Righteous

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Summary

Dean Winchester: bartender and love-struck fool by day, vigilante crime-fighter by night. When new information comes to light about his parents’ deaths, Dean decides to don a mask, a too-tight leather suit, and the alias ‘The Righteous Man’ in order to get the revenge he knows he deserves. But being a superhero comes with its own set of flaws: keeping secrets from the man he loves, lying about his whereabouts, saving people, hunting bad guys – oh, yeah. And his college-boy brother along with his nerdy, redhead best friend as his two sidekicks.
Can Dean keep his secret, get the boy, and save the day? Not very easily, that's for sure.
Prologue

Chapter Notes

My first finished fic and my first DCBB! I'm pretty excited to post this after a year and a bit, and I hope you enjoy. :)

DECEMBER 2015

Dean Winchester felt numb.

The breaking local news story should have shocked Dean to his core, but he couldn’t feel a thing. It was completely surreal, having his own theory proved correct after repeatedly being told he was wrong by the police, by his adoptive parents… by his own brother. His chest tightened as he watched the story play out on his TV.

“Now, on to our breaking news story…” the anchor began, expression turning solemn.

“The Lawrence City Fires of 2001. A famous event in Lawrence City’s history – where the company, Lawrence Gas, came under fire for negligence and malpractice after three homes burned down in the span of a week, all of which were attributed to gas leaks.” The newsreader looked down at her papers, the camera swerving to display a haunting image of a burnt house, and then she carried on.

“Howver, what was considered to be an accident all those years ago has now begun to be unravelled by an anonymous tipper. Which brings up the obvious question: accident or arson?”

A clip of Dean’s old home played on screen, flames swallowing the building whole. He winced, grateful when the clip ended and returned to the news reporter.

“The Masters’, Winchesters’, and Wilsons’ deaths, and the disappearance of the former Mayor of Lawrence City, Chuck Novak, are speculated to have been linked to the former owner of Lawrence Gas, Judas Azazel – who is more commonly referred to by his surname.”

Azazel appeared on screen, walking out of court – he wore sunglasses, hiding his face from the reporters that shoved their microphones and cameras in front of him. He brushed them away, walking through the crowd, as if he didn’t have a single thing to worry about.

“After being fired in 2002 under the accusation that his employees were not adequately trained to industry standards, Azazel went off the radar.”

Dean felt his hand curl into a fist.

“The anonymous tipper sent an email to Lawrence City Police Department at approximately 5:00PM yesterday evening – just hours after the reported disappearances of Meg Masters and Ava Wilson. The email revealed a document detailing how the families could have known private information about the former owner. It’s suggested that this information could have resulted in a much harsher punishment for Azazel than just the loss of his job, and why he could be linked to the disappearances of Ava and Meg.
“At this moment, the exact information in this document cannot be disclosed. LCPD have reopened the cases for the Masters, Winchester, Wilson, and Novak deaths and disappearances. A hunt for Azazel has begun, though his last recorded appearance is unknown.”

This couldn’t be real.

Dean switched off the TV after that, needing a moment to process what he’d just seen. He flopped back onto the couch.

For years, Dean had insisted that it couldn’t have been a gas leak that killed his parents, it just couldn’t. He had no real proof except intuition. His adoptive father, Bobby, mistook it as an excuse for desperate revenge - which, if the police found Azazel, Dean could get. Fourteen years later than he deserved.

Castiel Novak, Dean’s roommate, best friend, and son of the former mayor, was sitting at their kitchen island, watching Dean. He had also seen the news report – their shared apartment was tiny, so the kitchen and living room practically occupied the same space.

“Are you going to be okay?” he asked, his brow creased with concern.

“Are you?” Dean avoided the question, fiddling with the sleeves of his hoodie.

“Yes,” he replied, voice strong and clear, making it obvious that he meant it. Dean envied him for it. "I kind of suspected… something. I knew my dad didn’t disappear for nothing. This… makes sense."

Cas fiddled with his coffee cup and worried his bottom lip for a moment. “You… know the police are likely to come and question us, right?”

Dean rolled his eyes. His relationship with the police over the past twelve years had been… icy, to say the least. Any speculations he’d had about his parents’ deaths had been swiftly dismissed despite the fact that he had witnessed the entire thing.

He pulled down on his sleeves as his mind flashed back to that night.

Twelve-year-old Dean awoke to smoke, heavy and oppressive against his lungs. He had tried to inhale, but failed miserably— he coughed violently, suspecting a fire. His first thought was of his brother. Sammy, was Sammy okay? Sam needed him.

Knowing he needed to remain low and out of the smoke, Dean crawled his way to Sam’s bedroom. Dad had been in the military, so Dean knew what to do in the event of a fire or whenever smoke was present: get low, and get out.

It didn’t take him long to find Sam. He was standing outside their parents’ room, frantically knocking on the door as he choked up half a damn lung.

“Sammy! We have to go!” Dean rounded the corner, knowing they needed to get out. He could see the orange glow of fire behind his parents’ door, smoke curling around the gap at the bottom. Sam protested briefly, but Dean gathered his brother up into his arms – it hurt, and Sam was heavier than he expected, but he knew this was a life or death situation. With adrenaline powering through him, It didn’t take him long to haul his little brother down the stairs and straight to the front door, flipping up the latch and swinging it open.

The cold November air had felt like sheer bliss, the air cleansing Dean’s lungs as he tried to heave in as much of it as he could. He ran clumsily with his brother in his arms across their front yard,
depositing Sam by their front gate. He grabbed him by the shoulders to look him in the eyes when he gave him instructions.

“Tell Missouri we need the fire brigade. You have to run!”

“What ab-about Mom and Dad?” small, eight-year-old Sam had stuttered, tears in his eyes, voice coarse from inhaling too much smoke.

“Go, Sammy! Go now! I’ll save them!”

Dean had spoken too soon – an explosion strong enough to rock the ground beneath his feet had him turning to see the cloud of smoke and fire billowing out of their front door, all the windows shattered, and the porch roof going up in flames.

Dumbstruck and afraid, Dean stared up at the wreck despite hearing Sam stumble back and sprint off to their neighbour’s house for help.

No no no no no...

He couldn’t help.

Dean couldn’t fix this.

He’d fallen to his knees, the damp grass doing nothing to calm his racing heart, and watched his life crumble before his eyes.

Dean snapped out of the memory when Cas sat down next to him on the couch, the movement jolting him back into reality.

“Dean?” Cas’ tone was soft, a crease between his brows when he wrapped his fingers comfortingly around Dean’s wrist.

Cas had barely known his own father. The guy was obsessed with his job and neglected his family, so Dean could understand Cas’ apparent apathy towards the situation.

Dean, on the other hand, prioritised family over everything. He turned his hand over and slipped it easily into Cas’ – it was a gesture he desperately tried to make platonic.

“Yeah. I’ll deal with the questions. Anything to…” Dean paused, the words get my revenge dying on his tongue because they were too involved, too emotional, too angry for Cas to deserve to hear.

“Anything to fix what happened.”

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Dean hated being questioned. As a twelve-year-old, his life was wasted in police stations, waiting for someone to ask him the same questions over and over and over again. This time, they were invading his home.

Cas answered the door. Nobody opts to say no to the police, so Cas let them in – he was making them coffee and happily initiating amiable small talk. Normally, Dean would adore this aspect of Cas’ personality, but considering he’d just walked out of the shower, heavy water droplets dripping down his forehead, dressed in just a ratty t-shirt and sweatpants – both of which sported numerous faded coffee stains – he wasn’t exactly thrilled.

The two cops didn’t seem to care. Dean guessed they had seen worse.
Cas looked up when he heard Dean pad across the laminate floor and hurried to pour a fourth cup of coffee into a mug that read “PROFESSIONAL NAPPER.” He slid it across the kitchen island they were gathered around as Dean made his way into the kitchen.

“Dean. You know Sheriff Mills. This is Deputy Hanscum—“

“Call me Donna,” a cheerful voice interrupted. Dean rolled his eyes into his coffee mug.

“They’re here to—”

“Question us. Me. Yeah,” Dean said, swiping a stray droplet off his nose and sitting down on the stool adjacent to Cas.

