months. When he did open his eyes, he was presented with an unfamiliar setting. He knew he should feel anxious and nervous with what he saw, but something about the place just felt welcoming and familiar.

The smells of coffee and bacon drifted through the crack of a partially opened door woke him even further, his stomach grumbling loudly at the scents. Pulling back the blankets, Sam found himself dressed in flannel pants and a loose-fitting t-shirt, something he would have dressed himself in for bed. Yet he didn’t know where he was, it certainly wasn’t his small and bare bedroom back at his apartment.

This room was dominated by a large bed with rich sheets, thick blankets, and an abundance of pillows. Heavy wood furniture were pressed against the sides of the room, the rich colors bringing additional warmth to the room. Several small paintings and photographs decorated the walls, the sounds of people talking prevented Sam from taking the time to examine them, instead heading to the door. Gently pushing it open he moved down the hallway where things were starting to look more familiar. Paintings with religious motifs decorated the walls here, angels and gods looked down on him as he shuffled in the direction of the voices, and where he knew the kitchen would be.

“We’ll work to get you a new life here, but you’ll have to work to blend in. That means doing normal human things like drinking, sleeping, -” Gabriel’s voice was patient as he tried explaining how things would be different for the new earth bound angel. There was kindness and love in his voice as he helped his sister adjust, Sam was seeing a side of him that he didn’t think Gabe showed that often. It was easier to stay aloof and use humor as a shield, deflecting heavy emotions, but here he was gently easing a new angel into a human lifestyle.

“You guys need to blink more.” Sam smiled as he leaned in the door frame to Gabriel’s kitchen. Anna startled at his interruption where Gabriel started to laugh at the suggestion. He pushed off from the table and moved over to pour Sam a cup of coffee from the pot.

“Thank you Sam-a-lam, there’s food when you’re ready, got quite the spread for Anna. They didn’t really get her the best of foods while she was being held up. Do you really think we don’t blink enough?” He pressed the warm cup into his partner’s hands, their fingers touching for a brief moment. His own smile widened as he caught the blush spreading across Sam’s face. It seemed to him that he hadn’t damaged their relationship too seriously when he had left.

“Gabe, seriously? Cas has got his Eye-of-Ra thing, as Dean puts it, where he just stares. So yes, you guys need to work on simple things like remembering that we humans blink.” He chuckled as he pushed off the wall, spinning around Gabriel on his way towards the food laid out on the kitchen counter. There was a bit of everything available, he only questioned it briefly before he noticed that Anna had several plates with small portions of each breakfast food. Picking his own food out he took a seat across from the other angel who was glaring at her current overloaded plate.

“You have a point with Cassie there.” Gabriel conceded, Cas had his quirks and was kind of set in his ways now, it would take a bit more to try to change some of them. Leaning his back against the counter behind them, he picked up a few pieces of danishes, flipping them over in his hand before putting them down otherwise untouched. He did the same with a couple of mini-muffins, nothing
seemed to strike his fancy as he put everything back instead reaching over and grabbing at Sam’s coffee.

“Gabriel, none of these taste like anything more than molecules. What is the point of this? I want to go out there and feel like they do.” Anna complained, pushing her red hair up behind her ears. She gave Gabriel a challenging glare that didn’t phase him. Sam didn’t know too much about angelic powers or hierarchies but he had worked out that Gabriel was an archangel, one of the first four, so he could only assume that he had greater power than Anna did.

“We’ll find you something that you’ll like, until then. Fake it until you make it, baby-girl.” Gabriel winked at her, earning himself a groan from the other angel as he suggested that she keep trying different foods.

“You don’t need to eat? So the whole candy thing?” Sam asked as he ate through the fresh fruit pieces he had piled on his plate. Grabbing his own coffee back he rolled his eyes when he found it empty, Gabriel snapped his fingers and the cup was full again, startling Sam for a moment. He tentatively took a sip, testing that the drink wasn’t changed by the sudden appearance of the coffee. The coffee maker back on the counter looked a little less full when he cast a quick glance at it.

“Nah, but it helps keep up the illusion and picking up bad habits really helps sell the whole image. Homemade food, or food cooked with care tastes best for me. I can taste the amount of time and love that has gone into it. Now, somethings are done more out of habit than anything else. Like, do I need to sleep? No but that doesn’t mean I don’t like to when I can.” He turned his attention to Anna who had moved onto the muffins inspecting each piece and dissecting it with care before trying to eat any. “We’ll find something that you can tolerate at least until you find that something that makes you forget it’s made of molecules. For Cassie it’s Honey and Burgers, and I’m honestly surprised that he hasn’t tried them at the same time.”

“I think a lot of what’s holding him back is Dean, altering a burger with anything more than bacon is an act of blaspheme. How much does she need to catch up on?” Sam switched topics, his own plate empty as he watched Anna tease the dried up blueberry nuggets out of a bready muffin. She put a small piece in her mouth before making a face and pushing the blueberry muffin to the edge of her plate.

“I don’t need to catch up on anything, I was there the whole time. I have been silently watching mankind for hundreds of years, I watched as generations were born and died. I watched them love and I wanted to feel that for myself, that’s why I fell.” She said as she picked up another muffin from her line up. The yellow meal of the muffin crumbled as she attempted to take it apart.

“You didn’t fall, if anything we sauntered vaguely downwards, still fully angel. Sam just wants to know how well you know human culture to help you fit in, I can get you set up with books.” Gabriel didn’t like the idea that they had fallen, they were nothing like Lucifer and his followers. If anything, they had taken their Father’s word and commands to heart and were living with his creations. Sam had it right when he had stood up against Zachariah.

“Oh, I like this one!” Anna sat up so she could grab more of the same small dark-colored muffin she had stuffed into her mouth. Gabriel shared a look with Sam before a smirk tugged at the corners of his mouth. His partner rolled his eyes and walked out of the kitchen dropping his plate into the sink on his way out.

They set her up with a room full of literature and world history to help her catch up on life with more of the chocolate muffins and a few cupcakes. Sam made sure that there were a few pop culture things in the piles; movies, popular novels, music. He knew he saw Gabe smile at him when he gave his computer over to Anna and showed her how the media player worked.
“-And I’ll swear it might be fun. It’s a long way down, when all the knots we’ve tied have come undone. Anywhere you go, I’ll follow you down.” She smiled when she got the music player to work before she settled into a large papasan with one of the many books they had set her up with. Finally leaving her in what Gabe assured her was her room while she was there, they went down the stairs to the living room.

They had spent most of the day trying to help Anna acclimate to her new life, with just a brief outing to return the rental vehicle to the airport and pick up Gabriel’s fleet vehicle. The room was now bathed in the soft light of the afternoon. Sam’s stomach grumbled loudly once he was pulled away from the library they had set up, Gabriel laughed at his sheepish face and promised to make him something fit for a king for dinner, waving Sam out of the kitchen when he tried to help. After being shooed out of the kitchen for what was possibly the fourth time and threatened with not getting something healthy for dinner, Sam lounged across the couch and flipped on the TV with the remote he had to fish out from between the cushions. After going aimlessly through the channels he settled on some documentary on conspiracy theories surrounding the lunar landing and turned the volume down low.

“Speaking of conspiracy, when do you want to let the high council of paranoia know you’re back with a house guest?” Sam asked leaning his head back, looking into the kitchen at an odd angle. Gabriel was expertly tossing things in a frying pan like he was an accomplished chef, he gave pause to his task, turning the heat down on the stove top.

“Give me the phone, I’m sure they’re still trying to track me down.” He stepped into the living room to take the phone from Sam’s hand. Punching the number into the keys he stepped back into the kitchen where he got back to fussing with the food. With the phone now perched between his ear and his shoulder he continued to talk with Sam while he waited for the call to go through. He knew that the call would be monitored which is why he called the station and not one of their phones.

“We’ve got Singer to deal with in the morning, I don’t feel like dealing with all their fussing in such a short period of time. Balthazar alone will be a terror, remind me to bring a case of wine when we go.”

“Yes, hello?” Gabriel cheerfully answered when the call was picked up. Quickly he started spinning a story that fit with what the usual callers would tell. “I was abducted by angels, they took me to an abandoned fish packing plant and told me the secrets of heaven but they only spoke Dutch. I’m gonna need $1400 in small bills to purchase motel Gideon bibles so I can decipher what the angels were saying.”

“GABRIEL YOU SON OF A BITCH!!” Sam could hear Frank shouting through the phone. They were clearly on another Dr. Badass hour if the call wasn’t going straight to air. That or Gabriel knew that they would screen their callers before putting them on.

“Deveraux, you cranky bastard! It’s good to hear you again, the long and short of it is I’m back in the game! Let Balth know and I’ll see you guys in a couple of days for bowling.” Gabriel kept it short and to the point, there were too many details to mention over a phone call that he would just have to repeat again. Turning the heat on the stove off, he removed the food. The phone still balanced he pulled down dishes from the cabinet, the soft clank of them hitting each other audible to Sam from where he was on the couch.

“You’re going to act as if nothing happened and just leave us hanging?” Frank snapped, his agitation was evident through the speaker. He knew he was being sidelined while there was more that wasn’t being told.

“That’s the plan. I’ve got a leggy brunette lounging on my couch and would rather spend time with
them than reinforcing your tinfoil hat.” Gabriel flashed a grin at Sam who was still chuckling at his partner’s antics. He could feel his heart flutter at the honest laughter and smile that was coming from the human. He was so relaxed laid out there on his couch, as if the fears of his family and the church were non-present. The dimples alone helped calm Gabriel’s own anxiety, if Sam could stand up to his brothers and still be smiling, he certainly would try to fight them if needed.

Hanging up the phone before it could be passed on to Ash or Balthazar, Gabriel winked at Sam. Dinner had finished and he took two plates over to the couch, Sam sat up to take one for himself giving room for Gabriel to sit down as well. The food smelled and looked delicious, some sort of garlic chicken with noodles and small pieces of veggies. Taking a bite Sam hummed at the taste, his eyes closing as he ate.

“Before you get too impressed, it’s from a bag. I keep a couple in the freezer for when I’m too tired to cook anything more complicated than a shake-n-bake.” He bumped his shoulder into Sam’s, deflecting the unsaid compliment, unable to hide the blush that warmed the back of his neck.

“Still good Gabe.” He hummed through another bite, the warmth of the food spreading through his body as he ate. He turned the volume up a little bit, allowing them to follow the show, occasionally their forearms rubbing against the other as they ate in relative silence.

They finished their meal with them leaning into each other’s space. Gabriel excused himself, taking both plates back to the kitchen. He came back to Sam taking up most of the space like he was before, his back against the arm, one legs across the back of the seats and the other hanging off the side. As soon as he was seated he felt arms wrap around his waist and pulling him in so that they were together. Soft sounds of the TV switched over to commercials, the documentary they were watching forgotten for the moment.

“Where were you going to send her?” Sam asked wrapping his arms tighter around Gabriel’s chest, pulling him flush against his own. The closeness of his partner was something he was finally getting to have, he wasn’t going to give up the opportunity.

“Anna loves humans, and their emotions, she wants to connect with them on another level. Something that we can’t achieve being silent, invisible watchers from heaven. There’s several small non-profits that specialize in social interaction for therapy, it wouldn’t be too hard to get her into one of those.” He tilted his head back looking up into the hazel eyes to see what Sam thought of his plan. Usually he had Balthazar or Castiel help him set up any new lives, it had been a while since he had done one on his own, or without the help of another angel. Besides his partner had already helped him out immensely with Anna and he knew how much Sam would want to see it to its end.

“That’s not a bad idea Milton.” The voice startled them both, stepping out of the shadows their mystery friend moved to where he knew the alcohol was kept. Pouring himself a glass he looked at the two agents curled into each other on the couch with only a raise of his eyebrows before he continued on with his newest plan to provide them his un-asked assistance. “Give her your last name and I’ve got a story that fixes the issues at hand, including what to do with you having gone missing. Keep her with you for a week before sending her off, that will give me time to slide her seamlessly into the system.”

“Why are you always the one to show up?” Sam asked with an exasperated sigh. It seemed whenever they found themselves in trouble this guy was never too far behind. He did always seem to come to their aid though, for better or worse.

“Why should we listen to you, I can do all that well enough on my own.” Gabriel asked flippantly, his arrogance on display. Sam, however, could feel how he had tensed up with the sudden appearance of the other man. How he had gotten into the house unnoticed was alarming enough.
“You can, but I’m certain it will alert those on high.” The way he said it came across as if it was a threat instead of a warning. Sam still didn’t like this guy very much, he was merely a tolerated presence at this point. “Or you could do things my way, and your little sister will slip out of their reach. You have friends Milton, it would do you well to remember that.”

“And that’s it? You want nothing in return?” Gabriel’s eyebrows arched up as he questioned the man’s motives. There were things that this guy knew that he shouldn’t, but he hadn’t shown any signs of working against them yet.

“I’m kinda fond of my home the way it is. Keep the end from happening and I’ll consider us even.” He raised his empty glass to them both before placing it on the edge of a table and leaving through the front door. His entrance was mysterious but his exit was normal, almost to the point of absurdity.

“He knew about Samandriel. Led me to him, actually. Are we sure we can trust him?” Sam found himself whispering in the dark, the light from the TV flickering and casting dim shadows. The man had walked out as soon as he delivered his offer of assistance and Anna was still engrossed in her research, or at least he assumed as much. The only one who could hear him was the man he still had his arms wrapped around, there wasn’t really much need for whispers.

“Not sure we have much of a choice, Sammy. He’s not part of the Church or else we’d be in a world of trouble right now.” Gabriel was ready to accept the assistance, he could just snap his fingers and get everything squared away. But with the real threat of not just him, but all those he’s helped, in risk of being found and brought back against their will, something he knew some would fight and die to prevent, he had to give into the help being offered. There was so much that he needed to figure out to ensure that the others were safe. However, for the first time in a long time, he had someone willing to help him. Running a hand up Sam’s arm he brought his thoughts back to his surroundings, to things he could deal with in the present. “We can just lay here if you want but my bed is more comfy. Like I said I don’t need to sleep, but I like it, it’s one of my favorite habits I’ve formed through the years.”

“You’re not going to run this time?” Sam asked trying unsuccessfully to hide a yawn. He hadn’t done much during the day, yet he was still tired. He figured it was still left over from his back to back cases and all the chaos that came with it. Yet he wasn’t ready to leave the warmth of having his partner in his arms, a small inkling of fear that he would disappear again.

“I’m done running from you. You’ll only follow me anyways.” He smiled up at him before feeling the press of Sam’s lips on his forehead, his grace flaring warmly as he felt Sam calm down from a spike of panic. The sensation should have him worried or frightened, but he did his best to ignore the possibly of what it meant.