“Oh, man, black coffee? You’re a brave one, you,” Donna remarked as Dean took a tentative sip and then a gulp of the liquid, relishing in the bitter taste. Sheriff Mills, whom Dean had known for more than ten years, swatted her partner’s shoulder.

“It’s nice to see you again, Dean. It’s been a while.” She turned to Dean and gave him a sympathetic smile above her coffee cup, knowing how much he hated to be questioned about his parents. “You too, Castiel.”

“Yeah, Jody. It’d be nice to see you under different circumstances for once, though.” Dean hadn’t intended to sound so irritated, and Donna looked visibly uncomfortable about it.

“We won’t be long. We’re here to hopefully borrow something from you,” Jody reassured him, quickly taking a sip of her milky coffee. Dean knew what they wanted, and he pressed his lips together defiantly, preferring to let them come to him rather than offer it up himself. “Your father’s journal is valuable, Dean. He wrote everything down. Maybe he wrote something about Azazel.”

When the Winchester house had burned down, all Dean had left of his family was his dad’s 1967 Chevrolet Impala and whatever was inside it - which included his father’s journal. John Winchester kept his diary, all of his military arsenal, climbing equipment, and a box of old photos in the trunk. As an ex-Marine, Dean assumed it was more for reassurance than anything else; he needed to have an escape route should anything happen to him or his family.

Dean had never read his dad’s journal. If he read it, it meant there would be nothing left of his father for him to look forward to.

It meant that Dad would be gone for real.

He figured he’d read it when he was older, maybe after he retired.

Sam, on the other hand, had glossed over the entire thing at least a dozen times.

Dean had never let the cops see it, let alone read it. But Jody was good friends with the Winchesters, and knew about John’s journal, so it was inevitable that he’d eventually give it up.

Castiel placed a hand on Dean’s shoulder supportively. He knew how protective Dean was of his father’s things.

“How about we wait until Sam arrives for his Christmas vacation, then we can decide what to do. It’s only four days from now,” Cas suggested, ever playing the mediator, and Dean was grateful that he could be so calm and collected. Dean was far too emotional when it came to these kinds of
confrontations.

“No problem,” Jody said, even though she looked disappointed.

If Dean hadn’t known her personally, he was sure she would have been more insistent. After all, she’d caught glimpses of the boys growing up. For example, there was a time when she’d dragged a 16-year-old Dean home after he had gotten hammered with a bunch of random kids at school, and was subjected to Dean’s drunken ranting about why milk shouldn’t be in plastic bags.

Simply put – she’d seen him at some of his lowest points.

“How’s Sam doing?”

Thankfully, Jody changed the subject, and Cas gave a polite, rehearsed response. Dean didn’t feel much like talking, and he was glad that Cas knew him well enough to understand that.

He glanced up at Cas and found himself staring, watching his lips move as he gushed about how clever Sam was, as if it was his own sibling he was talking about.

The two brothers had known Castiel since Dean was fourteen years old – their ten-year friendship anniversary had been in September. Cas had been his best friend since their freshman year of high school, friendship cemented after Dean had slipped and called him ‘Cas’ accidentally. Dean still remembered the splutter of apologies that had spilled from his mouth afterwards, which had been brushed off by a kind smile easy enough to fall in love with.

Dean shook the thought away. Back to his parents, back to the cops.

He wasn’t at all keen on handing over the journal and wondered if there was a way he could pretend to lose it. Anything could happen to it while in possession of the police – they could misplace it, pick it apart, destroy it. He couldn’t risk losing his dad forever.

It would make sense for Dad to write something about Azazel. From the small glimpses Dean had seen of his dad’s journal over Sammy’s shoulder, it seemed like he noted every important detail in his life. The cops were definitely onto something.

But Dean didn’t want to let go of such a precious object.

He sighed, which earned him a short glance from Cas, and a squeeze of the shoulder. For the next five minutes, Cas’ hand didn’t budge.

Dean sipped his coffee.

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The morning of Sam’s arrival, Dean drove to his adoptive parents’ house: Bobby Singer and Ellen Harvelle, his and Sam’s legal godparents who had actually started dating just before his parents died.

On good days, Bobby called himself a mechanic for the Singer Salvage Yard. Sometimes he’d pay Dean a hundred bucks or so to fix up a complicated commission – Bobby was getting old, and getting the fine details right was becoming a task and a half.

He would never say it out loud, though.

And Dean would never expect him to.

Sitting in his parked car, Dean found his thoughts drifting to his dad’s journal again. Something
about it was nagging at him – as if the police were right, and it could have answers to his father’s death. He was torn – he wasn’t keen on reading it, but he needed to know why his parents had to… why they had to die.

And why he was forced to live such a screwed up childhood.

He huffed, shaking his head, and stepped out of his car to go to the trunk. Dean had moved a few of John’s belongings into Bobby’s basement – mostly guns and climbing equipment – but had kept the journal and box of photos in the back. Dean didn’t trust anyone else with these few precious items.

The trunk creaked open, and Dean’s gaze immediately fell to the leather-bound journal. He picked it up in his calloused fingers, letting them trace across the creases of the material.

It pained him, knowing he would have to read the entire thing, knowing he’d have to come to terms with his father’s–with his parents’–deaths to get any information out of it. For all he knew, Dad might not even have anything about Azazel in the book. He groaned, frustrated and desperate for answers before he heard the rattling of Bobby’s truck behind him. He swiftly put the diary in his back pocket, knowing exactly who would be with Bobby.

Sammy Winchester, back in time for Christmas.

Dean squinted through the sunlight at the passenger seat as the rusty old vehicle made its way up the driveway and, sure enough, Dean’s little brother was there grinning at him. Bobby pulled up next to the Impala, the engine still running as Sam leapt out to greet his brother.

“Dean!” he called, happy to see his brother. To Dean’s surprise, Sam appeared to have cut his hair a little shorter – his bangs no longer fell into his eyes, and instead, hung just above his brows.

“Hey, Sammy.” Dean gripped the back of his brother’s neck and forced him into a hug. Sam didn’t hesitate to wrap his arms around Dean, and despite being at least three inches taller, he pressed his nose into his brother’s shoulder. The two siblings had established long ago that affection wasn’t allowed to be sparse; it was either go big or go home with them.

Absently, Dean was aware that he was trying to make up for the affection that had been taken away with their parents’ deaths.

“I heard about Mom and Dad’s case. Bobby updated me on the way here,” Sam said, pulling away and swiping a hand through his hair.

“Oh, yeah.” Dean watched as Bobby hauled one of Sam’s suitcases into the house. “About that. I, uh… the cops want Dad’s journal. I don’t want to give it to them, but it might have something in it. I also don’t want to read it.” He pulled the journal out of his back pocket, an idea forming in his mind.

“Dean, you have to give it to the cops. They can help,” Sam naively protested.

“No. I need to have this, Sam. It’s all I’ve got left.” Dean looked his brother in the eye. “Can you… read it, tell me if there’s anything about this Azazel guy in it? I need some answers, some time, before the cops pick it apart.”

Sam pressed his lips together, hesitating briefly, but relented, seeming to understand Dean’s perspective. He nodded. “Yeah, Dean, sure. Let me get settled and I’ll check it out.” The younger Winchester slapped Dean’s shoulder affectionately. “So, are you gonna make Bobby carry all my crap inside, or are you actually gonna be a decent human being for once?”

Dean laughed, a wave of warmth filling him. Nobody could cheer him up quite like his baby brother.
“Shut the fuck up.” He shoved the journal back in his pocket, making his way to the truck to get Sam’s second suitcase. How much crap could a guy need for one damn holiday?

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Once Sam had unpacked the ungodly amount of crap into his old bedroom, he took the journal from Dean and began reading over the contents. He laid back on his bed while Dean took up the old armchair by the window.

When he looked outside, he could see snow beginning to fall in the early-afternoon light, slowly blanketing Bobby and Ellen’s home in white – the sound of Sam flicking the pages of the book in the background.

Jo, Ellen’s daughter and the Winchesters’ equivalent of a baby sister, interrupted the quiet for a minute, glad to see Sam once again. She was training to be a mechanic, so she rarely had the opportunity to take a day off and make the hour and a half journey to Sam’s college. Dean, on the other hand, didn’t hesitate to dump himself in Sam’s shared apartment with his girlfriend purely out of boredom.

Jo respected the brothers’ time together, and left once she had updated Sam on her dating life – which was non-existent, much to his relief.

It took another twenty minutes and a thin layer of snow on the ground outside before Sam found something.

“Dean.” He sat up abruptly, finger marking a point on the page. “There is something. ‘Chuck Novak went missing today. Azazel? Worried for Mary and kids.’” Dean scrambled over to Sam’s side, checking out the page for himself – sure enough, the messy handwriting read October 14th 2001, the day Chuck Novak had been declared missing.

Dean felt a shiver run down his spine, like he was looking at something he shouldn’t. Despite it being less than a month before his dad’s death, there was still a significant amount of writing left. Such a significant amount in fact, Dean noted, that loose pieces of paper had been added into the back.

“Alright. Anything else?” The older Winchester moved back to his chair, feeling a little overwhelmed. Barely a sentence, and he felt like he’d done some kind of injustice to himself. Preserving his father’s memory was so important to him.

“Uh, yeah. October 15th: ’Mary came back from work, told me she was certain Azazel was behind it all. Saw vice-president of Lawrence Gas, Bela Talbot, on phone. Was trying to find a way out of the deal.’”

Sam chewed his bottom lip for a moment. “I recognise that name. Bela Talbot.”

Dean felt a spark of familiarity at the name, too – like she was someone he’d known from his childhood, but hadn’t thought about for a long time. He tried to make a link, but couldn’t put a face to the name.

“‘October 16th: ‘Ruby Masters found emails today. Azazel’s been working with someone to create something – not sure what yet. Need to find out more. Meeting Ruby tonight. Police can’t do their job, so I’ll do it.’”

Sam flicked the page over.
‘October 17th: Bela Talbot found dead at Stull Bridge. Ruby works in morgue. Not a suicide, police not making information public. Ruby thinks Bela was driven insane by something. Ruby could lose her job for telling me. Rebecca Wilson - cop, working with us to lock Azazel up. Need more proof. Who is he working with?’

Sam scanned the next few pages, apparently none of the information being relevant.

“How the fuck didn’t you realise this was something important? You’ve read that thing half a dozen times,” Dean wondered out loud. “You’re smart as hell, there’s no way you didn’t pick this up the first time.”

Sam shrugged, eyes still on the journal.

“To be honest, I assumed the case had been solved. I mean, Azazel was fired and went AWOL. And… Dad had PTSD, we all knew that. He drank a ton, did God knows what with all those friends he had -” Sam shuffled awkwardly. “I always thought his and Mom’s deaths were an accident. You know that,” he confessed quietly, not meeting Dean’s gaze.

Dean felt a pang of betrayal in his gut. He knew Sam had never been keen on Dad – the guy was an alcoholic, he could admit that – but he wouldn’t make this kind of thing up.

_He wouldn’t._

“Alright,” he responded, not wanting to fight with his brother so close to Christmas.

Sam cleared his throat, continuing to read out relevant passages.

‘October 24th: ‘Mary met with Brady James today - won’t say what happened. Ruby says it’s a good thing. Need to see what it does. It’s not a good idea - Rebecca agrees.’” Sam looked up at Dean, who was giving him a look of extreme disapproval. Dean couldn’t believe his younger brother had glossed over these things, reducing them to drunken stories.

‘October 26th: ‘No signs of anything. Azazel failed?’”

Sam’s eyes widened as he turned two more pages.

‘October 30th: ‘Masters family died today. Police say it was a gas leak. Their house blew up. Meg was on a school trip. She’s going to be an orphan when she gets home.’”

‘October 31st: ‘Mary was sick today. Fever, vomiting. Think that Brady James fella gave her something.’”

Sam read solemnly and turned the page delicately – that was the last entry John ever added about their mother, Dean assumed.

Dean remembered Mary being ill the week before she died. Dad had told the boys it was the flu, and it had never seemed relevant until now. He should have realised earlier.

‘November 1st: Azazel’s plan is happening. I need to stop it. Rebecca is going to help.’ That’s it… that’s all of it.” Sam closed the journal, gently placing it on the bed beside him.

Dean felt like his world was crumbling again. For twelve years, the evidence he needed was in his father’s goddamn journal. His stubbornness for preservation was what had dragged the case on… what had stopped his revenge.
Anger bubbled up in his chest, and if he didn’t get away, it would turn into rage.

“I’m gonna go for a drive.” Dean snatched up the journal from the bed, Sam not looking at him, and made his way out the bedroom door. Ellen was at work, Jo was in her bedroom, and Bobby was outside, so Dean snuck his way into the basement – there was no possible way for anyone to find out what he knew he was going to do. He selected a handful of knives, then hurriedly made his way to the Impala.

He had a name.

Brady James.

~*~

Dean was a fucking idiot. His hip was bleeding, his head was spinning, and he couldn’t go to a hospital because then they’d call Bobby and he would ask what the fuck he’d been thinking.

Obviously, Dean had researched the Brady guy. He was a banker, a shady one at that, and was in a complicated game for his own benefit. He’d bought himself out of uncomfortable situations, participated in more than slightly illegal activities solely for money, and managed to worm his way out of the law every time just by knowing the right people.

All in all, he sounded exactly like the kind of guy that would be working with Azazel.

Dean needed to find him, find that goddamn son of a bitch who set his childhood home on fire. Who killed his parents.

After scouring the Internet for a week, he had managed to pull up some information about Brady. He was going to be at an auction that evening – buying or selling God knows what, definitely something illegal.

Dean knew he’d need some kind of password to get into the place. It was in the dodgy bit of Lawrence City, on the outskirts, where the police didn’t bother to patrol so much. Everyone knew its reputation, but Mayor Lucas Milton didn’t seem to want to bother with fixing it.

But Dean was desperate for answers. Armed with his stolen knives, he went to the place, thinking he could find a way to sneak in… and ended up bumping into security.

For a full minute or so, Dean had expected to die.

He was an athletic guy – after Bobby and Ellen had taken Dean into their home, his surrogate father had signed him up for gymnastics and kickboxing classes. Dean had become a problem child after the fire – vandalising school property, bursting into irrational fits of rage, or not speaking for days. Bobby told him he needed to get his energy out, and that’s what Dean put it into.

He only obliged because Bobby and Ellen could barely afford to feed their family, let alone pay for classes, so he refused to take it for granted.

Basically, he could hold his own in a fight.

But these guys… all of them were brutal.

Only narrowly did Dean manage to get away, and by narrowly, he meant getting a knife to the hip and a punch to the temple. Adrenaline was the only thing keeping him running, keeping him stumbling back home at three in the goddamn morning.
He couldn’t face Bobby.

It took almost everything out of him to hobble around the house, until he was stood underneath Sam’s bedroom window. With a loud groan, he bent over to snatch some pebbles off the ground. After almost ten attempts, he finally hit Sam’s window – he sighed in relief when he heard the thing open.

“Sam!” Dean’s voice was coarse, and he dropped to his knees.

“Dean? What the fuck are you doing?” his brother called down, apparently unable to see the horrible state he was in. The bitter cold of late December was the only thing keeping him conscious at this point.

“I can’t… Bobby can’t see. I got stabbed. You… you did that medical course.” Dean groaned in pain. He heard the window slam shut, and after what felt like an eternity hunched over on the rough gravel, Sam was hoisting his brother up off the ground.

“After I stitch this shit up, you’re explaining everything,” Sam practically growled at Dean.

It took almost fifteen minutes for the younger Winchester to haul his brother up the stairs without waking everyone else.

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Bobby always had emergency medical equipment on hand. Working in a scrapyard in the middle of nowhere didn’t mix well with injury, so Bobby took it on himself to have supplies around that would keep someone going until the professionals arrived. Dean knew that first hand. More than once he’d sliced open one limb or another messing around in the scrapyard – stitches were nothing new to him, especially ones from Bobby.