They woke up to music welcoming them back into consciousness. Warm and comfortable, Gabriel was tucked into Sam’s large form, he didn’t want to get up, he knew that the day was going to be full of dealing with people and trying to soothe things out. It was going to be long, and he wasn’t looking forward to it. It was better than the alternative though. With a grumble he removed himself from Sam’s arms and dutifully moved himself towards the shower to get ready for the day.

Walking out later while rubbing a towel to his head to dry himself off, he watched as Sam was poking through his closet unable to find anything that would fit him. His last suit ruined and subsequently trashed from his fight with Zachariah. Smiling Gabriel snapped his fingers, a clean suit appearing on the bed behind him. He was enjoying not having to be careful around Sam with using his powers for the little things. Sam hadn’t jumped or reacted in fear when he did, he had just accepted it as something that would be normal in his life now.
The two of them bid Anna goodbye for the day. Gabriel made sure she had enough chocolate flavored snacks now that she had found something that didn’t taste awful to her. Sam handed the car keys over to his partner and held on to the handle hanging from just near the door as he readjusted to Gabriel’s brand of driving. In less time than if he had been driving they arrived at the Hoover building. Sam insisting on taking a different entrance to the building to avoid dealing with his own brother at the moment, he shot Dean a text as he made his way down the stairs to his shared office.

Gabriel took the main entrance, flashing his badge to the security guard he caught a few surprised glances from agents in the area. Somehow during the brief time he was out, word had gotten around that he was gone, and people took notice. One agent in particular looked up and locked eyes with him, their gaze never breaking as he stepped out of whatever conversation he was holding with another agent. Tan trench coat billowed out behind him as he quickly made his way across the office floor, pulling Gabriel into a tight hug before holding onto his shoulders and addressing him.

“Gabriel, you’re back. Sam told me some of the details of what happened and the radio has been unpleasant to listen to.” Castiel tried to steer them back towards his desk and away from the other agents who were likely trying to eavesdrop on their conversation. Dean was nowhere to be seen, Gabriel assumed he was in evidence or the morgue or something like that for whatever case they were working on. The stack of casefiles on Castiel’s desk let him know just how busy they were with their own projects.

“Everything’s gonna be alright Cassie. Sam brought me back, oh and we saved Anna in the process. And wow, he’s right, you do not blink enough.” Gabriel tried to reassure his brother while filling him in without going too much into detail. He really needed to get his group together so he could share the information once and be done. If only a concentration of that much power wasn’t so suspicious, they were risking enough with the group of them living in the DC area.

“Singer is in a meeting right now, and I would like to know more of what happened and if I’m needed.” The implications of what he was asking wasn’t lost on Gabriel. Castiel was one of the highest ranking angel’s in his garrison when he was still in heaven and now was one of his closest confidants now on Earth. If things were going bad, he was willing to step back into his old position. Gabriel wasn’t sure that things would come to that but he was thankful for the offer.

The large wooden doors to the Assistant Director’s office opened up and a tall dark man stepped through making his way towards the exit. Gabriel instantly recognized him, neither of them made motion that they had any knowledge of the other though. Making his own way to the office where he knew his supervisor was waiting for him, he gave Castiel a smile and a nod, letting him know they would talk later.

“Agent Milton, I was just made aware of your return by an old friend of mine. Rufus Turner told me of what that idjit Zachariah Strode managed. While I’m not particularly pleased with how things went down, I am however happy that not only is a terrorist like him gone, but that your family is safe.” Bobby welcomed him into his office and didn’t ask about his disappearance instead having the whole thing handed to him in the fat file left behind by Gabriel’s mystery source.

Gabriel was initially struck at the beauty and the simplicity of the story that was presented. Of course his contact in the CIA would be a friend of Bobby’s, the old man seemed to know everyone. Now he had a name to go with the mysterious man who kept breaking into his house, drinking his liquor, and knew way too much about the supernatural world. Bobby continued with his one-sided conversation as Gabriel tuned back in.

“I need you debriefed and given a psych eval. before I can clear you back to work.” The request was something he should have expected as it was pretty standard, especially with his situation. Anytime
someone’s family gets involved in a case, counseling is provided and evaluations take place.

“Director Singer, I’m good I promise! I got my sister, she’s fine, I’m fine. Let me just get back to work, I’ll gladly take desk work for the week so I can watch her while she recovers.” Gabriel didn’t like the idea of sitting down with another occupation therapist or a wanna-be profiler. There was too much going on, and he needed to get back to work so he could try to track down what was going to happen next.

“I’d also like Winchester to get an evaluation as well.” Bobby continued with what he was saying, the interruption from his agent mostly ignored.

“What? Why? It wasn’t his family that was kidnapped and ransomed.” Gabriel was taken aback by the second request. Sam seemed the same to him, if anything a bit stronger and more determined, but nothing that he felt warranted an evaluation.

“Because he hasn’t been all there since you disappeared. Read his last report.” Bobby was concerned for his agents, especially when one of his best new promises was acting out. He could handle getting yelled at and being lied to so long as the cases were wrapped up and dealt with. But the younger Winchester had been acting in a way that had him thinking about how easy it would be for the boy to go off the reservation. He held out a neatly stapled report across his desk for Gabriel to take.

“…With the assumption that even the draftiest house couldn’t produce the necessary wind vortices to accomplish the things that were witnessed during our investigation, I am resigned to come to the conclusion that there are forces at work here that are out of our scope of current understanding. Whether there is a life after death is something best left to a philosophical debate, however with what I have seen, I can honestly say that there is more to this world than science alone can attest to.”

Gabriel read the report to himself except for the conclusion, which he read aloud. After reading it he put it back down on Singer’s desk slowly. The mind of reason that he knew his partner to be was fully within the scope of his report, attempting to lay a realistic cause to half of the things that presented during his investigation. Yet in the end he was unable to come up with some real-life thing to pin the gruesome murders as the culprit, and in the process openly admitted to the potential of other worldly influences.

He wanted to leave the office at a sprint and wrap Sam in a tight embrace for being able to deal with not just a ghost, but a violent and vengeful one on his own. He wanted to beam with the pride he was feeling towards his partner for accepting the possibility of something out of the scope of his own understanding as a cause, and dealing with it. More than anything, he wanted to hear from Sam what exactly had gone down during that case. Instead Gabriel had to maintain a straight face and stare down their boss while he prepared to say something that went against his own gut and morals.

“That was a clear cut case, Winchester did a fine job without having a partner on that one.” He wasn’t able to say what he knew Bobby wanted him to say. It went against everything inside him. The fact that Sam had reached for the unreal without his direct influence was something their supervisor couldn’t have been happy with.

“Dammit Gabriel! He was a straight laced agent that was assigned to your division with expectations to keep your damn theories in check, not to take those theories and run with them himself!” He slammed his hands on his desk causing pens to jump out of the cup they were sitting in.

“You sent him in to spy on me?!” Sam had assured him that he wasn’t a spy and here he was hearing that he was, Gabriel was pissed. He had to take a deep breath so that he wouldn’t explode or say something he would regret, there was still the large possibility that Sam didn’t know that he was being used to spy on him. That it was all a plan done up by those in higher authority.
“I won’t lie to you, you’re too damn good at sussing out the truth. Yes, initially that was the idea, especially from those who were in a higher position than myself. I just wanted to hire someone who would keep you from running too far with these theories you keep reaching for.” Bobby sounded sad or hurt that he had to keep something like this from one of his agents. Gabriel knew that Singer was a good man and cared for his people, he was right in his thinking that it wasn’t his decision to use Sam to spy on him, to potentially shut down the X-Files. He had been there at his hearing defending them.

“Are you going to reassign him…?” The question was quiet, Gabriel didn’t want to hear the answer if they were.

“No, he’s damn good at his job and doesn’t put up with your shit.” He admitted with a sigh, there was no way he would remove Sam from the X-Files at this point. “I’m actually getting your case reports on time for the first time since we started this little project of yours. And for the most part, mentions of bigfoot or vampires have all but been dropped from the reports. But he almost went off the rails looking for you. I don’t want to know what’s going on between you two, but if you idjits can’t get it to work out I might have to reassign him.”

“I don’t think that will be a problem Bobby"

Chapter End Notes

Follow You Down - Gin Blossoms
They were given desk duty for at least the week following Gabriel’s reappearance. Some cases that would have typically been given to them were reassigned, although Sam wondered who got them and how they would deal with them. That gave them shorter work days and no travel, which allowed them more time to help Anna get integrated into society. It also gave Gabriel time to catch up with Angel Radio using their bowling night as a place to discuss some of what happened. During which he tried convincing Balthazar that he needed to get back to broadcasting and taking calls, which would get them new leads in regard to what the two of them called ‘omens’. Even if he was on light duty he wasn’t going to stop collecting potential cases.

Sam had moved back into his own apartment after spending the first two nights with the Milton’s. However, he made sure that after his shifts helping out in the morgue that he would swing by and help Anna out with social cues and references. It was an easy excuse to spend more time with Gabriel as well but it wasn’t the date that he was hoping for. After talking about Gabriel’s little sister, he even got Dean to help him out with Anna, taking her out for ice cream and seeing how she would deal with real world practice.

Castiel and Gabriel held back as their small group walked around the reflecting pond with their ice-creams and smoothies. Dean was loudly trying to explain why his obsession with his car was acceptable and normal. Sam was being spoken over and insulted as he tried to explain why it was strange the way Dean interacted with his car. Anna had taken Dean’s side, saying that love is not something limited to other humans. Which got Dean gloating at Sam, starting up their argument all over again. Using the Winchester’s argument as a distraction Gabriel used the time to catch his own brother up with some of the details of what happened while he had gone missing.

“So that’s where we’re at Cassie. This Rufus guy knows a bunch about at least me, and he knew stuff on Samandriel, we don’t know a lot on him. But’s he’s been giving good tips and he’s been helping out in a big way. I think we can trust him, but I also think we need to get the radio back up and running. Balth is still hiding from anything that will project his voice in anyway, including any of Frank’s voice modifiers.” Gabriel finished his ramblings hoping that his brother would have some ideas of what they should do next. He was at a loss himself and he hated not knowing where to go next when there was something big going on. He was glad that he had people in his life now that he could go to and expect them to help him out, it was a big change and something he still wasn’t used to. But he was done running and knew that he was going to need all the help to stay strong for whatever was next.

“I think you did good bringing Sam into your life.” Castiel’s comment was off topic but from the bench they were sitting on they could see where Sam was laughing at Dean who was trying to explain pickup lines and flirting to Anna. Even from where they were sitting they could see that she could easily school Dean as she got the number of another red head who gave her a Vulcan salute as she walked away into the crowd. “He helps you. And you’re stronger with him. Don’t underestimate what he can do for you in the upcoming days.”

"After seeing what he did to Zach I don’t think I can.” He said as he ate the last bite of his cone watching the normal chaos of the monument grounds. Sam had answered his phone, stepping away from Dean and Anna. The two of them had taken it upon themselves to see just how many phone numbers they could get. Dean pumping his fist signaling that he got another number. “It doesn’t
bother you what Deano is doing out there?”

“No, should it?” Castiel tilted his head, “It’s not as if he’s going to do anything with any of the number’s he’s gotten. He’s thrown out most of them as soon as he was certain that the person who gave it to him wasn’t watching. This is good practice for our sister, and they’re having fun.”

“Huh, so he is.” Music interrupted them as Gabriel’s phone rang from inside his jacket pocket. Reaching in and flipping it open he held a finger up, signaling that he needed Cas to remain quiet. “Alright Bobby, when do you want us to come in? No need? But I thought you said… yeah, ok, I get it. But still… Fine, I’ll contact Winchester and let him know.”

“A case? But Singer had said that you would have at least a week before returning from light duty.” Castiel guessed the nature of the call easy enough, and he had a point, they were only five days into their week long mandated break from cases. Usually when the Assistant Director put a team on light duty he tried to keep them on it for as long as he could. Whatever the case was it must have been pretty important to pull agents back to field work, and it must have been really strange to pull Gabriel and Sam back to field work.

“That was the plan, but as it turns out we’re needed again. No rest for the wicked, or for those who hunt them down.” Gabriel said as he pushed off the bench. Bobby didn’t give them the whole rundown of the case, he only gave them the time they needed to be at the airport and which flight they were going to catch. He said everything else would be in the file for them.

“I understand, Dean and myself can help Anna while you’re gone.”

Gabriel didn’t verbally express his gratitude but it was something that was easy to read on his face. He reached out a hand, placing it on Castiel’s shoulder and gave him a gentle squeeze before letting go and walking to where Sam was laughing at Dean and Anna again. Watching the three of them tease each other and having fun had him smiling as well. This was another thing he loved about humanity, no matter how tough the situation was or how bleak the future was, there was always something to smile and laugh about, even if it was just for a short period of time. There was always something to be happy about, they made sure of it.

“Sammy, we’ve got a case. Leaving tonight, Singer has someone meeting us outside the airport to hand off the case file. Do you need a ride?” He knew that Dean and Castiel had taken the impala to meet them. He was trying to teach Anna to drive since she insisted on not teaching herself the easy way. And he assumed that Sam had walked to meet them since he seemed to walk or jog everywhere. Gabriel wasn’t even certain that he owned a car.

“Yeah, thanks. My phone just died, I’ll leave the door unlocked so you can just come in when you pick me up.” Sam smiled at him with those dimples, causing him to smile back. Knowing he was the cause for that honest smile made his heart flip-flop, he was unable to come up with a witty retort or a cheesy innuendo.

“Sure thing. See you in a few.” Gabriel waved to Dean as he rounded up Anna and drove them home explaining how Cassie was going to be checking in before she was slipped seamlessly into society. He knew he would be able to keep an eye out for her, but he had the idea that she would do just fine on her own. He was mostly happy that she had stopped talking about her life path being similar to falling.

“Things must be working out between you two if you’re letting him call you ‘Sammy’.” Dean wiggled his eyebrows at his brother after overhearing bits of their exchange. He didn’t comment on the case they had just gotten, it was something he was used to himself. At least they had gotten to recreate that dinner that they had both missed from the last case they were called away on.
“Shut up, Jerk.” Sam blushed as he shot the soft insult at his brother.

“Bitch.” Dean grinned back at him.

The flight felt like it took forever. Gabriel spent the flight silent in anger after reading through their case file and Sam couldn’t blame him. He only wished that Gabriel would talk with him about this case because he couldn’t figure anything out about it from the case file. They were being flown into San Diego, California from there they would be driving a couple of hours to get to a prestigious think tank school. A school where students were handpicked and given full scholarships to attend. Any child who went through this school was all but guaranteed a spot in any ivy league they wanted.

School had returned from a break and one of the kids had fallen sick. All tests and reports came back diagnosing it as meningitis. But it didn’t act like any known form of meningitis. He had shown signs of improvement when he was isolated and treated however as soon as he was reintegrated back into classes he quickly deteriorated and spiraled into fever induced madness and eventually died. The parents had called in for an investigation siting malpractice or abuse in the school, but the preliminary investigations turned up nothing out of the ordinary. Until it happened to a second child.

Both autopsy reports were present in the case file and Sam had gone over them with a fine tooth comb. There was nothing in them that he could find out on his own and he knew he needed to see the bodies for himself once they got there. He also wanted to do follow up interviews with the families of the first victims as well as any friends of the students. Sam wanted to agree with the reports of stress exasperated illness. Both of the students were near the top of their class before falling rather quickly to the bottom. And while in a highly competitive school with extremely smart students, the bottom would still have surpassed the top in any other school, the stress to be the smartest and the best was intense enough to drive someone to get sick.

He woke up hours later by an attendant nudging his shoulder gently, requesting that he move his leg from the aisle so they could get the drink cart past. Sam pulled his legs in, looking to his right at his partner. Gabriel had fallen asleep with the scowl still etched into his face, their case file laid open in front of him with new sticky notes pasted on it. Reading them he could see exactly how the case was bothering Gabriel.

‘Only the kids. No Adults.’ ‘The loss of the innocent’ ‘vaccinated against meningitis.’ ‘Please don’t let this be what I fear it is.’

Sam was left wondering what Gabriel was afraid it was. He had his own ideas of what it could be that frightened him. However, he knew he was upset at the idea that this was all surrounding the children. Anything that targeted children was awful in its own, but coupled with the fact that they were called in on this investigation and Gabriel’s unspoken fears this case could only mean bad news.

The flight landed without Sam learning anything more from either the reports or his partner. They walked in time with each other, quietly matching their strides, Sam keeping his own slower so not to outpace Gabriel. A decently sized car waited for them in the rental lot, something that Sam wasn’t going to be cramped up in when they drove. The small victories were something that he would hold onto until they could figure out what was going on and put an end to it.

They didn’t speak much once they got into the car. Sam held onto the armrest as Gabriel drove the vehicle with his own brand of reckless driving, weaving in and out of traffic trying to get to their
location before something else came up. Even the radio was turned down low enough that he had trouble making out either the words or the tune. The subdued silence was unnerving and was only making Sam nervous for the upcoming case.

“How much longer ’till we get there?” The question echoed in the car. The sound of his own voice nearly startling Sam into a sitting position, pulling away from the window he looked at the driver to see if he could read his face. All he could see was worry and determination.

“Not much more. Your call, visit the coroner or stop at the school first?” He didn’t bring up the third option of splitting up, there was something about this case that was already rubbing him the wrong way. He wasn’t about to let Sam out of his sight in case it was something one of his brothers had fixed up. It didn’t have the feeling of it being angelic related but he wasn’t going to take that risk while there was still a bounty on his head and a target on Sam as well.

“The school is housing us, right? We should stop in there first and let them know we’ve arrived and set up what we need to start our investigation. The dead aren’t going anywhere for now.” Sam made the decision for them. Despite getting some sleep on the flight he knew he would feel better knowing where they were staying for the duration of the case. The fact that they were staying near the students in one of the faculty housing meant that they wouldn’t be able to get away from the case, which didn’t seem like such a bad thing at the moment.

Gabriel forced air out his nose at that, he couldn’t muster a full laugh given the situation, but the deadpan humor was enough to brighten his outlook. The coroner was expecting them anytime in the next two days, Sam was right, it wasn’t paramount that they examine the bodies first, they would still be there when they were ready. Letting the school know that they were available and were conducting the investigation would ease the minds of worried parents and students alike. He got better information from the living than from the dead anyways.

The school grounds were gated and the compound was massive. A large castle-esque manor stood center drawing the eye towards it. The long driveway reaching up and creating a teardrop shape around a large fountain, the road running at the base of an imposing set of stairs. Gabriel let out an impressed whistle taking it in.

“So do you think Xavier is in?” Gabriel asked bringing a hand up to shade his eyes from the sun. They parked in front of the loop, a driver meeting them at the base of the stairs taking their car for them ensuring that their belongings would be brought to their rooms. The fact that the school had a valet service was impressive and showed the kind of funding this school received.

“I don’t think these kids are that kind of gifted, Gabe.” Sam smiled, glad that his partner’s sense of humor was resurfacing. Without a laugh here and there, he knew how hard this case could wear on them both. Neither of them like the idea of something attacking children in a school.

They were greeted by an attendant when they reached the front doors. Ushered down long richly decorated halls that reminded them more of a wealthy manor than that of a private school, they found themselves in front of the administrative offices. A large mahogany desk sat center in the room, flanked by walls lined with bookshelves, leather bound books whose titles were hidden gave the room the feeling of a private study.

A short woman with hair tightly pulled back into a bun stood up from the chair and walked around the desk to greet them. She wore a simple pantsuit that Sam assumed was worth more than their flight here. Smiling warmly she introduced herself.

“Agents Milton and Winchester, I am Beatrix Ellos. Dean of studies here at Wallace Preparatory Academy. I’m glad that the agency was able to sacrifice two agents for our issue here. I asked for
assistance here because I’m not certain that this is merely a case of viral illness in our students.” She ran her hands over the fabric of her shirt, smoothing out any wrinkles that had dared to form. While she did a commendable job of keeping the nerves out of her voice, Sam was able to detect the slight vibration in what she was saying. She was scared and worried for her students here. She didn’t know what it was that was causing the children to grow sick, but she could tell that it wasn’t right.

“Both autopsies concluded damages consistent with high fevers from meningitis.” Sam offered having memorized the details of the case file. There wasn’t much that had him thinking that there was anything other than a potential outbreak that the school should be expressing caution and closing the dormitories until things were cleaned.

“Not entirely. I take it you haven’t had the chance to see them for yourselves yet? The funerals have been postponed due to school inquiries, once you have attended to them they will be released back to their families.” She folded her hands together, stilling them, trying to keep them from shaking with nerves. The dean was conducting herself very admirably and professionally in spite of the situation at hand. There was nothing so far that had either agent suspecting that she was doing anything against the interest of the school or her wards, yet her statement was vague and ominous.

“Mrs. Ellos. If you are hiding anything you can be charged with obstructing a federal investigation.” Gabriel tried to keep his voice as soft and non-threatening as possible, he could tell that she was holding back information but didn’t want to scare her either. She had been very welcoming of them so far and he didn’t want that hospitality to turn on them.

“Not hiding anything from you, I assure you. I was hiding this from the families and the media. The official autopsy reports were perplexing and terrifying. I would tell you, but I think they are best understood by observation. I wouldn’t have believed any of it unless I has seen it for myself.” The headmaster looked at them with pleading eyes. Whatever she had seen of the two dead children had her frightened enough to try to hide it.

“I would like to stay here and question yourself, as well as some of the students that had known the two others. My partner can take the trip down to the coroner’s offices while I start here.” Gabriel knew that Sam would be able to find anything out of the ordinary on his own, he trusted him enough to let him investigate without him by his side. He just needed to make sure he would be safe without him too. He hadn’t wanted to let Sam out of his sight during this investigation but it was looking like that was going to be unavoidable unless he pulled some strings and snapped his fingers, something he also wanted to avoid because it would draw unwanted attention. Splitting up they could cover more area and get more investigation done. If there was something hunting and targeting the children he wanted to find out and deal with it as quickly as they could. There was no need to let it get another victim.

“Very well. I can take you to the library where many of the students will be studying in preparation of upcoming exams. I’d be more than happy to talk with both of you more when dinner is served, you are invited to sit with me at the dean’s table.” Her shoulders relaxed as they stepped up and trusted her word. With two federal agents here to help solve this mystery she was feeling better than she had in weeks. It was weight off her back.

“Thank you Mrs. Ellos.” Sam nodded his head at her in thanks, eager to get started on their investigation. He agreed with Gabriel’s plan that they split up, if he hadn’t said it first Sam was ready to suggest it. After all he had been spending a lot of time in morgues lately and was familiar with dead bodies and how to spot things that would be potential causes of death or at least things of concern.

Pulling Sam out of the room, Gabriel looked around making sure no one was watching the or could
over hear them. Reaching inside his jacket pocket he pulled out his pen and pressed it into Sam’s hands, closing his long fingers around the smooth metal. He refused to take it back when Sam realized just what had been forced into his possession.

“I want you to hold on to that. Use it if you need to. Don’t argue with me, I’m not letting you run around without some better form of protection than that pea-shooter you’ve got strapped to your waist. I’m almost certain that my brothers aren’t involved in this, but I’m not taking that risk.” Gabriel insisted, it was the only way he was going to let his partner go anywhere without him at his side. He had seen how Sam could handle the blade and it was enough of a reassurance that he could take care of himself. It was also a trust exercise on Gabriel’s part, he wanted to keep Sam in his life without either pushing him away or smothering him. If Castiel could do it with Dean, he could do it too.

“But what about yourself?” Sam understood what Gabriel was doing, giving the blade to him, but he worried about what Gabe would do without it. If his guns were about as effective as squirt-guns than how would Gabriel’s fare any better against whatever they might face?

“That’s sweet that you’re worried for me, but Sammy, I’m good. There’s not much that can kill me, let alone hurt me.” He placed his hands on the sides of his face and pulled him down for a quick kiss. Sam’s eyes fluttered closed when their lips met, for a moment everything around them melted out of his reality. It was just he two of them and the warmth that spread from his center. Breaking from the kiss, Gabriel smiled at him, rubbing a thumb down his cheek catching on the light stubble on his jaw. “Let’s get this show on the road.”

Sam reluctantly agreed with him before heading out on his own. The car was ready for him when he got outside, the keys already in the ignition. He gave thanks to the valet, unsure of the protocol of tipping a school valet or not and drove away, leaving the large school behind him. Finding the coroner’s office took him a bit longer than he had hoped for as he was still function on the dumb flip phone that Angel Radio set him up with and was without an easy GPS. Getting in was easy, showing his badge and paperwork, he was directed towards the basement where the coroner met him.

One body was already out and prepped on the slab, it was clear that makeup had been painted on in preparation of the body being released for the funeral. Sam shook his head but understood the desire to get started on the work. Looking over the body there didn’t seem to be anything out of the ordinary that stood out right away. Not until the coroner popped the skull open.

“There’s nothing that had been in there had liquefied by the time I got to it. Nothing worth saving. Didn’t even have to draw up a jar for it.” The coroner mumbled as he shared his findings. He had been told to keep things quiet about this case by the school not that he would have shared otherwise. “Brains don’t just turn to goop, there’s nothing that does that. Even Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease doesn’t do anything quite so drastic.”

“So there was nothing left when you opened it up?” Sam questioned, it was something that was a bit far-fetched but so far the evidence was looking strong. The coroner was right with this being unusual, he couldn’t think of anything that would cause a brain to dissolve. Yet the brain cavity was empty, there was no brain in sight, and no tool marks aside from the bone saw marks where the skull was cut open. The coroner showed him some photos taken during the initial autopsy including the cranial excavation. The looks on the assistance face was what cinched the idea that this wasn’t faked for Sam, it was confusion and horror evident in the photos.

“But a thing. Same went for the other body too. It’s a real shame what happened to these kids.”

Pulling the second body out of the cooler drawer the coroner left it for the agent to investigate on his
own. The skull plate opened easily along the incision line, again the inside was void of any vestige of a brain, and again there weren’t any tool marks from where the organ would have been removed. Sam delicately replaced the bone before turning the body on its side. There on the neck he noticed something unusual.

“Doctor? Did you make any remarks on the bruising at the base of the skull where it meets the neck?” Sam called out holding the body still trying to get it to balance on its side. He didn’t want to roll it over completely but he still wanted to get a better look at the bruise.

“No, must be perimortem bruising that wasn’t noted in our initial exams. But it’s interesting that you bring it up.” The coroner was at his side with a small pen light illuminating the area and taking notes on a small notebook he pulled from his pocket. He reached in with the light taking crude measurements of placement and size of the bruise.

“How so?” He asked watching the coroner step back and scribble more notes down.

“Well, Agent, this isn’t the first time that ‘soup for brains’ was the unofficial official cause of death. I just didn’t link the two because the last time it happened the victim was involved in one hell of a car crash. At the time we figured with that much rattling around the brain just kind of oozed out his ears or nose.” He stopped his story, looking up at Sam who was still examining the body. He must have remembered something about the case because the coroner quickly pulled his story back on track and stopped himself from rambling. “I can pull the files for you. But his body was covered in bruises and lacerations, but the one at the base of the neck stood out, you don’t usually get bruises there in a car crash.”

Sam found that he had taken the pen out from his pocket to push the student’s hair out of the way so he could get a better look at the bruise. There was more than just bruising when he looked closer, there was a puncture wound in the center of the bruise, it was almost indiscernible with the exception of the bruise. If he wasn’t looking for things out of the ordinary he might have mistaken it for a spider bite or a tick bite. But coupled with the state of the victim’s brain it was certainly something to take note of.

Stepping back from the body slab, he tucked the ben back into his interior pocket. Catching a look from the coroner he gave a quick smile, he could tell the man was waiting for something. Sam had to think if there had been a question asked of him.

“That would be great. I can wait for the files if it won’t take long or you can send them to this email if you have electronic copies.” He pulled his business card out of his pocket and offered it to the coroner, before remembering that he didn’t have access to his emails on his phone. Thankfully the man didn’t take the offered card, forcing Sam to tuck it back into his pocket.

“We keep the files behind the showroom. Won’t take long at all.” He took off his gloved and started unbuttoning his coat as he made his way for the door.

Sam followed him back upstairs and through a room full of various types of coffins, some open and on display. Like most towns the coroner was also the mortician, he suspected that they didn’t see too many causes for autopsies so the man did them only when necessary. A small room at the back which could have at one point been a supply closet had been transformed into a filing room. The coroner opened a drawer and thumbed through tab after tab on the files stacked deep before coming across what he was looking for. Handing it off to the agent he moved back to the offices, getting out of the way and effectively ending the live of questioning and interrogation.

Flipping open the file Sam skimmed through it, he noted that cause of death was officially blunt force trauma due to car crash. However, the pictures showed him what he was looking for, the circular
bruising at the base of the neck. The information about the lack of brain looked like it had either been omitted or removed because Sam couldn’t find mention of it in the report, the sudden end to the coroner’s story made sense if he was told that it wasn’t a possible cause of death. Just like with the reports on the two children, as the coroner put it ‘Soup for Brains’ as a cause of death was alarming and typically unexplainable, he was probably told not to talk about it by someone.