Sam had stitched him up fairly well, but he was getting paranoid.

“I’m not a professional, Dean. Someone should really look at that.”

Dean peered down at the stitched up wound on his hip. He downed some whiskey and then poured some on his injury, hissing through his teeth at the two separate burning sensations.

“I’ve looked at it. You happy?”

Sam rolled his eyes. “Vodka works better than whiskey.”

He slammed the medical kit shut. Dean flinched, knowing he was in for a scolding. He turned away and downed some more booze before facing the music.

“What the fuck were you thinking? Going out on a whim, by yourself? This is why we have cops, Dean!” the younger Winchester whisper-shouted. He paced around his room as Dean sat back in the armchair by the window.

“Did you think you could actually do something? You’re just a bartender!”

Wow. That comment hit home.

Dean snapped his head in Sam’s direction, eyes narrowed in offence.

“Dude, fuck off. I’ve been waiting fourteen years to do something about this, okay? Forgive me for being impatient. The police aren’t gonna do shit for months, Azazel could be gone by then, Brady
could be gone by then!” Dean spat, the dull throbbing in his hip preventing him from lashing out as much as he wanted to.

Sam sighed. “Being impatient almost got you killed! If…” He hesitated. Dean’s offence turned to curiosity, anger dissipating as he waited.

The younger Winchester folded his arms resolutely. “If you’re gonna do this, go after Brady, Azazel, whatever… then you aren’t doing it alone.”

Dean put two and two together a lot slower than he would have liked. He blamed it on the whiskey. “No. No no no. Absolutely fucking not.”

~*~

FEBRUARY 2016

“Who the fuck do you two dipshits think you are? Batman and Robin? You guys are so screwed –”

A fist barrelled into Brady’s jaw. He felt the bone rattle under the impact, shattering like a porcelain plate colliding with a wall – but the man chose not to react. When the hand withdrew, its knuckles were split and stained scarlet.

“You’re responsible for the deaths of Meg Masters and Ava Wilson, you jackass. You hitched them up with the good stuff and let the two of ‘em starve in the back of your goddamn truck. The entire damn city deserves to see you locked up, sicko,” the shorter one spat – though he was still at least three inches taller than Brady.

Bloody murder danced in the unfamiliar man’s eyes. Height was one of the few things Brady could have used to identify his interrogator if he ever needed to; the rest of his face was hidden with a grease-stained bandana and ratty black hoodie. A charm swung from his neck – a silver cross gleaming against the muted light, now tainted with a drop of Brady’s own blood.

The taller one of the two shifted uneasily; his footsteps echoing in the large warehouse. Like his companion, he was dressed in all black – clearly a makeshift, last minute disguise, with a wool hat hiding his head instead of a hood.

The shorter member of the duo was bulky, and stood tall, disciplined, as if he was a former soldier. But this man was different: though he was still muscular and significantly taller, he was lither, more agile. Perhaps he was younger?

Brady could see vulnerability in his suspiciously unguarded gaze, despite his strong stance.

“What’re you gonna do, Robin?” Brady taunted, his duct-tape restraints pulling, “Did I kill your girlfriend?”

The taller one shifted irritably once again – he’d hit a soft spot.

“Damn…” Brady breathed, a sense of pride coursing through him at the idea of managing to visibly affect one half of the vigilante duo that graced Lawrence City.

“Well, I hope she burns in hell.” He spat tauntingly, his swollen mouth leaking blood. His eyes widened excitedly in remembrance.

“Who knows what the fuck I gave ‘em, it was some shit I found in the dumpsters near the hospital.
Told ‘em it was some magic mojo crap that’d make them stronger – they ate that bullshit right up. Then they went around causing hell like they were fuckin’ possessed by the devil!” With a brief pause, he eyed up his interrogator.

“They both died after being locked in the back of a van for three days – their hearts couldn’t handle the withdrawal. Just proves how weak they were,” he sneered with a pleased chuckle.

Brady’s gaze flicked to the taller vigilante, inexplicably marvelled by him. His eyes glistened with emotion – what a petty thing it was, to feel so much attachment to other people. It was a specific weakness in every single one of Brady’s victims, and these two knuckleheads were no different. Beneath the brawl and all-talk attitude, they were just men.

With a rapid change in demeanour from kicked-puppy to cold-blooded-killer, the taller one pulled out a cell phone from his pocket, the iPhone voice-recorder app displayed on the screen.

“Thanks for the confession. LCPD will appreciate it.” The tone of his voice was hard enough to slice through marble, sending a chill up Brady’s spine.

The two figures proceeded to make their way out, confidence set comfortably in their shoulders. Sirens began wailing in the distance, reminding Brady of his now decided fate – but he didn’t care.

Prison was the least of his problems.

Outside the warehouse, the two interrogators sprinted towards their getaway vehicle – a slick, black ’67 Chevrolet Impala, artfully hidden from any possible CCTV cameras by a thick line of trees. It reflected the peach hues of the late evening sky and stood strong amongst the greenery; a comforting place to escape to after such a brutal confrontation.

In the safety of the car, they tore away their grimy disguises – flinging them carelessly into the back seat with two identical sighs.

In recent months, Lawrence City had been overflowing with crime. The adrenaline rush that had once followed successful cases was now replaced with either exhaustion or crankiness, something the pair were experiencing in full swing these days.

“Who’d have thought your theatre skills would come in handy one day, huh, Sammy?” the shorter one finally remarked, slouching back comfortably into the worn leather of the driver’s seat.

“I worked tech. And it’s Sam.” Sam snapped as he tapped at his phone, using a dummy-email and rerouted IP address to send Brady’s confession to the police along with the location.

“Sure thing, Sammy. Better get you back to school before Eileen says anything,” Dean replied as he revved up the engine, cruising away from the crime scene a few minutes before the police arrived.

“Do you think we’ll ever find Azazel? That guy didn’t even seem to be working for him. Dad’s journal was wrong. False lead.”

Dean turned to face his younger brother, who was pulling his signature puppy eyes look. Every time he pulled that specific expression, Dean was reminded of the days when Sam was just his baby brother. Now, he was on his way to becoming a bigshot lawyer whilst Dean was barely making enough money to pay the rent.

“We will,” he insisted, glad Sammy didn’t pick up on the doubtful waver in his voice.
Chapter One

MAY 2016

Dean was in a good mood.

The spring sun of late May warmed his back as he sat amongst the daisy-littered grass in Oak Grove Park, the green centre of his hometown, Lawrence City. Absentmindedly tugging at the lush blades of green, he felt a shallow breeze pick up as he laid down to stare up at clear blue skies.

Along with the pleasant weather, the time of year also meant that his very-recently-turned-21-year-old younger brother was done with law school for the summer, and was coming home to finally be able to drink in public – legally, that is. Ellen, their stand-in mother of sorts, owned the bar that Dean worked at, meaning that he and Sam had been drinking in secret together for a number of years.

A shuffle from beside him brought him back to another, more immediate source of his good mood. It was in the form of his best friend, lounging on a hideous, neon-orange picnic blanket next to him.

Dean’s gaze slid easily from the infinite blue of the sky to the equally infinite blue of Cas’ eyes; he was laughing about something that had happened whilst working a photography job at a wedding - a bridesmaid had downed a few too many tequila shots, causing her to oh-so-gracefully puke at the exact moment Cas’ finger hit the shutter button, evidence of her inebriated mistake perfectly captured on film.

He met Dean’s eyes with a wide smile, clearly amused by his own story, eyes crinkled at the corners; his slim, tanned hands were gesturing in time with the retelling. Dean watched carefully, smiling and nodding in all the right places despite the fact he wasn’t paying much attention to what he was saying.

Castiel loved novelty sweaters, cute cats, and his $2,000 Canon camera.

Dean loved Castiel. It was as simple and as difficult as that.

He loved him so much, in fact, that he hadn't said a word to anyone about it, not since he had realised how he felt. It was in times like this – watching Cas’ expression animated with passion and excitement and happiness – that Dean realised he would do anything for his best friend; like how he would for Sam, but also not in that way at all. It wasn’t more or less, it was just… different.

Needless to say, he felt like a complete and utter sap.