“Gabe, so get this.” Sam didn’t have to wait long for his partner to pick up the phone. He wanted to bring him in on the new evidence sooner, see if there was anything he could make out of it. “It’s not meningitis. Both kids had bruises and puncture wounds at the base of their skulls, their brains had been liquefied by something. And the kicker, there was a victim before them. I’ve got the file and I’m returning to the school.”

“Be really careful, Samshine, I think I know what’s going on. We’re dealing with a wraith.”

Chapter End Notes

Title is from an Offspring song of the same name.
“Ok, I’ll bite. Only because encephalopathy diseases don’t work this quick or completely melt a brain. What’s a wraith, Gabe? You have to really convince me because I’m currently working on how this is some new designer form of a spongiform prion being injected into test subjects.” Sam laid it out for Gabriel over the phone. He wanted to hear his partner’s theory but he also wanted to let him know going into this how he already had a perfectly non-supernatural reason for what they were seeing.

“We can meet up at the school and I can give you the low down on what they are and what they do. It’s not some disease, Sam, it’s a monster. But you’re not too far off with your idea of the victims being injected with something. Get back here and we can go over it.” Gabriel wasn’t going to discuss the details of the creature over the phone, Sam knew that. It was something they were better off doing face to face, besides they didn’t know who could be tapped into their lines. Well he knew that Angel Radio was tapped in, Sam had told Gabriel as much explaining his dummy phone and the occasional check ins with Frank and Ash. But they didn’t need anyone in the school overhearing them, there was still some professionalism that they had to uphold during a case. Something that Sam was adamant about doing.

Sam hung up the phone and couldn’t help but chuckle in the car. Things were as normal as they could be with this case. Gabriel was back and working with him again. They had a mystery case with evidence that was pointing at a logical scientific reason. And his partner was coming up with ghosts and monsters as the culprit. He knew he was going to continue to go at this case from the side of science and medicine while Gabe would maintain his path of the supernatural. He knew that Gabriel would probably be right but he also knew that he could come up with new evidence by coming at the case from his own angle. Besides his reports were the ones that Singer wanted to see on his desk, which meant they were going to need some evidence that backed up his theories.

“Cause everyone here hates everyone here for doing just like they do. It’s best if we all keep this quiet instead.” Sam found himself singing along to the music as he pulled into the long driveway leading up to the school. His mind was surprisingly calm for the details of the case; the main reason was that things regarding the case were no longer a huge mystery. They had started uncovering bits and pieces of evidence leading them to creating a picture of what happened.

Gabriel was waiting for him on the bottom of the steps, sitting in a pair of sweat pants and a grey t-shirt with the school’s emblem on it. The tight fit of the shirt had Sam staring a little harder than usual, it had to be a student’s shirt, he was a little curious as to how he had gotten the outfit. Stepping out of the car he gave his partner another look over taking in the unusual outfit, arching an eyebrow as a simple question.

“I interrupted a chemistry class while they were going over reactions. Did you know that when hydrogen peroxide is introduced to potassium iodide you get this giant foam tower? Also, this school has a laundry service, they took my suit to get it cleaned. Sam, why couldn’t I have gone to this school?” Gabriel stood up, the pants pulling up above his ankles, it was clearly an extra student uniform, and one that didn’t fit either.

“Because when you were in school the earth was still cooling.” Sam teased him in a way that anyone
that could have overheard them wouldn’t have thought much of the comment. It was easy to pick on his age now that he knew approximately how old he was. It was something that Sam had only put a small amount of thought into since the age difference between them was so vast, but in a way that astronomical difference made the assumed age difference not so bad. Gabriel had responded by sticking his tongue out.

“So, they gave you a gym outfit?” Sam asked ready to hand over the keys to the school’s parking attendant. He was still amused with the idea that a school for high schoolers, many of whom didn’t have driver’s licenses, had a parking attendant.

“It was this or one of the sports uniforms and those are unforgiving.” He explained waving at his outfit before nodding his head in the direction of the car. Sam had to stop his thought process from running with the idea of Gabriel in a baseball uniform, the tight pants hugging his legs and ass, of Gabriel bending over to field the ball, or the fact that the agency had a softball team. The sound of the trunk being popped open pulled Sam’s attention back to the moment. “Our overnight bags are still in here. Your computer bag and my briefcase are in the rooms, but nothing else made it. Here I’ll give you a hand and I’ll show you where we’re staying.”

Gabriel led them out the back doors where there were several ivy coated buildings with cobbled paths leading up to them. They had names hanging over their doors indicating which dormitories they were. A small one near the back simply said “visitors” above the door. Entering the house Sam noted that there were eight hooks for keys beside the door, indicating that there were probably eight rooms in the house. The whole place was relatively quiet, there was still two hours until dinner was served in the dining hall, anyone else who was using the house alongside them was probably still in class or otherwise busy with the school’s functions.

“We’re upstairs across the hall from each other, I don’t think you’ll comfortably fit in the bed you’ve got.” Gabriel explained as he led them up the worn wooden stairs passing bland paintings of cabins and hunting dogs. “There’s at least three visiting professors this year also using the house. I’ve already started to set up one of the walls in my room as our evidence board. Found some things that support your findings at the coroner’s office.”

He pushed open the door to his room. The space was comfortable enough, a dresser lined the wall nearest the door, opposite the bed stood a cupboard and a whiteboard had been wheeled up for their investigation, and Gabriel was right about the bed. Sam had to assume his room mirrored this one, his feet were going to be hanging off the edge of the bed and he wouldn’t be getting any solid sleep during this investigation.

“Gabe, the coroner reports were falsified. The listed cause of death isn’t what killed them.” He took out the files given to him back at the morgue. Flipping through the papers he pulled out the photos from the first case showing them to his partner before taping them up to the board. “Look, here, there’s a bruise at the base of the skull, complete with a small puncture hole. The same bruise and marking was found on both of the students’ bodies. Same cause of death.”

“You found the smoking gun, Sammy. These things feed off of brains, and we’re sitting in probably the smartest collection of young minds, this is like a Chinese buffet that’s actually any good. They inject an endorphin and hormone mix that scrambles the brain then slurp it out with their homemade straw,” Sam wasn’t sure that he wanted to know what the homemade straw was or how it worked. So far this case was not only weird but rubbed him the wrong way. Neither of their ideas gave them much room for comfort. Either it was a monster slurping brains, or a real life monster concocting deadly diseases and administering them to children in a school. Gabriel went on, “Victim usually doesn’t feel a thing while they snack on their brain bit by bit. But lasting effects… hoo boy. These kids started off close to the top, they didn’t crash and burn, their brains started melting.”
There’s only one of them, lucky for us, or there’d be more bodies. Not so lucky for us, it’s found a feeding ground. It won’t leave and it’s going to get territorial and aggressive once it finds out that we’re on to it. Sam it might actually help the case if you keep going with your theory, lull the wraith into a false sense of security. Or we could blatantly go about things as if we know what’s going on and try to lure it into coming after one of us. Naturally I would prefer if it went after me.” Gabriel was going off on a tangent again, but Sam wasn’t paying too close attention. He was busy reading over some of the students’ statements that his partner had gotten.

Each one read almost the same, their victim had started complaining about headaches and was having trouble remembering simple things. Eventually leading to them slurring their speech and forgetting bigger things. The whole thing seemed as if the kids were coming down with dementia or Alzheimer’s. Shortly before the first kid died the second one started with the same symptoms, it was very likely that there was already a new victim in the school. They would just have to find that person before things escalated further.

“Can we trap it?” Sam asked pulling Gabriel out of his own planning and thoughts with a plan of his own. He wasn’t exactly sure how it work or even if it would, that’s why he was asking. Gabriel would know better unless he had access to research material and the time to throw himself into the research. If he was right with his thought process they didn’t have much time.

“Like Scooby-doo style trap?” He asked, face contorted in confusion. He was still used to people treating his monster theories with contempt and making fun of him. Honestly this case was set up like an episode of Scooby-Doo; a large rich school, a monster running around causing trouble, all they needed was a janitor with a grudge and access to a projector.

“No, just, can we capture it and arrest it? Continue to go with my theory that it’s a designer disease being used and targeted at students before being weaponized. We can get this creature arrested and locked up, no questions asked except possibly by wherever ends up with your monster.” He had no idea what they would do once they had their culprit captured and in custody. If it really was a creature where did you send it? He didn’t think there was protocol for unnatural creatures in a prison environment. Sam continued when he saw the sparkle in his partner’s eyes, the gears were in motion in Gabriel’s head and he just had to provide some more of his plan.

“So get this, there’s a pattern, it’s a thin pattern as there’s only two known victims. But it’s still there. We’re overlooking something, the second student started showing the early signs of the same illness as the first shortly before the first died. We’ve got another kid out there being feasted on, or whatever. As much as I don’t like the idea of it, we find this kid we can find our perpetrator and hopefully swoop in and take ‘em in alive.” The idea of using one of the students as bait for their plan was sickening but it was something that he couldn’t see another way of doing this. If his theory was correct there was already a child being targeted and if they took too long working out details they would have their fourth body and would be starting on their fifth. Neither of them wanted this to drag on when it was the lives of students on the line.

“Ooo Sammy I knew you were the smart one.” Gabriel had broken out into a huge grin and was wagging his finger at him. With Sam’s theory and plan, Gabriel now had a plan of his own. He needed to get back to the school where he could question the dean and get access to faculty records. Their killer had to be someone working for the school, and a recent addition to the staff at that.

A knock at the door brought them out of their theories and plans, reminding them that they had an obligation to the school aside from catching a killer. Dinner would be held in the main hall and they had been invited to the dean’s table. Gabriel changed out of the loaner outfit and into clean clothes, black slacks and a golden dress shirt. Sam left his jacket draped over Gabe’s bed and left for dinner in the same outfit he wore to work. An audible snap of fingers and a low whistle of appreciation
caused Sam to glance at himself in a mirror as they made their way out of the dorm they were staying in; his shirt was a rich green and was better fitting than the simple white ones he wore.

“Can you not do that without letting me know first?” Sam said with a roll to his eyes. He was under the impression that Gabriel wanted to lay low for a while, but he had been displaying small amounts of power since he got back. Part of him wondered if that was because he didn’t feel like he had to hide anymore.

“Hey, if I told you first would you have let me?” Gabriel grinned at him, wiggling his eyebrows, which only caused Sam to laugh at him.

They walked together, bumping into each other and making teasing remarks causing the other to laugh. Instead of fretting about the case they were relaxed, until they made it inside the dining hall, where they returned to a state of high alert. Long tables were spread out with students already sitting at them, a table at the head of the room looked out over the student body and they could see where two seats were saved for them. Both Sam and Gabriel took careful sweeps of the room in with their eyes, trying to note exits and potential escapes were located. They each took a different row to walk down knowing that they were both looking for the same thing as they walked passed the students. Getting to the end of the rows they locked eye-contact and Sam gave a simple nod before they made their way to their seats.

Sam had seen something in the crowd of students that he wanted to talk to Gabriel about, however they were seated with a person between them. It would have been nice to have his partner next to him while they ate, to try to whisper ideas to him during their meal. He knew that their perpetrator was somewhere in the school and possibly a teacher so talking about their theories or making notes to each other would probably get them into hot water down the road.

“Gentlemen! I’m so very glad that you could join us.” Mrs. Ellos called out to them indicating their seating on either side of her. Taking their seats they were introduced to the teachers on their side opposite the dean. Sam was seated next to Ms. Stoke, head of the English department. While Gabriel was seated next to Dr. Finkle, head of chemistry, whom he had already met in his classroom.

“We’re all pleased that the FBI was able to provide two capable agents as yourselves to help us with our situation. It’s all very perplexing to us- “

“Yeah, since when did the FBI care about two meningitis cases? Shouldn’t they have sent in the CDC for this?” Dr. Finkle interrupted the dean pointing out one of the oddities of the case.

“Typically, yes, this would be better suited for the CDC, however there were some discrepancies in the autopsies and the peculiarities of the three cases that warranted a different approach.” Sam tried being diplomatic without disclosing too much of the case. He wasn’t sure who had been briefed on the case within the faculty and how much they knew. Mrs. Ellos had tried keeping the nature of the student’s brains hush-hush, so he assumed that there were other parts of this that were being kept from the general body of the faculty. But he also wanted enough to be shared so they could gauge the reactions and potentially find the wraith before the third student went down.

“Woah, three cases? Only two students came down with meningitis.” A look of surprise and fear crossed the teacher’s face as he stuttered through his sentence. Sam had let the fact of the third case slip through, something he was starting to regret. They didn’t need any panic spreading through the school while they were investigating.

“That’s the thing Fink. We don’t think it’s meningitis. We think these were targeted cases.” Gabriel deadpanned the accusation, the cat was out of the bag and now it was time to see how the mice ran.
“So, you’re saying these were murders?” The chemistry teacher was the only one who seemed bold enough to ask questions, the others had fallen silent around them. This was not an easy topic to bring up and Gabriel was honestly done talking about it without getting any clues or having a better direction to take his series of questioning.

“Yeah sure, whatever, hey pass me more of those mashed potatoes. Dean Ellos, we’re gonna need access to the school’s records tomorrow morning.” His flippant refusal to answer their questions had them pulling back. It was exactly as he wanted. He would be better off conducting one-on-one interviews to gauge reactions than trying to read people sitting on the same side of a long table as him.

Dinner went quickly, discussions having veered away from the case at hand. Sam had gotten into a discussion on the symbolism present in Catch-22 with Ms. Stokes that had gotten the teacher on her left involved as well. Gabriel would have joined if the visiting professor hadn’t brought up theological theory causing the special agent to request a seat change so he could go over some of the new theories being presented in the study. By the end of dinner, they had both agreed that the teachers were grasping for distractions and the ones they had interacted with were likely not their suspect.

“Sammy, I was thinking it over during dinner, and we could do it your way. Still not sure where we’d send the bastard once we caught it, but thing is they’re weak to silver. So we clasp silver cuffs on them and they shouldn’t be able to break out. I could try to knock them out with some mojo if the silver isn’t enough.” Gabriel said as he undid the buttons on his shirt. He had gone over Sam’s idea in his head during dinner and had come to the conclusion that Sam was the best partner he could have gotten.

“Shouldn’t you be not using it so much? Doesn’t it send off a ping like on angel radar or something?” Sam asked, sprawled out on Gabriel’s bed, arms crossed behind his head and feet dangling off the edge of the bed near his ankles.

“Eh, not really, only if I use it for something big or draw attention to myself in some way.” He waved his hand dismissively. Sam was right though, he shouldn’t be risking himself like this, not with just about every angel on a manhunt for him.

“When do you not draw attention to yourself?” The teasing reply came back quick and sarcastic. Sam was grinning at him, dimples framing his smile, as he swung his legs over the side of the bed and stood up.

“Hey! I resent that!” He tried to sound offended, but his laughter ruined the illusion. Wrapping an arm around the other agent’s waist as he tried to move past him, he pulled them together pressing his face into the taller agent’s collar. Knowing that Sam was going to be in the next room didn’t help the worry that sat in the pit of his stomach.

“Goodnight Gabe. We can discuss your need for attention in the morning.” The words were soft as Sam pressed his lips to the top of Gabriel’s head, silky golden hair brushing his face. He untangled himself from the arms wrapped around him and left the room to go to his own.

“Love you Sam.” He whispered into the dark as the click of the door shutting across the hall sounded.
He was in the same dining hall that they had eaten dinner in earlier that night but it was dark and shadows licked up the walls from the light thrown off by scattered candles. The room was empty but it didn’t feel like it, Sam felt like he was being watched. Sinister laughter bounced off the walls and echoed in his head. Spinning around he started seeing figures in the shadows, eyes watching him from the windows. A shout of pain brought his attention to where the dean’s table was the night before. Gabe was there, his wings stretched out and chained down, crimson mixed with the metallic golds. Deep, red lines etched into his exposed flesh, trails of blood marring his soft skin. Golden eyes locked on to him and the pain in them was no longer for himself but for Sam. Sam tried to get to Gabe’s side to help free him of the restraints, but he found himself unable to move, chained to the floor. The chorus of laughter abruptly ended and a slow rhythmic clap took its place, the sound coming from behind him. Unable to turn around Sam had to endure the wait, watching as Gabriel thrashed against the chains in anger, fear, and pain.

“Miss me?” The twisted smile was something he would never be able to forget; the grin stretched wider than the mouth should, and the sparkle in his eyes was of malicious joy. Lucifer looked him over as he placed himself between Sam and Gabriel. “I think you’re going to be the last one I kill so I can watch my baby brother fall apart. Take you apart inch by inch and he’ll be forced to watch. Sweet revenge for trapping me like Daddy did.”

Sam’s phone rang from inside his pocket, the sound muffled and distant. Laughter peeled out of Lucifer, the creatures in the shadows echoing while rattling and knocking on the walls. The ringer sounded out again, Lucifer pointed at Sam’s pocket, not with a look of curiosity but of knowing.

“Aren’t you going to answer that Sam? Go ahead, answer the phone. We can wait.”

“Sammy, either answer your phone or open the door so I can answer it.” Gabriel’s voice woke him from his nightmares. Sam bolted upright, gasping for breath and grabbing at the blankets around him as he took in that he was in his room and not the dining hall. His phone was still ringing on the side table, the vibrations caused it to move from one end to the other but hadn’t caused it to fall off the edge. Reaching out his hand hit nothing a few times before his fingers wrapped around the phone. Flipping it open he was greeted with silence followed by a loud burst of static and then nothing. The door to his room swung in and his partner stood in the doorway watching him carefully.

“What’s wrong Sam? You’re looking at your phone like it just put a curse upon your cow.” Gabriel let the door close behind him as he stepped into the room. He could see the discomfort on his partner’s face, sweat glistening on his forehead. But more so he could feel the unease leaking from him, it had toned down from panic and fear as soon as he had knocked on the door. The extreme emotions were what caused him to get up and check on his partner in the first place, now that he was in the same room as him he could feel Sam calming down.

“It’s nothing Gabe, it just died.” Sam plugged his phone back in, standing up and riffling through his bag for a new outfit to wear. He wasn’t sure what to make of his dream but he was glad that Gabriel was fine, keeping his hands busy with his clothing he kept himself from wrapping Gabriel up in his arms. He didn’t want the other to worry about his dreams now on top of everything else that was going on.

“Did you charge it last night?” He asked flopping on the bed, the mattress bouncing him slightly. The blankets were still warm from where Sam had been laying only moments before. Looking up he started tracing patterns in the popcorn-ceiling with his finger, giving Sam a bit of privacy without leaving the room.

“Yeah, I mean, I thought so.” He finished dressing himself returning to the bed to grab his tie from
the side table where he had hung it the night before. “I left my jacket in your room, Gabe. Can we grab that before we go down for breakfast?”

“Anything you want kiddo.” Gabriel smiled up at him, he had centuries of practice hiding his fears and emotions behind masks. Sam didn’t need to know about his worries on top of everything else they were dealing with. They grabbed their jackets and made their way down to the dining hall, both of them keeping a careful eye out for anyone who might be more than they seem as the students and faculty entered the large room.

Gabriel had a niggling feeling that something was about to go wrong in the worst sense all throughout breakfast. He moved his food around his plate with his fork as the teachers made small talk around him and Sam. The student that Sam had pointed out yesterday was looking tired and drained, Gabriel could tell that it would only be a matter of time before he would be beyond saving. They didn’t have much time and even less time for errors, while eradicating the thing would be the quickest way to deal with it he wanted to go with Sam’s plan. If there was a chance that they could capture it, he would have undeniable proof that the X-Files were not only necessary but could be expanded. The more people he could save or help, the better.

Sam was also quiet during their meal. While he ate a few things from his plate his eyes were constantly scanning the room. He jumped when a group of students broke out into laughter, his hand subconsciously reaching out to brush against Gabriel, to ground himself. Movement on the edge of his peripherals had him looking for someone who had no reason to be there. He wanted more than anything to be anywhere except the dining hall in that moment. A tone rang out and Sam stiffened at the sound, setting his face to hide his reaction. If their suspect was watching it wouldn’t do them any good if they saw how uneasy and jumpy one the agents was.

The students got up and filed out heading to their first classes. Dean Ellos gave them the key to the records room as well as a ring of janitorial keys, giving them access to every room of every building. Thanking her they left the room, Sam’s shoulders sagging in relief as soon as the large doors closed behind them. Gabriel however was still fidgeting, his fingers rubbing together anxiously, Sam’s nervousness and apprehension had rubbed off on him. The fact that he was starting to share Sam’s emotions had him even more nervous, this was something he wanted to discuss with Castiel.

“Sam. Something’s gonna go wrong, I can feel it. You still have my blade right? You keep that thing by your side at all times, and don’t pray. I can’t hear you but they can and we don’t want more than we can bite off.” He grabbed at Sam’s wrists, his fingers rubbing the back of the other’s hands. Gabriel knew they had to split up again but the heavy feeling in his gut was something he couldn’t ignore. He wanted to push Sam away from whatever was going to happen and into safety, but he had promised that he wouldn’t do something like that again. Sam was capable of handling things himself and had proven it, he had to trust him.

“It’s in my inside pocket.” He patted the front of his jacket, feeling the shape of the pen where he had tucked it in. They had agreed to split the work, Gabriel had insisted that he would be able to go through the files as he put it, ‘in a snap’. Sam was going to scope out the remainder of the school to see if there was an optimum location to set a trap for this creature. He also wanted to get to one of the chemistry labs to silver plate his pair of cuffs. “Remember not just new staff, but look at transfer students, teacher aids, visiting professors.”

“Got it Sam, don’t think it would be any of the visitors or we would have noticed them in the house. But good call on the transfers.” He pulled the set of keys out, separating the keys to the records rooms from the rest and handing the ring over to Sam. He only needed the one key, and really didn’t even need that. “One more thing, while you’re out casing the joint keep an eye on mirrored surfaces. A wraith’s true form shows in reflections. You spot it, note who the disguise is, and call me. We’ll
"get this son of a bitch before it gets another kid."

"I have to head back to the room to grab my phone, hopefully it’s charged enough."

"It should be, and Samshine? Don’t go pulling any self-sacrificing shit today, I want you in one piece when we go home. I’ve got a missed date that I need to make up for with a smart and handsome person that I don’t want to miss again.

Sam blushed, the tips of his ears turning red, he didn’t even try to hide his smile, his dimples standing out. Squeezing Gabriel’s hand before letting go he left his partner to get his phone and start on his task. There was a lot of school to cover and until Gabriel came back with a short list of suspects, a lot of people to observe in mirrors. The school didn’t seem to be short on reflective surfaces as Sam made his way down the main hallways. Trophy cases gleamed with the accomplishments of students, picture frames with the smiling faces of successful alumni looked down into the halls behind glass, a few strategically placed mirrors near the main entrance where visiting parents would see themselves and their gifted child. However, once he started into the education wings reflective surfaces became more and more difficult to locate. Light sconces were heavily polished but they were small and Sam knew he wouldn’t be able to reliably use them to find their creature. He was thinking about how he might have to move a couple of the mirrors from their places into different areas so he could watch the crowds between classes when everyone was moving about when he got back to his room, his phone was at half charge and there was only one text message.

‘Hate seeing you go, love watching you leave ;) PS NICE ASS.’ Sam laughed at the message, his face heating up again when he remembered that Frank and Ash were monitoring his phone. He was going to have to remind Gabriel again about that, but he got the feeling that it wouldn’t stop his partner at all. Knowing Gabe, it might actually give him reason to send more messages like that or even escalate them.

Sam decided to explore the outside grounds before going back inside the building. There were sports fields as well as equipment rooms, a greenhouse, as well as the parking area for the faculty that didn’t live on campus. This school seemed to give every opportunity to their students, Sam wasn’t surprised that graduates of this school would have their choice of university when they left. A group of students ran past him in the same matching sweat suit as he approached the track field. Watching them run off he noted that none of them had the mark on their neck. There was nothing to use in the fields to check for reflection, in fact they were wide open, as expected, and Sam knew they wouldn’t make for a good area to trap anybody. It would be a long chase if they got their suspect out here, and always the risk of them getting away if they were more athletic than either of the agents.

The parking area was between the sports fields and the greenhouse. He could see small shapes moving around near the base of the greenhouse, moving through the tall grasses and hopping through the fencing near the raised beds outside. He also could see their rental vehicle parked in the lot, the whole thing was surrounded by fencing though. Sam knew that they wouldn’t find anything in there as he walked the perimeter going around. Most of the cars were of moderate price range, only a few cars were high end luxury makes, he had expected to see more with the school being as decadent as it was.

Getting closer to the greenhouse the shapes running through the grass got bigger and he could make out what they were. With the addition of a small wooden structure on the far side of the building he smiled at the chickens pecking at the ground. The chickens clucked softly to themselves as he moved through them to the glass building, steam and the elements had softened the panes giving them a milky quality.

There was a rich smell of soil and humidity around the building that only intensified when he stepped
inside. Greens surrounded him, reaching up and growing to the ceiling in places. Fragrant flowers were open throughout the building, and Sam could see that some of the plants were growing small fruits out of their typical season. The rows of planters were close together and didn’t allow for quick movements, Sam moved carefully through them as he leaned in to inspect a plant here or there.

“Greetings Agent… Winchester was it?” a feminine voice startled him, she must have moved close to him without making a sound in order to have caught him unaware. Turning around he saw an older student with a pair of pruning shears, his body tensed up at the sight of the potential weapon. He was unable to make his body completely relax in front of the student, there was something about being in the narrow and crowded space that had him on edge.

“Sorry, miss, didn’t mean to interrupt any studies going on. I’m just investigating all the buildings per protocol.” Sam said as he looked around him again, taking in his surroundings and making note of where exits were blocked off. The glint of a small metal watering can caught his eye, it sat behind a broad leafed plant, and had nearly become invisible by reflecting the colors and images of the plants around it. He took a couple steps back hoping that it would force the student closer in order to maintain a polite conversation.

“If there was anything in these greenhouses making people sick I would have found it. I’m here everyday helping out. I’d like to study botany, you see.” She did move closer to keep up with manners and etiquette, as she did she moved into the line of the watering can. Sam carefully watched as it reflected something twisted and hideous, something aged to the point of rotting. He was glad for all of his trainings as he maintained a blank face instead of reacting to the sight, Gabriel needed to know what he had found.

“Of course. Well I’ll be sure to find you if we need to ask you any questions regarding any of the plants in here, miss. You have a nice day.” He smiled and nodded to the monster as he continued back-stepping to the door, never turning his back on it. Once he was outside he punched Gabriel’s number into his phone.

“Sam it’s a student, you were so right about that call. I found the records and you’ll never believe it, but the guy in the car? The father of the exchange family that took in our monster.” He answered the phone on the first ring, excitement in his voice as he explained what he had found in the records room. The pieces were fitting together nicely for him, they just needed to find and capture this person. He just needed to meet up with Sam and they could get their plans in motion.

“Gabe, I know. I just met her.” Sam’s words pulled all the excitement out of Gabriel’s voice.

Chapter End Notes

Back 2 Good – Matchbox 20
Gabriel’s room had been rearranged to fit another white board as well as the equipment that they had managed to gather up from around the school. They even had managed to sneak food out of the kitchen before lunch was served, through Sam’s sweettalking and puppy eyes. They had excused themselves from another meal at the faculty table to work out their planning with minimal distractions. On one of the boards was the photo of their suspect and her newest target, from asking around they found that their suspect was specifically targeting men. Once they figured out who their suspect was the final piece of the puzzle, everything else falling into place. Each victim, with the exception of the first, had gone out with their suspect, this would have given her access to being alone with them as well as opportunity to drain their brains. This was something that they knew would be important to their plans but they didn’t want to put another kid in danger if they could help it.

Along with the photos they had put up potential ideas of how they could go about capturing her. Sam brought up the greenhouse, and even though it would close quarters it would be secluded from the rest of the school so if things did go bottoms up it would have minimum casualties. Classrooms would increase the risk of a hostage situation, and the dining hall would involve everybody and would probably result in everyone needing therapy if she showed her true colors. Gabriel was reluctant to put them in a tight area with poor visibility but he agreed that it would be the best location after throwing out the other suggestions. Once he was told that the greenhouse was also a regular place that their suspect spent time between classes, things were sealed.

Across the other board were runes, symbols, and sigils that Gabriel had explained had power, especially if there was belief in their creation. He explained how some were old symbols that had been made for specific results. Others were things that Gabe had been tinkering with, combinations of Nordic runes and angelic scripture. Sam knew there had to be a story there that he might hear one day but for now he was listening and copying the marks to memory. They didn’t have a lot of time to sneak in during the dinner break and set the traps they needed before confronting her and preferably capturing her.

The plan was that they were going to use dinner as a way to get into the greenhouse and set everything up when they knew no one was going to be moving around the school. Gabriel had found a supply closet with various paint supplies that they would be able to use and had convinced Dr. Finkle that silver plating his handcuffs would be a fun science experiment for the kids. Sam had placed a call with Castiel letting him know about how the case was shaping up and how they were going to need additional agents to help bring their suspect to a prison. Gabriel had taken the phone half-way through the call and suggested a specific agent for the job. Things had been coming together nicely and now they just needed for the game pieces to come together.