Cas hummed a content note, finishing his anecdote, and ran a hand through the dark tangle of his hair – managing to knock his thick-rimmed glasses off in the process.

Dean caught them swiftly and sat up, leaning forward to slide them back onto Cas’ nose, taking care not to hit his ears.

"You really need to stop dropping them; this is your third pair this year." Dean frowned.

Castiel said nothing, fiddling with the glasses instead, a light pink flush creeping up his neck as he murmured an agreement. Dean figured it had something to do with the heat – after all, Cas had insisted on wearing one of his stupid (yet adorable) sweaters. The soft pastel blue material hugged his torso, which was doing Dean no favours whatsoever.
“Anyways,” Cas started, stretching back for his beloved camera, making his sweater ride up a little, “I actually need to take some photos for my art class…?” It sounded like a question. Cas was asking him to model.

Dean raised his eyebrows in slight surprise at the proposition.

“I wondered why you were being so nice to me,” Dean teased, rearranging himself to face his friend, then shrugged. “Fine. You gave me pie. I owe you.”

“That’s all it takes? Pie?”

“Hey, I’m easy.”

Castiel grinned, flipping the switch to turn the camera on. He raised it to eye level, looking at Dean through the viewfinder.

“What do I do with my face? Blue Steel? Hey, who’s is better, mine or Nick Nolte’s?”

Dean pouted his pink lips and squinted jokingly, making Cas burst into laughter – a sound Dean didn’t think he’d ever get tired of hearing. He tried to hold the expression long enough for Cas to take the picture, but he rapidly lost control and joined in with Cas’ snickering.

“Now I see why you get all the girls,” Castiel remarked teasingly with a trace of something else, lowering the camera to his lap to observe his work.

“What girls?” Dean replied in a similar tone.

Though he had furiously dated as much as possible in high school, times had changed and so had people, so much so that he hadn’t dated anyone for the last two years. In the beginning, it was about making Cas jealous – something he now realised was not an acceptable method of trying to win him over. Eventually, the dates fizzled out into just hi’s and bye’s here and there, no real effort given on his part because no matter how many girls he brought home, it had zero effect on Cas. His best friend was always happy for him, no matter who he was with, and instead of devoting time to them, he finally settled on spending it with Cas.

“My point exactly,” Castiel retorted easily.

Judging by Cas’ smile and adorably scrunched nose, he was in just as good of a mood as Dean was.

Moments like this were perfect for Dean to tell Cas exactly how he felt; the warm sun on their backs, cool breeze through their hair, miles of scenic green around them – but still, he hesitated. Screaming panic held his tongue hostage, fearing that if he confessed his feelings, then the best friendship he’d ever had would be shot to hell.

Cas dragged his eyes away and lay back on his eye-sore of a blanket, clutching his camera once again, silently snapping pictures as Dean smiled at him. It couldn’t have been the best angle to take pictures to draw from, but his photographer friend seemed quite content as he flicked through the photo library.

“You’re so photogenic,” Cas commented, almost absentmindedly, as he turned the camera around to show Dean. On the screen, Dean was sitting casually, elbow pressed into his knee, gaze aimed slightly off to the side. Clearly Cas hadn’t noticed, but Dean was no stranger to the fondness alight in his own eyes – it unsettled him slightly knowing that there was some kind of photographic evidence that could prove how ridiculously smitten he was.
Leaning back, Dean felt the warmth of Cas’ shoulder brush against his own, making his gut flutter all too familiarly with hopeless nerves. He was well aware that entirely platonic relationships didn’t consist of invading each other’s personal space, but this was Cas. From the moment they’d met, he didn’t seem to have a problem with standing closer to Dean than what was deemed socially acceptable. Dean was simply returning the favour… or making up excuses, he didn’t know which. All he cared about was that the other boy was there.

Dean turned to glance at Cas, who was worrying his bottom lip.

“You’re thinking really loudly there, man.” The pitch of his voice was a few octaves higher than normal; he cleared his throat before continuing. “Care to share?”

Cas released his lip and sighed, wearing an expression that was reminiscent of a grumpy baby.

“There’s an office party at the newspaper I regularly commission photos for. I’m invited,” he said. There seemed like there was more, so Dean waited expectantly.

When Cas didn’t elaborate, Dean encouraged, “So, what’s the problem? It sounds like fun.”

“I’m supposed to take a date, and the only girls I really know are Anna and Jo – but Anna’s my sister and Jo wouldn’t go to an office party in a million years.”

That’s true. Jo’s aversion to office parties was laughable. Dean swallowed nervously before commenting as nonchalantly as he could manage, “So? Take a dude.”

The statement caused Cas’ eyes to widen slightly. Dean didn’t actually know if Cas was interested in boys – despite the fact that they’d been friends for almost eleven years – but apparently, now was as good a time as any to find out.

“I was… going to ask one, actually.”

Dean was fairly certain the temperature increased by at least 20 degrees at that; he could feel his palms begin to clam up with nervous sweat. The next couple of seconds seemed to drag out into eternity – a heart-stopping build-up to whatever Cas was going to say next, and holy crap Dean had never been so hopeful about something finally going right in his life.

A laugh burst from Cas’ lips. “I was gonna ask you,” he said hesitantly… but Dean’s joy was short-lived. “– as friends, obviously.” Cas added, almost as an after-thought. “You really thought I was gay?” He brushed off.

Dean’s heart fell to his stomach.

“Honestly, you had me fooled for a second there…” He forced out the half-truth with an equally forced laugh.

Dean’s daily unrequited love quota had reached its limit. With his chest closing in on him, he desperately needed to flee to the sanctuary of his bedroom, where he could peacefully coerce himself into shoving his feelings back into the closet and nurse the depletion of his mood.

“Alright! We should head off. I’ve gotta plan quiz night at The Roadhouse and order a new batch of Jack Daniels,” Dean rambled, and hastily hauled himself to his feet.

“Dean, it’s only 4:30 –”

“What a shame. I still need to get goin’.” He didn’t think his shamefully icy tone went unnoticed, but
as per usual, Dean skirted around any potential confrontation by snatching up his stuff and briskly marching over to his car. Once Cas slid into the passenger seat, Dean turned up the radio far too loud for conversation – his way of saying please don’t speak to me.

~*~

Dean and Cas shared a dingy apartment situated in downtown Lawrence City. It was too cramped, had a constant faint scent of cat urine, and was situated above a women’s lingerie shop of all places – but it was home. Being the nerd he was, Dean had sweet-talked Cas into letting him plaster the walls with a million different posters. Cas didn’t understand most of them, but he appreciated the way they hid old water stains and cracks in the plaster.

A life-sized Captain America poster had been pasted down their front door, which was violently flung open by Dean, who stormed in and chucked his keys on the kitchen counter, ignoring the fact that they slid off the other side and onto the floor with a clink.

Cas wasn’t so quick to let Dean’s behaviour go unnoticed – for the entirety of the short drive home, his best friend’s mood had been foul to the point that even he couldn’t bear it. Usually the kind to mask hurt with humour, Dean’s mood had been a somewhat new experience – in hindsight, it was quite entertaining when he snapped, “Shut the fuck up, Cas!” when Taylor Swift played on the radio, despite the fact he had said nothing.

“Dean...” he called, tapping on Dean’s bedroom door before cautiously stepping inside.

Dean muttered a series of what sounded like swear words – he was perched on the edge of his bed, face in his hands.

“You’re supposed to wait for me to say ‘come in’,” he remarked petulantly, like a five-year-old.

Cas’ eyes did that puppy thing that could rival Sam – and there was no way in hell Dean could force himself to overlook it.

“Jesus Christ, fine. Come in.” There was a notable tone of exasperation in his voice as he rubbed at his eyes.

“Is this because of the gay thing?” Cas was always one to get straight to the point – something Dean usually loved, but right now it was just inconvenient. Not entirely sure how to answer, Dean remained quiet for a few long seconds before he couldn’t take the relentless staring anymore.

“Yeah,” he confessed quietly, eyes down, almost ashamed at his behaviour.

Cas stepped carefully over the tragedy that was Dean’s bedroom floor – dirty clothes strewn from the bed to desk, an empty plastic tub of pie was left on top of a graphic porn magazine, something he wasn’t shocked to see.