“You got those memorized yet Sam?” Gabriel said as he sprawled out across the bed, dropping his head into Sam’s lap interrupting any work his partner was trying to get done. They had been over the plan several times and he was confident that his traps would be sufficient if they got them up in time. He wanted to get out there and set things up so they weren’t rushing their work on the symbols.

“I think so. We ready for this?” He put the notebook that he had been drawing the symbols on over and over to the side. His hands free, his fingers sunk into Gabriel’s silky hair, running through the strands and rubbing lightly at his scalp. Gabriel’s eyes fluttered closed and softly hummed at the feeling. Sam smiled down at him thoughts of what other noises he could draw out of the angel on his lap pushed to the back of his mind as he reminded himself that they would have time after they took down a wraith.
“You can do that all night Sambo.” Gabriel was losing himself in the soothing actions, his mind drifting away from their intended plans and issues at hand. He didn’t want to capture the wraith if that meant leaving Sam’s lap. His grace was humming along softly, pleased and reaching out towards the bright soul next to him.

“Yes that a promise?” Sam smirked as he tightened his fingers in his hair, pulling Gabriel up off his lap and pressing their lips together. Gabriel gasped at the sudden switch to a rougher treatment, his eyes popping open with a haze coating them as heat rushed down to his belly. Sam took advantage of the opportunity with Gabriel’s gasp, his tongue pressing in, his kiss demanding and hungry. He pulled back as quickly as it started, showing far more restraint than his partner who was flushed and in a clear daze. Any longer and he wouldn’t have been able to pull away from him and they would have lost their window to go after their monster. Sam rolled off the bed to stop himself from continuing what he had foolishly started. “We’ve got work to do Gabe.”

Gabriel groaned at the loss of contact, his head falling heavily back down on the blankets where his partner had been just moments before. Taking a couple of deep breaths, he managed to clear his mind and bring himself back onto task, it would take more than just deep breathing to bring other things back under control. Turning his thoughts to symbols, traps, and wraiths he forced images of being pinned down on a bed as far out of his mind as he could. While Sam was a huge tease, he was also right, they had a monster to catch and a school full of children to save.

Double checking that they had all the paint and brushes, Gabriel’s hand went to his hip where the silver-plated handcuffs were tucked away. He led them out of the room and towards the greenhouse, the school was mostly dark with light pouring out from where the dining hall was. Light scattered out into the adjacent fields, they followed the shadows stretching like long fingers towards the greenhouse. Without light, the greenhouse seemed more crowded, branches reached out and grabbed at their shoulders as they moved around, mapping out the area before laying down the first marks of paint.

The last of the paint placed down on the floor, Sam watched as the symbol faintly glowed before fading into the darkness. He wasn’t certain if there would be a time when he wouldn’t be impressed by the display of power or the presence of the supernatural. For the time being he could only accept the edge it gave them in their casework. Catching Gabriel’s eyes across the room, he nodded and sent off a quick text to hopefully draw their prey into their trap. All they had to do now was wait.

They didn’t have to wait for too long, their suspect was lip-locked with her current target, pulling him by the lapels of his uniform jacket towards the greenhouse. One of her hands reached out behind them blindly searching for the handle, the door rattled open and they stumbled past the first symbol. If she caught the faint light that flared up from it activating she didn’t react, instead deepening the make-out session to effectively distract her prey. She stretched her free arm out, a slick sliding noise emanating from near her wrist as a long bone like spike grew out of her flesh. Sam flinched, unnerved by the sound of bone breaking through flesh, however he kept his eyes trained on their suspect. Another sigil glowed faintly in the dark, casting pale light across the thick vegetation before fading back to darkness.

The magic pulsated think in the air as each symbol was set off as the wraith maneuvered deeper into their trap. Each one went off as planned weakening the creature with every step, his fingers twitched together as she got closer and closer to the final mark. It didn’t go off as planned but set off a bright blinding light, the wraith dropped down to her knees, hands covering her eyes as she let out a wailing scream. Gabriel bounded forward reaching out and wrapping his hand around the boy’s shoulder, pulling him away and out of her reach, his body going limp in his hands. A quick glance over the boy and he could see where the bone like needle had grazed and nicked his neck just under his ear, but was otherwise unhurt.
Gabriel didn’t have to watch to know that Sam had darted forward at the same time that he had, his actions in tandem to his own. Instead of going towards the innocent, he had instead tackled the wraith and was attempting to pin her arms. The creature was trying to use her strength to flip them only to have Sam retaliate by flipping them back. The bone slid back out as she pulled her wrist free and surged forward striking at his face. Sam jerked back losing his grip on her, giving her the chance to get up and square off against him, he was quick to get into a fighting position refusing to let her get the upper hand. He felt something trickle down the side of his face and restrained from reaching up to brush it aside, anything could trigger her into an attack.

His vision tunneled in on her, the room around them fading away into darkness. He wasn’t going to let this one slip away, not when they were so close. Her eyes darted over to where Gabriel was standing off to the side, carefully watching his partner and their suspect dance around each other. Looking past him, she was able to see where Gabriel had laid the boy down out of harm’s way. The sight of her most recent meal acting as just enough of a distraction to pull her out of the moment of the fight.

Sam launched himself into her, using his full weight and his momentum to spin her as he took her down. Landing on top of her, he could feel ribs straining and creaking with the rough treatment and impact against the floor, air was expelled and she gasped for breaths. Long fingers wrapped around her wrist tight enough to bruise and slammed them against the floor, ear piercing shrieks exploded from her mouth, there must have been just enough air left in her lungs after the impact. Bone clattered against the hard-concrete ground of the greenhouse as the organic needle snapped off.

There was so much noise filling the small space, Sam had all he could to not flinch at what was currently assailing him that he never heard Gabriel snap his fingers. The screams only got louder and the smell of burnt flesh filled the small building, permeating through the heady scent of humid vegetation. The cold of the metal contrasted heavily against the heat of her flesh. Looking down Sam could see the flashes of silver on her wrists, the flesh under the metal sizzling as the cuffs branded her skin. No longer able to take the volume of the noises of her wailing, Sam reached behind him, confident that she wasn’t moving with the cuffs now in place, his fingers touching something cool and firm. With a heavy swing downwards, sounds of terracotta shattering brought all other noises to a halt. Soil tumbled out of the broken pot covering his pants and shoes, the roots of a small tree wrapping around the head of their now unconscious suspect. Gabriel arched his eyebrow at his partner, the corners of his mouth turning up in a smirk.

Sirens seemed like a peaceful background noise as they echoed in the new quiet, blue and red lights flashed as a patrol car tore across the field coming to a stop near the greenhouse. Shadows danced as the lights oscillated, Gabriel stepped over the prone body of their suspect before leaning over and picked something up off the ground. He sent a quick glance to the other student who was still leaning against one of the rows of planters. The student seemed mostly fine, but would benefit from a medical examination and a good therapy session.

“A bit unorthodox, but we did it Sam.” He snapped his fingers again, producing a mostly empty syringe which he carefully wrapped in a handkerchief, the bone shard no longer visible. “And the final touches before we go see who the force sent over to deal with our mess.”

“Gabe… really?” Sam looked at the ‘evidence’ that had been created to verify his own theory and claims. He knew that they wouldn’t be able to get the school to believe their reason for arrest without it and he would be hard pressed to produce a report that Singer would accept without it either. On the other hand, its current state was far more acceptable than the bone straw that it had been moments before. Shaking his head, he rubbed his toe across each set of symbols on the floor, breaking the magic, before reaching down and lifting the creature into his arms. Gabriel had a bounce in his step as he exited the greenhouse, the cool crisp air hitting them in a hard contrast to the warm humidity.
that they had been holed up in previously. An agent nearly as tall as Sam met them near the patrol car, his face was set in an unreadable expression, and there was something off about him that Sam couldn’t place right away.

“Zeke! My man! How’s your clone Gads doing these days? Have him poking around the stiff’s still?” Gabriel bounded over to the other agent, softly punching him in the arm and receiving zero reaction. Sam could tell from the interaction that this was more than just another agent, Gabriel didn’t act that way with ninety percent of the agents back at the capitol. Only Castiel, Dean, and to some extent Bobby.

“Commander, you know that Gadreel is not my clone, we are merely what they call identical twins. And he is doing fine, sir. Although the radio had us worried, it is good to see you again.” The agent was very stiff with his greeting, taking Gabriel’s jokes literally and without a sense of humor. Sam shook his head and smiled, he knew what was going on, he was starting to pick up on the clues quicker and quicker.

“Zeke, this is my partner Sam Winchester. Sam, Ezekiel.” Gabriel introduced the two agents to each other as they passed their suspect off. Sam could see a few of the same symbols painted on the inside of the patrol car. This was someone who understood exactly what was going on with the creature in their custody, and it made Sam feel more at ease that precautions were being taken.

“Blink.” Sam said over their reunion. The single word had Gabriel cracking a grin, now that it had been pointed out, he was able to see where his partner was right. Ezekiel, startled at the command, quickly blinking several times as if to make up for all the missed blinks. “You need to blink more to sell the illusion. And you’re really stiff, loosen up a bit.”

“Sammy! I’ve been telling him that for years! Zeke, don’t worry, he knows and is strangely cool with most everything that’s been thrown at him so far. I should probably get him checked out for brain damage.” Gabriel winked at Sam earning himself an eyeroll coupled with a bitch face.

“Well he is willingly spending time with you.” Ezekiel’s come back was quick and wasn’t expected, Gabriel’s jaw dropped as Sam barked with laughter. A small smile twitched across the agent’s face as he watched Gabriel unable to find words, stuttering over himself. Before Gabriel could formulate a response and potentially target him for a retaliatory prank, Ezekiel ducked into the driver’s seat. Pressing his hand to the window as he drove off, Sam waved in return, swiping his hand across his face trying to wipe away the smile.

“You know that joke was at your expense, right? Or do we really need to get your head checked?” Gabriel finally found his words as the patrol car was pulling away, lights still causing shadows to dance across the fields, but the sirens had been mercifully turned off, it was a time when students should be sleeping.

The school medic, along with several members of the faculty had come out and taken care of the other student. The agents took the time to fill in those who had come out to investigate why a patrol car had parked outside the greenhouse, within reason. Because of the newly classified nature of the case they could only pass on bits and pieces of what they had come up with. For the most part people nodded and seemed glad that the nightmare was over for the school. Sam would be glad when they could send a declassified briefing to the school so they would have their closure. They watched as the last of the onlookers walked away with flashlights towards their dormitories.

“I dunno, I liked him, Zeke. Gabe, for someone who says they hate their family as much as you do, you really seem to have some fun apples in the bunch.”

“You’ve met Luce! And Mikey is just as bad as him!” Gabriel started to get worked up at the
comment, Sam hadn’t meant the dig to cause that sort of reaction. He had met plenty of Gabriel’s family to know that most of the ones that were Earth-side were the good ones who wanted nothing to do with the way things were being run. He could only imagine, his own childhood hadn’t been great but so far none of his family, that he knew of, was out trying to kill him.

“Calm down, Gabe, I’m teasing.” Sam wrapped his arms carefully under Gabriel’s arm, pulling him tight against his chest, tucking his head under his own chin. He wanted to pull both of their thoughts away from Lucifer, his nightmare was enough to not want to sleep where he didn’t have Gabriel where he could easily check on him. It was an irrational fear, Sam knew that there wasn’t much that could touch him, but he found that he really cared what happened to his partner, and he only wanted good things for the both of them. Leaning in he whispered into the top of his head, “Besides I think you said I could do something all night long…”

Gabriel wanted to snap them back to his room and avoid the wait that the walk would produce, but he knew it wasn’t a good option. The walk back wasn’t too bad, the dark was an empty dark and not one that felt like watching eyes and the light had been left on at the front door of the visiting professors’ dorm inviting them up to their temporary rooms. Instead of splitting once they got to the top of the stairs, Gabriel entwined his fingers in Sam’s and pulled him into his room with him. Refusing to let go of these warm fingers, Sam was pulled down into the bed as Gabriel fell backwards into the pillows.

Laughter was muffled as their lips pressed together, arms reaching and wrapping around strong backs, bringing each other closer. Long fingers tangled deeply in golden hair, drawing a low purr-like noise from Gabriel. The sound vibrated against Sam’s lips, the slight tingle sending him into another low chuckle while pressing his fingers through again. In yet another sweep through the golden locks, Sam pulled, the soft purr cracking into a gasp and a long moan. His lips latched onto Gabriel’s throat, kissing and nipping his way down to where it joined at his shoulder.

His soft moans and humming were driving him wild and ready to explore what other noises he could cause. Hands scrambled at his hips, fingers reaching between fabric and skin, wanting to touch. Sam rolled his hips, grinding them together, a gasp escaping his own mouth as Gabriel’s head fell forward with a force against Sam’s shoulder. Fingers stilled as a shudder ran through his body, before going back with twice as much fervor.

The belting ring from the flip-phone was jarring and unappreciated, ruining the mood they were getting into. Sam rolled off with a humph not-so subtly trying to fix his pants so the pressure wasn’t too uncomfortable. Gabriel’s hand rubbed over his face, pulling down on his cheeks as he growled in frustration.

“Put it on speakerphone Sam, I want to be ready to yell at Frank when that grumpy asshole starts in.”

“Sure thing.” Sam was ready to listen to someone get yelled at for interrupting them as he reached over Gabriel’s body to flip his phone open and hit speakerphone. The bed wasn’t big enough to comfortably fit two grown adults and groaned in protest at the movement before quieting down with Sam draped over Gabriel waiting for whatever greeting they would get. The phone sat in silence as the seconds ticked by on the screen, indicating that a call was in process and hadn’t been dropped or lost. He felt the bottom of his stomach drop as he recognized the sing-song voice within the burst of static.

“Found you.”

Energy crackled as the phone exploded. Sam startled, pulled himself up against the headboard and looked at his partner and noted the large dark wing-like shadows cast across the walls behind them. Gabriel's eyes glowed as if a golden fire was burning behind them, power leaking from him. His face
set in a stony mask of quiet rage. His body vibrated with anger as he clenched his fists and ground his teeth, staring blankly at the far wall where the phone had been flung by an unseen force. Sam wanted to shrink back at the raw display of power that had sent the phone to its final rest, but he knew that the anger wasn’t directed at him and never would.

The golden light faded as he squeezed his eyes shut, forcing his hands flat against the thin comforter on the bed. He was trying to will himself back in control, before looking at Sam. The beautiful and strong human who he had already promised to himself that he wouldn’t lose, the one who had put up with so much of his shit already and still hadn’t run away. Gabriel used the memories of Sam laughing at one of his dumb jokes, the memory of the way the edges of his eyes crinkled, and how his dimples framed even the softest of his smiles. The happiness of this one human was something that he found himself heavily invested in. Gabriel turned to face where he knew Sam still was. Slowly he opened his eyes when he knew the anger had mostly passed.