Cas didn’t know, but the reason for the complete disarray of Dean’s room was exhaustion and lack of time; usually Dean was exceptionally neat. The whole vigilante thing was evidently taking its toll.

“Dude, it’s fine,” Dean protested gently. “I’m just tired after working til 3am every night for the past week and a half.” Another half-truth – he’d actually been making up the hours for this other job – the one he wasn’t keen on Cas knowing about.

“I wasn’t – I, um...” Cas scratched his neck; his Adam’s apple bobbing as he swallowed.

“I’m sorry. I know you hate... ‘chick flick moments’,” he continued, complete with physical
quotation marks. It brought a smile to Dean’s face. Cas always noted Dean’s catchphrases, something that never failed to flatter him; the idea that somebody could pay that much attention to him was… well, there wasn’t a word for it. Not one that Dean knew, anyway.

“I can bear it for now – go ahead, confess your ‘sins’… whatever, man.” Dean masked the increase in his heartbeat with a smirk. There was no point whatsoever in getting his hopes up, but his damn heart was screwing with his logic.

“I wasn’t exactly… interested in many people during high school. Or college, for that matter.” Dean’s eyes flitted down to where Cas’ tongue poked out to wet his lips and he noticed how his blue eyes looked at anything but him.

“I’ve never kissed anyone, Dean. I’m 25 years old.” His confession ended with a slight tremor in his voice, as if he was about to cry.

Dean hated seeing Cas like this. Feeling a little useless, all Dean could reply with was, “C’mer,” and pat the empty patch of Marvel-themed duvet next to him.

Cas’ dating history had always been somewhat of a mystery to Dean, despite the fact that they had known each other for so long – it was simply a topic that never came up. Only now was there confirmation that there was nothing to tell, much to Dean’s selfish relief.

Cas settled down next to Dean, their knees knocking together.

“I have… I have had feelings for people.” There was a detectable emphasis on ‘people’ that Dean chose to ignore – now was not a time to get a hard-on about Cas possibly hinting he was queer; it was a time to listen to his fucking problems like a good friend.

“I guess when the person you hang out with all the time is Lawrence City’s heartthrob Dean Winchester, you’re not really gonna get anyone…” He trailed off, tone bittersweet and breaking Dean’s heart.

“Dude,” Dean scoffed. “I once wore the same Han Solo shirt for a week straight in senior year,” Dean said as a denial to his apparent status. That earned him a small laugh – if in doubt, pull the Star Wars card. Frankly, it was the only bit of pop culture Cas understood and only because it was Dean’s favourite.

“With a face like yours, I don’t think anyone noticed.”

Before Dean could prepare himself, he felt warmth around his knee – Cas’ hand was there, but only briefly. The temptation to pull it back, interlock their fingers and memorise Cas’ fingerprints with his own was all too real – but he resisted.

“I noticed,” Cas said softly. It was just audible, and it made Dean look up at him. With barely six inches separating them, Dean’s heart was racing so fast, he was sure he was going to implode or explode or something-plode. This close, Dean could see a few scars beneath Cas’ thin stubble from where he’d fucked up shaving, and there were a few barely-there freckles on his nose; the yellow-hued light from his desk lamp made Cas’ eyes look like a muted green rather than their usual bright blue.

Dean’s frustration at being so hopelessly attracted to his best friend was going to shoot through the roof at this rate. So, naturally, he ran.

“Wait – oh shit!” he exclaimed a little too abruptly, pulling away and scrambling across the bomb-site of clothes and comics towards his door.
“I forgot to get... milk and coffee!” Dean stumbled around his words. Usually, he was a smooth liar, that is, until it came to Cas. He expected his friend to look upset – but instead, Cas actually looked rather amused, a small but curious smile playing at his lips.

“I’ll be 15 minutes, tops,” Dean continued, feeling a little confused but relieved that Cas didn’t appear upset.

Cas’ gaze drifted lazily up the entirely of Dean’s body, which, in turn, seemed to respond under the scrutiny of blue eyes in the form of a small shiver up his spine.

“Make sure you get the coffee with the blue lid this time. Decaf is a crime and I won’t let you subject me to it ever again.”

“Yeah, yeah. Alright, Your Highness,” Dean replied, playing up his fake-grumpy voice as he grabbed a hoodie and quickly made his way out of the apartment, desperate to escape the pressure of his own feelings.

~*~

Despite the fact that the sky had been utterly flawless an hour or so ago, the previous shallow breeze had picked up into a full-blown storm – angry clouds made the world look dull, and heavy raindrops cascaded downwards, soaking Dean to the bone – despite the fact that he had pulled up his hood and crossed his arms over his chest to keep the heat in.

“Fuckin’ Lawrence City,” Dean cursed under his breath.

“One day without rain is all I ask for.” He heaved open the convenience store door with a sharp huff of irritation. Fortunately, only a few people were around – Dean wanted to get his stuff and get gone, undisturbed by anyone. His rain-chilled body made him even grumpier after his disappearing act from the apartment, and the only cure he knew of was a scalding hot shower.

Dean tossed everything he needed carelessly into a basket (double-checking that the lid of the coffee tin was blue and even making sure to check the caffeine content), then hastily slammed it down on the till. The cashier was a young girl with a punk-rock hairdo and an excessive smudge of black around her eyes; she chewed gum a little too loudly for Dean’s liking. Who the fuck even bothers to look like that for work? he thought. Dean knew she had to make polite eye contact, but it just made the whole checkout ordeal just that little more awkward. Her eyes were a piercing blue in contrast to the black eye makeup, making her stare intimidating. He was briefly reminded of Cas for a moment, whose eyes often held a similar look.

He averted his gaze, which landed just behind her. There was a VCR-type box covered over in grey duct tape and collecting dust, positioned precariously on a high shelf. It was strange – it shouldn’t be covered, not in plain sight of the public anyway.

“CCTV?” he asked the girl, gesturing vaguely towards the box, and then dug through his pockets for cash.

She turned her head lazily to the box and then looked back at him with a devoid expression, popping her gum.

“Not working,” she drawled.

He glanced up towards the corners of the store, noticing that the small cameras had also been covered over with duct tape.
Bad move, he thought, throwing a few bills down on the counter.

He shook his head, his gaze tracking around the store until it was caught by a person near the window, whose face was hidden by a balaclava. His eyes tracked analytically over the individual – until they landed on some kind of device in the person’s hand with a flashing red button on it.

That was never a good sign.

“Get down!” Dean shouted, scrambling around the counter in order to protect the girl, dragging her down to the floor, just as an ear-splitting shriek shattered the window.

Dean’s immediate instinct was to grab the kid and run, but he knew better than to stupidly try and escape when a potentially violent offender was on the loose. Gripping the girl’s shoulders tightly, he dragged her into a corner and clamped a hand over her mouth. It probably wasn’t the smartest thing to do, but Dean couldn’t risk her making any noises and revealing their location.

He flinched violently when a gunshot fired, head ducking instinctively. Prancing around rooftops with his brother and fighting crime was fine, but the sound of a gun would always scare the crap out of him. Where there were guns, there was death – and that was something that Dean would always struggle with.

A body landed with a heavy thud a few feet in front of them, snapping Dean out of his thoughts – a woman in her late 20s, he judged, lipstick smudged across her cheek. Dean examined it with a small tilt of the head, then realised it was actually blood. There was another gunshot and a bullet pierced the skin right between her eyes with a gruesome splatter of scarlet. Her body twitched grotesquely before going completely still. The teenager beside him clutched his sleeve as he felt her hot tears land on his fingers – apparently, she wasn’t as stoic as she looked.

Vomit threatened to give away his hiding place, but Dean managed to swallow it down, leaving the acidic burn of bile behind. Grimacing, he realised that he had to do something. He was probably the only son of a bitch in here who knew how to fight at all. Thoughts reeling, decisions in the making, he knew he had his bandanna in his pocket. However, he hadn’t revealed his identity to anyone – not Cas, not the Harvelles, nobody – and somehow, the idea of a teenage girl being the first to find out wasn’t so appealing.

Another shot rang out and he flinched again involuntarily. The sound gave him a clue as to where the violator was – the back of the store, a perfect position for Dean to sneak up on them. Knowing he couldn’t risk anyone knowing who he was, he reluctantly pulled out his bandanna and tugged up his hood, quickly assembling his signature disguise.

“Stay here,” Dean whispered harshly, then peeked cautiously out from around the counter. A can of wasp spray was collecting dust on the bottom shelf – he handed it to the girl.

“If anyone comes, spray them in the eyes with this. You won’t get in trouble ‘cause it’s self-defence.”

Nimbly, he shuffled out of his position and quickly reached out to grab two bottles of wine from the discount shelf. He then crept carefully down the refrigerated aisle, not appreciating the chill that seeped into his dampened clothes as they stuck uncomfortably to his skin.

Approaching the attacker was way too easy. It was a female, judging by her smaller frame. She was facing away from him, standing over the body of a man, dark liquid pooling beneath him, rolling down the dips in the tiled floor.
Dead.

The sight made Dean’s blood boil. He launched one of the wine bottles right into the side of her head, a spot he knew would either knock her out or seriously hurt her. It appeared to be the latter – the girl toppled to the floor, but she was conscious.

She didn’t stay down for long, though, pouncing at Dean when she got the chance, slashing a silver blade that had been concealed in her jacket alarmingly close to his face. The only reason Dean’s reflexes complied was because of years of gymnastics training along with extensive experience in hand-to-hand combat that came with fighting drug-lords and psychotic murderers on an often nightly basis.

Despite his quick dodge, he still thought he was a goner – this girl was lethal, wielding the knife expertly and not hesitating to try and slice off all his damn fingers at once. She knocked the last wine bottle out of his hand and it rolled away, while backing him up all the way down the aisle - crap.

Dodging her hits with the grace of a ballet dancer, Dean managed to get in a front kick aimed directly at her stomach. She stumbled backwards, wheezing as the air was forced out of her lungs. Surging forward, he grabbed the back of her head with both hands and brought his knee up to slam her in the face.

He didn’t anticipate how quick she would be, managing to twist out of his hold, only to swipe at his legs to bring him crumpling to the floor. Dean had just about rolled over onto his back before she dropped down on top of him to grasp at his neck, immediately cutting off his air supply. Struggling for air, vision gradually dimming, he saw the wine bottle out of the corner of his eye. Dean tried one last attempt, and using all of his remaining energy, made a grab for it successfully. He brought it over her head, glass and crimson liquid splintering over them like snowflakes.

Her grip loosened and he heaved in full gulps of air. She swayed precariously to the side, clearly dizzy from the impact, and Dean jammed the broken, jagged edge of the shattered wine bottle into her thigh. Her scream was of pure agony as she toppled to the side, clutching her leg as red liquid spilled out of the wound.

Dean felt a pang of guilt as the attacker lay whimpering – she wasn’t dying, but she certainly looked like she was. Knowing he couldn’t risk her escaping, Dean slammed his fist into her temple with a crack, knocking her out instantly.

The Winchester brothers refused to kill. However, Dean certainly struggled to live up to it when his younger brother wasn’t around to calm him down.

Taking a few deep breaths to combat the adrenaline rush, he returned to the cashier, who was quivering behind the counter. She was clutching the can of wasp spray like her life depended on it; make-up-tainted tears made her face look like the creepy chick from The Ring.

“Don’t touch me!” she yelped, frightened, and Dean didn’t blame her. His expression softened.

“I’m not a killer,” he started, palms up reassuringly, “just a guy trying to buy some damn coffee.” He tried to joke, realising it was the entirely wrong moment to even try. “Sorry. The attacker…” He glanced back to her to double check. “I knocked her out.”

The girl sniffled, clambering out of her hiding place. It was Dean’s first chance to really look at her. She had initially looked a little menacing due to her excessive ear piercings and undercut hair style, but now that she was a blubbery mess, Dean has realised she just seemed to have a hard outer shell.
“Do we – do we call the cops?” she stuttered, tugging at the sleeves of her cherry-red hoodie before wiping at her eyes. It didn’t make much of a difference, it just smudged her eye makeup even more.

“You can do that. I don’t want them to find me – since, y’know…” He huffed an unsure, awkward laugh. “I just beat the shit outta some chick and look like a serial killer.” He stepped towards the girl cautiously, placing a hand gently on her shoulder. It was then he noticed his split and bloody knuckles – how the hell was he gonna hide that from Cas?

Dean tried to give her a reassuring smile, but felt it was a weak gesture considering he had a bandanna over his face.

“I can’t tell you my name in case the cops try to interrogate you, but what’s yours?”

The girl chewed her lip before answering. “Claire… Mills.” Her voice shook, clearly hesitant to give a full name. Dean felt his eyebrows crease – the name was distantly familiar. Considering he’d lived in Lawrence City his entire life, he wasn’t too surprised that it rang a bell.

“Okay, Claire. Here’s how this is gonna work: I want you to call the cops, and if they ask you who I am, you tell them-”

Dean pulled at his hoodie, stopping briefly before reaching underneath his t-shirt to reveal a silver chain. A tiny cross dangled from the end, reflecting the dusky yellow overhead lights of the store.

“Tell them you don’t know.” He undid the chain, then placed it into Claire’s small hand, folding his hand over hers. “Keep this. It’s proof you can trust me.” His tone was sincere – he needed to persuade her that he was the good guy.

Claire nodded, shoving it into her pocket before pulling out her phone. Dean began to head towards the exit.

“Wait – what if I need you again?” she called, making him pause. It was a good point – Dean racked his brain for a location that wouldn’t reveal his true identity, knowing his apartment and the bar were totally out of the question.

“Oak Grove Park.” he decided. “There’s a bench in the northwest corner dedicated to the old mayor, Chuck Novak. Shove a note in the back right leg. There’s a hole in it where the rain won’t get it. I… go there on Sundays.”

That bench had been the spot where Dean had broken up with Lisa Braeden – the longest relationship he’d ever had. She was anything a guy could want: physically flawless, with a carefree personality and a long, well-paid medical career ahead of her. Sadly, she just hadn’t been the one for Dean.

The only one he really wanted was Cas.

“Alright – um, thank you, …whoever you are.” Claire nodded at him knowingly, traces of a grateful smile on her face. She then began tapping away at her phone, calling the police to lock up the woman who was lying in the pool of blood in front of the dairy section.

With that, Dean left hastily, head bowed… but not before grabbing the coffee and milk.
Chapter Two

Dean was distracted by the TV – the news was on, and Claire was being interviewed about the incident at the convenience store from two nights ago. He was pleased to see his necklace hanging from her neck, a detail that would have been missed by many. Hopefully, that meant that she trusted him.

Another person was also being interviewed – and that’s when Dean realised why Claire’s name rang a bell. Jody Mills was giving a statement about the situation – an arm lovingly wrapped around her daughter...Claire Novak.

“What happened was... terrifying. The idea that I almost lost my daughter – I just... there are no words to describe how relieved I am that Claire is safe. I’m so glad my daughter was saved by the Righteous Man.”

Dean’s mouth twitched at the name. Jody then looked into the camera, something earnest in her brown eyes.

“If you’re listening, Righteous Man, thank you for saving my daughter. Thank you so much.”

Dean’s brows pinched together. ‘The Righteous Man’? Was that his new superhero name? Lawrence City was known for its strongly Christian population; he was sure someone would be offended that a vigilante was being linked to the Bible.

As the reporter clarified that an official statement on the incident would be made by Mayor Lucas Milton, something hit Dean in the back of the head – spinning around, he swallowed the curse that was on his lips when he realised it was Ellen.

“Boy, you better get workin’. I ain’t payin’ you to stand around lookin’ pretty,” she lectured good-naturedly.

“Aw, Ellen. You know these looks bring in at least 80% of our tips.” He smirked, grabbing a damp wash cloth and wiping down the mahogany bar, grimacing at the amount of sticky alcohol on the surface that should’ve already been cleaned. He was slacking.