“I’m sorry.” The words echoed as they both spoke at the same time.

“No, Sam. I’m sorry. I may have over reacted a bit just then, but from now on, you’re not answering that phone, can’t really, again sorry.” He looked over again at the shattered pieces of what had been the phone that Ash had set him up with. He wasn’t surprised when his own phone chirped with a new text message, without even looking he knew it would be from the guys at Angel Radio trying to check in on Sam, there was probably some kind of emergency signal in it knowing them.

“I should have known, the burst of static at the end, I should have heard it before now. He’s been tracking me since you banished him, or whatever that was.” Sam couldn’t look up from studying his hands in great detail. He felt that it was his fault that they were still being hunted by that psychopath, that it was his fault that he had been targeted and hadn’t noticed before.

“You shouldn’t have to be able to hear the hum of angels through static. That’s on me. And him hunting you down, it’s his way of getting at me. So again, on me.” Gabriel wanted to reach over and lift Sam’s chin to force him to look, but instead reached across for his hands. As soon as they touched, their fingers intertwined seeking comfort through the other.

“I get him wanting to hurt you through me, but the voices in static bit? How is that your fault?” Sam spoke up after sitting there for a moment, his eyes searching for Gabriel through his curtain of hair. He wanted to reach out, but he didn’t think he was worthy of the forgiveness he knew his partner would offer. It was his fault after all, he deserved to be shouted at instead of receiving apologies.

Gabriel took a deep breath, he wasn’t ready for this. Honestly, he wasn’t ready for any of this. His plan had been to keep Sam at a distance until the human had given up and left him, he was used to that, this was something entirely new. But he had to let Sam know that he wasn’t going to run again, that he would answer any of his questions truthfully, no matter how painful the answer would be.

“Humans’ shouldn’t be able to hear the word of God unless they are prophets, and even then, it still drives them mad. Angels speak on a level that is close to that of our Father, so many of us speak through our vessels so not to harm you. Sam, you can hear the voices of my siblings because of me. You got too close and I cared too much, I still do. So, uh, your soul and my grace kind of imprinted on each other? Normally not something that happens because grace tends to overpower, but you’ve got one heckuva soul there kiddo.” He reached out and tapped on Sam’s chest, his grace trying to reach out and mirror the action but he held back still afraid of what could happen. This was uncharted territory, when a lesser angel fell for a human it was considered to be a great sin and they were hunted and struck down, but Gabriel wasn’t feeling anything but love. Certainly, his Father wouldn’t condemn him for loving one of His own creations. He could feel the love being reciprocated and it only made his grace swell.
“Gabe, what did you mean about vessels?” Sam took it all in while slowly trying to digest it. He learned that he had formed some kind of bond with the angel next to him and while he knew he should be freaking out, he couldn’t feel the stress and anxiety building up like it should. Instead he felt pride and happiness, and the feeling of self-loathing started to ebb away slowly. A million questions were floating around as he absorbed the new influx of information, but he found himself fixated on one specific piece of info.

“Oh yeah, angels aren’t as we appear. We’re kind of monstrous; massive in size, crazy forms, some of us have multiple heads, some are giant wheels of eyes. So, we take a familiar form when we come to Earth, remind me to tell you stories of the first couple of times we tried with our true forms, those are some wild stories.” Gabriel wiggled his eyebrows trying to bring humor back to their conversation. He would rather laugh and see Sam smile than lose himself to the anger that had only recently been pushed below the surface. “Vessels are humans that have consented to sharing their form with us, some stay for the ride while others are sent to their personal heavens.”

“So that’s not really you?” He reached up and tugged gently on a loose strand of hair that had fallen forward. He didn’t want to know if Gabriel’s body was somebody else, long dead, but the question came out regardless.

“What? Oh, Sammy, this is one-hundred percent me. Remember how Luce burned through several and asked how mine was holding up so well? After I ran from home I went into hiding. I found a vessel but they can be easy to track, and I didn’t want to be found and dragged back to my responsibilities. Dad gave all of us the ability to create, but most angels haven’t got a creative bone in their body and never try. I made this one, just for me. So, I’ve looked like this for millennia, not a bad look if I say so myself.” He couldn’t help but wink at the other man a playful smile quirking the edges of his lips up.

“A little on the short side.” Sam teased him placing a kiss on his nose, the smile returning to his face. Gabriel lit up at the sight of that smile, it was all he needed in his life, more of his smile and the sound of his laughter. And the kisses that came with them weren’t all that bad either.

“Hey! You Neanderthals only recently got freakishly tall!” He balked at the accusation and playfully swatted at Sam’s chest. The earlier mood had been ruined and they were both tired, covering a yawn with his hand, he snapped his fingers on his other hand, a large tv replacing one of the white boards still in the room. Volume was turned down and he handed a remote over to Sam so he could lazily flick through the channels. “It’s a small trick that won’t attract attention, now relax and stay with me tonight.”

Sam grunted and skootched up on the bed so he was closer to Gabriel, grateful that he wasn’t going to be alone. He knew that he wouldn’t get much sleep otherwise, and what he would get would be plagued with nightmares. Settling in he flipped through the channels until he found something with animals on it, it was an easy and neutral subject that didn’t require much concentration. Gabriel’s hand began to rub small circles on his side, the motion soothing him and lulling him closer to sleep with promises of safety and protection. It didn’t take long for Sam to fall asleep, the remote falling gently from his grip.
Sam was walking through the Hoover building’s long dark hallways. They were longer than he remembered them being, stretching on longer than physically possible, without an end in sight. Screams were muffled by the walls but they surrounded him as he picked up the pace. Lengthening his stride Sam tried to get further down the hallway, it seemed to stretch to meet his new pace the end of the hall never coming closer. The end tunneled into a black pinpoint, an unobtainable goal, a dark laughter echoing through the halls there to taunt him.

He stopped his running, unwilling to give the laughter the satisfaction of his failure to reach the end of the hallway. Slowly walking down the hall, meandering from side to side he listened to the closed doors, the screams of unknown person’s being tormented could be heard through them. The screams had been muted and indiscernible earlier, but now there were tones of familiarity to them and occasionally sounded as if they were calling out to him for help. Sam winced as the voices calling out for him matched faces of people he knew in his mind.

Pulling tightly at the handle of one door, it swung out towards him exposing a scene of Sheriff Bronson’s body surrounded by towers of yellowing bones with teeth marks so deep they were visible from the edge of the room. The man he had met on his first case with the X-Files was being torn into by a large hyena. The animal towered over the man, blood and flesh hanging from its teeth as a manic cackle emanated from the animal’s maw. The sheriff was still calling out for help as the flesh repaired itself readying for another mauling from the creature. Sam turned away from the scene for a brief moment before a loud guttural scream drew his eyes back in. The hyena was gone and in its place was a pale, gaunt, humanoid creature with glowing red eyes and long talon-like fingers ripping into the chest of the man it had at its mercy. Sam closed the door, his stomach churning violently as he turned away from the nightmare.

“You could never have saved them, you know. Only damned them further. Their souls were lost the moment you were called into their lives.” Words echoed through the hallway as Sam reached for another door, the handle hot under his touch.

The room was covered in soft silk strands, it seemed to glow an ethereal white light as he stepped through the threshold. Silk grabbed at him as he walked further into the room, the screaming here was muffled and buried within the blankets of webbing. Strung up in the center was a large cocoon which jerked in struggle, but unable to dislodge itself from its bonds. Reaching at his hip, Sam’s fingers came in contact with a large knife, the metal cool to the touch. Pulling it loose he held it in front of him, the blade’s edge gleamed in the unnatural lighting, etchings of symbols ran down the center of the wicked metal.

It bit into the silk and cut easily through it as if it was a hot knife in butter, caterpillars poured out of the wound sliced into the cocoon. Sam flinched at the memory of these wriggling creatures, but pushed forward as the cries turned to sobs and got louder. Cutting through more of the webbing, additional caterpillars inched their way out and moved closer to him causing him to brush at his skin trying to keep them off. A small hand shot out of the deep cut he had made, fingers reaching out for him to help. Gripping tightly, he tried to pull the person out only to have half a body pop free. Caterpillars spilled out of the near skeletonized chest of the child, the face frozen in a silent scream as more swarmed over what flesh remained. Recoiling at the terror facing him he jerked back,
letting go of the body and letting it fall into the growing mound of insects. In his hand was a crumpled candy wrapper, this had been Margo, the young girl at the mountain hotel.

“‘It’s all your fault Sammy, you did this to them. You brought this on them and yourself. There is no saving them. I’m just here to clean up your mess, all of their messes. They ruined the world with their very presence and I’m going to purify it of them.’ The voice sounded much close, no longer echoing through the walls of the never-ending hallway. Sam spun around, his hand still gripped tightly around the handle of the knife. A smile too large for his face, greeted him, open festering burn sores were present and his eyes glowed an icy blue from the incredible power trapped within.

“Lucifer.” The name was forced through his teeth, his eyes narrowing in anger at the presence of the fallen angel.

“You remembered me!” He responded as if a high-school crush had just noticed him, his hand brought up to his chest, fingers splayed out against the dirty and blood-stained cloth. The look of innocent joy, at poor juxtaposition of the situation and the knowledge of who this was. Sam refused to let any emotion other than anger show around him, he couldn’t show weakness or give Lucifer something else to get at him with. “You could join me, you know. We were meant to be together, you at my side as the new world is ushered in. I can offer you anything you desire; I could ease all the pain you feel for these worms, remove all of the monsters that mar the world, never have to hunt anything down. Just say the word, and it will all be yours.”

“NEVER!” Sam shot up in bed the scream fresh on his lips. The soft rose light of the sunrise was starting to chase away the darkness that permeated every corner of his small bedroom. Sweeping glances around the small space told him that he was alone, and the minimal personal touches to the place reminded him that he was back at his own apartment in DC. Knowing that he wouldn’t be able to return to sleep after that kind of nightmare he got himself ready for work in the new day’s light.

It had been several days since their last case was wrapped up and they had returned to the main offices. Ezekiel had sent in his part of the report along with a write up from Gadreel in regards to the bodies of the victims that had been transferred over to the agency for a follow up. The report was solid and their suspect was in custody. Bobby had been pleased that they had solved the case without a casualty, it was one less piece of paperwork that had to be drawn up for his review.

But during this time Sam had returned to his own apartment, pouring over ancient texts and modern studies on the supernatural. Being in his own place made the nightmares worse, and a full night’s sleep was now something of a rarity for him. But, studying was something he was good at and knew he could lose himself in. He found an old journal and started to write down notes as he compiled and organized the information, including sections on things he had learned reading through old case files. He didn’t know what they might face but he wanted to be prepared and not have to rely on Gabriel every time.

Gabriel had also thrown himself into research, except he was scouring the internet for signs of new cases they could take. Reading through religious forum boards, alien encounter chat rooms, and the transcriptions of bizarre police reports that intrepid radio enthusiasts copied for the internet. While they sat in their shared basement office he would have both music going and Angel Radio being played on the off-chance that something would come across. Balthazar had returned to the microphone and the stories and interviews continued bringing in new information.

“Sam, listen to this. Three separate tornadoes touched down around a town in Nebraska, one hit a gas station and turned into a flame spout, one went over an older graveyard and was a whirlwind of bones, the last picked up fish and frogs from a wetland and rained them back down over the town. Sound like something we want to check out?” Gabriel asked when he heard the door open and the
other agent shuffle in. A paper cup of coffee was placed on the edge of his desk and the creak of a chair let him know that his partner had gone to his desk just out of his reach. Still reading articles online Gabriel reached for the coffee and took a sip, and started sputtering, the tangy taste of sodium molecules assaulting him. “Sam? You alright today, you salted the coffee. Ugh, you look like the walking dead, you’re coming home with me at the end of today.”

Sam started to protest but Gabriel wasn’t going to hear it this time, talking over him instead of entertaining the weak excuses. They had gone on one date together since they had gotten back, Sam had gotten so wrapped up in the possibility of Lucifer hunting him down and the Church or the other angels hunting down Gabriel that he couldn’t afford to have time to relax. He wanted to be ready for whatever was going to happen next that he didn’t take time for himself. Laying his head down on his desk, fingers wrapped around his own warm paper cup, he listened as Gabriel planned out their evening together.

“I’ll cook you a good dinner, something with veggies because I know you love them, and you can continue whatever you’re doing at my place where I can keep an eye on you while putting music or a movie on, some kind of distraction. And if I have to, I’ll drag you into my giant plush bed with all those big fluffy pillows that I know will knock you out, it’s good thing I’ve got a taste for large things.” He wiggled his eyebrows and smirked at his double entendre.

“I did not need to hear that, but that’s not a bad idea. Someone’s got to take care of Sammy since he’s shit at taking care of himself.” Dean stood in the doorway looking in at them. Gabriel had a mess of things going on behind his desk, multiple old case files open, the glow of his computer bathed the paperwork in a pale light, Dean could only assume that the agent had several tabs open. His brother however had stacks of old books on the floor near his desk, it reminded him of the rare few times that he had visited him in college. And he knew from the mountain of discarded paper cups falling out of the trash can that his brother was avoiding sleep again.

“Jerk.” He had pushed his own cup away from himself, the taste of salt ruining the coffee. He knew he needed more sleep, but every time he closed his eyes he was assaulted with either visions of how things could have failed or nightmares featuring Gabriel’s older brother, sometimes both. He didn’t want to sleep if that’s what was going to greet him when his eyes closed. Instead he had been drinking coffee, energy drinks, and taking caffeine pills, but even then, there were times that he crashed, and last night was one.

“Bitch.” The name calling came easy to them and it held no animosity. Since his brother was clearly in no mood to take the details of the case he turned to the older agent. “Milton, Cas sent me down here with something that came across our desk, it’s something we can take care of easy enough, but he suggested I offer it to you two.”

“You know you can call me by my name right? You are doing the horizontal mambo with my cousin, that makes us practically family.” Gabriel took the offered file and pointed out how strange it was that even with their terms of familiarity he had never used his first name.

“And you sleeping with my little brother didn’t already?” the scathing reply came quickly, just because his brother liked the man, and he couldn’t fathom why, didn’t mean he had to. Gabriel was known to go against the rules and just because he had been thrown into the basement offices with his pet projects he acted as if he could get away with anything. There were days Dean was envious of the autonomy that he was granted, and the leniency he got, but the he remembered how little recognition and lack of respect he received in return.

“Is that what’s bothering you? Because I can tell you that it doesn’t bother me one bit, I’m enjoying every moment of it in fact. Ok let’s see what we’ve got going.” He flipped into the case file, it really
was a simple one. He almost handed it back to Dean before he read some of the witness reports. Flashes of black in the eyes of those who had personality shifts and before they had gone missing, the increased smell of sulfur throughout the town, increase of violent crimes in the area. Gabriel knew that this wasn’t the actions of a gang on the rise like Dean thought it was. And the fact that this case was coming out of Fairbury Nebraska, not too far from the area with the trio of tornadoes, if they weren’t omens then he would shave his head, and he didn’t take bets that he wouldn’t win. This was a demonic event, and it was right up their alley.

“Dean-o. We’ll take it. Tell Cassie I said thanks and we’ll be taking the long route there. No flights this time, there are things I want to bring that they won’t let on the airplane. If you catch my drift.” Gabriel winked and sent a smirk at Dean, knowing that it would get to him, and his protective older brother attitude. The things he needed were supplies to aid in the case but Dean didn’t need to know that.

“Whatever, nice to see you guys taking normal cases. Sammy used to have a future before he was sidled with you and the Joke-Files.” Dean knew it was a low blow, but he didn’t need to know what Gabriel was planning to do with his brother. Even if he didn’t go into the details of it, the wink was enough to gross him out.

“Oh! Didn’t know you cared so much. Don’t have to remind you that we just took down a future terrorist with thoughts of grandeur and biological warfare while you and your team are chasing down gang units and tech smugglers.” The sarcasm was thick and his tone was edging on something nasty. He didn’t need someone needling on his work, he got enough of that on his own, but say that his partner was being wasted really got to him. He knew that Sam was the best thing that had ever happened to him and didn’t need people telling him how he could be doing better. He was going to fight for him if he had to, even if that fight was with a brother.

“Can you two stop that? I’m right here. I’m tired, not dead. Dean, thanks for the case, now leave us alone.” Sam lifted his head off his desk, tired of hearing the two of them fighting. He dismissed his brother, Dean was talking under his breath as he stomped away back towards the stairwell, his grumbling getting quieter the further away he got.

“Gabe, come here.” He reached out towards his partner, pointedly staring at him, waiting for him to look up and make eye contact. How something could be so old and yet so immature was beyond him, but he knew he needed to reassure him that he wasn’t upset with him. “I don’t need you fighting for me, Dean’s my brother, I can handle him. I’ve told him enough times that it’s my choice to stay with the X-Files and I like it here. Not just because of you, the case work is diverse enough that I’m not working just lost persons. And if you were worried, I still like you, that hasn’t changed. Now tell me about our new case, I’m assuming you took it because it had something to do with the omens you’ve been finding?’’

“You really are the smart one, that must make me the lucky one. How much have you found out about demonic possession?” He pulled his chair over so they could sit closer as they went over their new file. If they were going to go after things a bit more dangerous than vampires or ghosts he wanted his partner to be ready for it. While he wasn’t sure exactly what the demons were planning, there were enough strong omens and with multiple possessions things could get hairy.

“A good bit actually, they’re fairly well documented. So are exorcisms and banishments. I even found documents including things for summoning and trapping.” Sam pulled the documents in question out. The bookshelf behind his desk was begging to become filled with stranger and stranger books, his legal texts now sharing space with ancient tomes regarding evil spirits in western Asia. Gabriel had been good about letting him borrow from his own personal collection, but Sam had found a few pieces of his own to add.
Vibrations of Gabriel’s phone dancing across his desk alerted them to the phone call. The tech department had been slow in getting Sam a replacement phone, but he wasn’t in a rush to get it done. There weren’t many people who called him anyways that didn’t already have Gabe’s number. He let his partner get the phone though, still wary about hearing that voice on the other line.

“Hey guys, yeah we’re heading that way soon. Got a case that coincided with the omens. Alright thanks for the heads up, good to know we’re on a time crunch with this.” Gabriel hung up the phone, making a face at the news he had just received. Sam could tell that it wasn’t something good, but since he had a good idea of who had called he was able to deduce what the news probably was.

“The Church already moving in on this?” He stood up, pushing away from his desk, ready for the inevitable. Anytime the Church was involved things were more trouble than they could anticipate, but this time he felt like he was more prepared than the last. He had faced off and won against an angel, there weren’t many who could claim that.

“Bingo, and we’re driving so we need to leave soon, if not now. We’ll have to stop overnight somewhere along the way. We can still go with most of my plans; share a room, maybe a bed, while we watch bad movies on tv and eat something from room service or take out from a diner if we can find one.” Gabriel held his hand out to Sam ready to lead them into their next case.

The car was packed in a short period of time, Gabriel putting a large green duffle bag in the back alongside their luggage. Metal clanged against metal as the bag was tossed without ceremony next to several gallon jugs of water. There was something sunk at the bottom of each jug but the trunk was shut before Sam could get a good look at exactly what Gabriel needed to bring along that couldn’t be flown across the country with them. His laptop and their case file were placed within his reach on the backseat and a small cooler with snacks and drinks was tucked behind the driver’s seat.

Gabriel had cut him off from the caffeine while they were on the road, insisting that he was better off trying to get some sleep. He fought sleep for the first couple of hours on the road, reading through the case file and reciting Latin under his breath until he was comfortable that he would remember the right words in the right order when he needed to. The music played quietly over the speakers as Gabriel switched CDs, the familiarity of the sounds and the comfort of being close to his partner had him drifting closer and closer to sleep. The landscape slipping past them as they drove further west.

Teeth, there were too many teeth. He pulled the sheet down on another body laid out on a metal table. Again, like the other one, this one had too many teeth in the jaw. Rows of sharp, pointed teeth, sparkled under the harsh light of the coroner’s spotlight. He knew he was alone in the morgue but he couldn’t shake the feeling of being watched, the hairs on the back of his neck standing up as he moved to the next sheet covered body.

A scream ripped out of his throat as he looked down at the dead, green eyes staring up at nothing. Pale skin, ice cold to the touch, didn’t yield under his fingers as he grabbed at Dean’s shoulders trying to shake him awake, the denial of his death the only thing Sam could think of. Layers of dried blood couldn’t conceal the amount of damage done to his brother’s throat; flesh and muscles had been torn through savagely, his esophagus exposed and ripped apart, bite marks visible at the edge of his skin.

“This could have been avoided if you just took my offer.” Lucifer sat on the edge of an exam table, his feet swinging back and forth, he didn’t look up from where he was picking at his fingernails with a scalpel. “That offer still stands, all you have to say is yes.”

Sam was shaking as he pulled himself out of the dream, his forehead sore from where he had been resting it against the window. Looking outside he saw that they had stopped at a gas station, he could see Gabriel just inside the convenience store. The car was still on and the AC was blasting directly
into his face. The music was just audible over the sound of the air.

“Hey, little lizard where did you slink? Left your cage door open, under the basement sink. The dripping water made your moldy body eyes open and I can’t get your body out of my mind. I can’t get your body … I can’t get your body out of my mind, I can’t get your body…..” Sam reached over and popped the CD out of the tray cutting the song off short. He sat in the car with only the sound of the air system and his own thoughts until Gabriel returned.

“Sam, you’re up! And you look awful, what happened?” Gabriel’s smile quickly faded when he saw the state the other was in. Fear and discomfort came off of him in waves, he grasped Sam’s hand and folded it between his, rubbing his thumb over the top of his hand to try to calm him and offer some grounding. He could feel Sam’s soul reaching for him begging to be soothed and taken care of, instead of giving in, he tucked his grace further in, preventing it from touching the soul.

“Nightmares,” was all that he said, his voice tired and quiet. He couldn’t go back to sleep, he knew what was waiting there for him and he couldn’t face it. If only he could have a coffee or an energy drink he would be able to stay awake.

“Do you want to talk about them?” Gabriel kept his voice low, as if he was trying not to frighten away an animal like a deer or a rabbit. He knew his partner hadn’t been sleeping, it was something that Dean had been concerned with, and if Sam was avoiding sleep because of these nightmares they must have been something strong.

“Sometimes it’s old cases and how badly they could have gone, sometimes it’s seeing people I love hurting or worse. But he’s always there, Gabe. He’s there telling me how it’s my fault and how he can fix it.” His voice cracked, he hated admitting a weakness as if the faults would cause him to break and fall apart. He was supposed to be strong, to be able to stand up to the dark forces of the world without blinking. Before Gabriel the worst he had encountered was other people, and as twisted and awful as they could be, they were familiar and he knew how to deal with them. Now he was faced with things that followed him into his dreams, plagued him when they were otherwise out of reach.

Gabriel’s eyes darkened in anger, his jaw clenched tight. “You should have let me know earlier. Shielding your dreams is easy and something I would do for you in a heartbeat. We’re not that far from where we’re going to spend the night. We’re going to make one more stop for food and then we’ll cuddle up to a movie until you sleep a dreamless sleep.”

“Is that a promise?” The idea of sleeping without dreams chasing him until he was tired again was everything he wanted in that moment.

“For you? Always.” He pulled Sam’s head close and pressed his lips against his forehead, his heart fluttering at the simple action. He had it bad but he wouldn’t have it any other way. Castiel was right, he would find strength, not weakness with this.

They found a diner just down the street from the motel and got hot meals to take back with them. Their room had a single, king-sized bed, the floral print bed spread clashed hideously with the geometric designs on the walls. But there were extra pillows just as Gabriel had requested and it wasn’t long until they were propped up in them. Their bodies tangled in each other while sharing slow, lazy kisses. Gabriel ran his fingernails slowly up Sam’s arm and across his shoulders, he arched at the feeling, a small gasp escaping as his eyes quickly shut. Gabriel smirked and filed away the knowledge and tried again with a little more force, leaving white lines that would slowly fade to red. Sam’s reactions were beautiful and Gabriel could see him slowly taking him apart with just his touch, something he wanted to try soon.
Sam surprised him by pulling him forcefully into a sloppy kiss, like he was trying to claim his mouth. With his long legs he straddled easily over Gabriel’s waist. Hands moved so they could unbutton his own shirt, breaking the heated kiss just enough so he could pull the fabric off his torso, his shoulders stretching as the shirt peeled back exposing his tanned skin. Gabriel’s fingers reached up and ran softly over the muscled chest in front of him, moving back down he used his nails causing goosebumps to form and sending a shiver through Sam. Hazel eyes fluttered as he ground his hips down, drawing a groan out of both of them.

Running his fingers back up the exposed skin, Gabriel startled when Sam caught one hand with his own and brought it up to his mouth. Sam pressed kisses to the center of his palm and to the tips of each finger before pulling one into his mouth. There was the taste of butter and salt still lingering from their dinner, but under that something that was purely Gabriel, Sam used his tongue to draw the finger in sucking on it.

“Kiddo, you might want to not do that again.” The words came out deep and husky, Gabriel’s eyes glinted possessively, a thin golden ring surrounding a dark pool. His free hand dropping and giving Sam’s ass a slow squeeze.

“And if I do?” Sam asked, flashing a wild smirk before taking another of Gabriel’s fingers in his mouth. He rolled his tongue around them before increasing the suction. He knew exactly what he was doing, wanting to drive Gabriel crazy. What he wasn’t expecting was the sudden reversal of their positions as Gabriel flipped him over and pinned him to the bed with a show of exceptional strength. The idea that he could be manhandled like that had Sam more turned on and leaking against his underwear, the fabric still tight against his erection. He tried grinding up, only to be held down, letting out a soft whine at his denial.

“No, this is my show now. I’m gonna make you scream my name and have the neighbors call in noise complaints. Gonna make you come so hard that you’re going to forget all about the nightmares, forget your name, only able to remember mine because you’ll be hoarse from shouting it over and over.” He gently grabbed Sam’s dick through the fabric, stroking it as he told him how the day was going to end, those hazel eyes dark with lust. He had Sam helpless under him and he was going to do as he wanted, worship him and bring him pleasures he deserved. He growled deep in his throat before bending over and kissing Sam hard and demanding, his hand working the button and zipper open.

Gabriel nudged at his hips, urging him to bring them off the bed so he could strip him of his pants. He could have just snapped their clothes off, but he wanted to take his time, savoring every piece of skin Sam had. Moving his mouth from his lips to the side of his neck he ran his tongue across, tasting the salt off his skin, feeling his pulse against his lips. He latched down just above his collar bone, sucking and working a bruise to the surface, marking Sam’s skin. The soft moans transformed into groans and whimpers as he dragged his teeth across his skin, flicking his tongue out over a soft nipple, it quickly hardening with the saliva cooling under his breath. He twisted his hand on the upstroke, rolling precome into his palm before sliding back down.

“Fuck, Gabe.” He shuddered, thoughts unrelated to what was going on in the moment fleeing from his mind. Sam didn’t know exactly what he wanted, only that Gabriel was the one who could give it to him. He wanted everything, his mouth, his hands, his cock, on him in him. He ran his tongue across his lips before begging. “Please.”

Gabriel had never heard anything so beautiful, it sounded like a prayer to him. The sinful nature of the prayer’s request sending a shudder through his body causing him to moan around the nipple he had been sucking on. Sam’s cock twitched in his hand, the teasing of Gabriel’s mouth on his body complementing the rhythmic slide and twist of his hand. Hearing Sam’s breathing hitch as he stroked
his hard length, caused a wave of desire to surge through him. He could tell Sam was close and he wanted to claim him with more than just marks.

“Mine,” he growled, removing the hand that was holding Sam’s arms above him, down to the bed, his fingers quickly snapped his clothes away, the sound quickly being drowned out with their noises. With the sudden freedom of his arms, Sam brought them up to Gabriel’s hair, driving his fingers deep into the silky strands his grip tightening at the same time that Gabriel wrapped his hand around both of them, stroking them at the same time. He yanked him by his hair, crushing their lips together, muffling their moans with demanding kisses and battling tongues.

He came with a shout, yelling Gabriel’s name at the ceiling as his head fell backwards into the pillows. Gabriel finished a few strokes after him before falling into him, their sticky mess smearing together as he laid on his chest, rising and falling with his breathing. Dragging himself up through the blissful mind fog, Gabriel kissed him slow and tender as they came down together. Before things could start to dry and they found themselves stuck to each other he rolled off and wandered into the bathroom.

The sounds of water running coupled with the heady feeling of the orgasm, Sam started to drift off before Gabriel had even returned. Having cleaned himself off he brought back a warm cloth and rubbed it over his chest, cleaning up what he could before tossing the cloth to the ground and climbing into bed. Curling into his side, he threw his arm over Sam turning himself into the blanket they had forgotten. He reached out to Sam’s thoughts, carefully shielding him from night terrors and prying eyes. Sam’s breathing evened out, restful for the first time in a while, and they were both asleep in minutes.

Chapter End Notes

Song used: Body by The Presidents of the United States

Hey it finally got there! This chapter was a mess but it ends with what we've all been waiting for. ;)
Stay tuned for the upcoming shit show we all know will happen, I mean come on! I have Luci on the loose still.

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