It had just gone 10pm on his first shift of the week at the Roadhouse. Tuesday was always Dean’s least favourite night to work because it was usually pretty empty; the few customers they did get were generally old, greasy men whose lives revolved around booze and solitude. He tried not think about how worried he was that he’d end up like that one day. He had already lost his parents, and with his new career path, it was always a real possibility that he could lose everyone else he loved, too.

He was so lost in his self-deprecating thoughts that he didn’t notice the figure take a seat right in front of him until they called his name.

“Dean!” The familiar voice made the bartender look up, any thoughts of him ever ending up alone vanishing into the woodwork. Little Sammy Winchester, hair longer and floppier than ever, was grinning like a total dope as he leaned across the bar.

“Sammy! I wasn’t expecting you for another week!” the older Winchester said, rushing around the bar to greet his younger brother properly. It had been three long months since they’d last seen each other – since they’d captured Brady – and Dean was thrilled to spend the summer together.
“Yeah, well, I lied. Surprise!” Sam didn’t hesitate to wrap his arms around his sibling.

“Jesus, Sam. Grow a little more, why don’t you,” Dean teased, returning the tight hug. He felt an overwhelming wave of happiness pool in his chest.

“Man, how’ve you been? Anything interesting happen in your nerd squad?” he said and pulled away with a pat to Sam’s shoulder.

Ignoring the job he had to do for the moment, Dean pulled out the stool next to Sam and the two sat down, eager to catch up on each other’s lives.

“Well, Eileen left for Illinois this morning,” Sam started, expression affectionate and full of longing. “She’s doing a project with a bunch of other students in a kids’ home. It’s pretty cool, actually. I’m gonna miss her.”

Sam and Eileen had met during their first year of college. They were both avid law students with enviable SAT results. Dean liked to believe – to the mild annoyance of his brother – that they’d quickly bonded over something that was probably nerd-related. They’d been dating for two and a half years, and the older Winchester was fairly sure and hopeful that they’d be together for many more.

Sam was playing with his fingers restlessly, something Dean knew was a nervous habit.

“Uh, I’m actually…” He trailed off, glancing up to Dean then back down to his fingers again. He took a steady breath, and squared his shoulders as he looked up and held his brother’s gaze.

“I’m thinking about proposing to her soon.”

Dean’s jaw dropped, eyes widening in pleasant surprise. He couldn’t help the happy grin that pulled at his lips.

“What? Sammy – that’s awesome!” He slapped his brother happily on the shoulder. “Holy crap… Ellen’s gonna go nuts! Same with Cas.” Dean hastily grabbed two bottles of beer from the mini fridge behind the bar.

“Hey – how are you and Cas, by the way?” Sam began, apparently not as clueless as Dean initially believed him to be.

“We need some celebratory beers, brother,” he said, determined to ignore any potential Cas-related confrontations. He grabbed the first bottle – popping it open with the silver ring he always wore.

“C’mon, Dean, don’t change the subject,” Sam reprimanded without any real force as he took the bottle. “Everyone suspects it.”

“Suspects what?” Dean circled around the bar again, deciding to stand instead of sit. If anything got uncomfortable, he wanted to be able to retreat into the kitchen.

Sam pulled his signature bitchface as Dean took a swig of beer, glad for the momentary relief from his brother’s eyes as he tipped his head back.

“Dude, your past eight Instagram posts have been selfies of you and Cas going on your ‘Sunday park trips’. Are you dating?”

Dean almost choked on his beer at Sam’s bluntness – I wish, echoed in his mind.

“‘I’m not gay.’” He swallowed down some more of the golden liquid before putting it down a little harder than necessary. “And please… never say selfie again, Samantha.”

Sam gave a slightly irritated sigh and swiped a hand through his floppy hair. Dean considered booking a hair appointment for him as punishment if he didn’t let the Cas thing go.

“I know you aren’t gay, Dean. I have eyes –”

“Huh, really? I had no idea.” Sarcasm dripped heavily from his words.

“– but I think you have a thing for Cas.” A self-satisfied look was all over Sam’s face. He knew he was right and wasn’t afraid to let Dean know it. Trying to come up with some kind of denial that was true was difficult, so Dean chose to down the rest of his drink instead.

“I’ve got a job to do –” Dean picked up the dirty washcloth, face twisting in disgust at the sight of the stained material, “– and you insisting I’m all frilly and queer for Cas is stopping me from doing it.”

The older Winchester knew he’d handed his brother victory on a silver platter, but also knew any attempts at a denial would be completely futile and would result in a way more embarrassing situation. So, he decided to cut his losses and bail out now.

“Alright, then.” Sam drained his beer, happily clunking it on the bar as he stood up. “I better go unpack my stuff. Oh, by the way, I’m staying at your place.”

With a shit-eating grin, Sam strolled out of the bar (without paying, Dean noticed with annoyance), smugness practically radiating from his retreating figure.

*Dammit.*

~*~

Lawrence City was always a masterpiece come nightfall, nothing like New York or LA with its colossal skyscrapers and neon lights, but impressive nonetheless. It used to be an industrial town; most of the buildings were old workhouses or factories. This meant they were lower down, closer together, and mostly concealed in shadow – making it perfect for a vigilante to sneak around.

The Winchesters were scouting the city together once again, mostly going for a test-drive after months apart, and Dean was struggling to keep up with his younger brother. Sam had clearly been doing some kind of training while he was away – he was more agile than normal, climbing up, down, and around like he was freaking Spiderman. Now that he was out of his ratty flannel and baggy jeans, Dean could see the change in his physique. Sam had always been reasonably fit, but now he resembled Thor - the amount of times Dean had said that he’d “willingly let that man screw me” to Cas made the observation that much weirder. Sam was incredibly light on his feet and consistently wary of his surroundings – it dawned on Dean that his brother considered this vigilante business as something very serious.

“Hey, Peter Parker. Slow down a minute,” Dean heaved, watching Sam execute a perfect leap from one building to the next. They were headed towards the hospital, going by rooftop to stay discreet.

“I really think all that cholesterol is catching up with you.” Sam laughed, landing swiftly on his feet, the Doc Martens he wore barely making a sound. Dean was envious of his brother’s sudden stealth.

“When did you get bitten by a radioactive spider?” Dean jumped across the gap, less gracefully than Sam, his logger boots making a loud thump against the concrete. Despite the mask Sam wore, Dean
could see the judging look in his expression.

“Don’t you take gymnastics classes?” Sam remarked. He watched as Dean caught his breath. “Eileen likes boxing and she asked me to join. It really helps keep you light on your feet. Other than that, I’ve been at the gym a lot.” He shrugged, like it was nothing.

Dean smirked, ammunition practically handed to him.

“Man, I bet that turned you on. So fucking whipped.” A fist hit his shoulder jokingly and he was about to initiate a play fight when he was interrupted by a shrill ringtone.

“Sam! What the fuck?” Dean tried to snatch at the object as his brother pulled it out, but he batted any attempts out of the way.

“Hey! It’s not what you think. Someone’s helping me find the drug source.” The younger Winchester hit a few buttons, putting the caller on loud speaker.

“What the fuck, Sam –”

“Oh – bad time? Are you kicking ass right now? I can call back later, I’m actually in the middle of a Buffy marathon.”

The voice rattling out of the phone was female – the kind of voice Dean imagined belonging to a peppy pre-school teacher. He furrowed his brows, glaring at his younger brother.

“No, Charlie, we’re just on our way to the hospital. You got anything else on that lead?” Sam was being downright cryptic and Dean didn’t like it – he swatted at the back of his brother’s head.

“Dude, what the fuck is going on?”

“Calm down, man. This is Charlie Bradbury, she’s an IT major at school and she agreed to help hack into documents to get a lead on this drug thing, okay? Y’know, since Brady was a false one,” Sam explained. “Shoot me, I told someone, but we need this information, Dean. Brady could have given that shit to anyone, we need to stop it.”

Dean sighed. It unnerved him that his brother had swooped into town, seemingly independent with his marriage proposals and organised plans. He absently wondered when Sam stopped being his whiny five-year-old kid brother.

“Are you guys done?” Charlie’s singsong voice interrupted the tense silence that had settled between them – although, Dean realised he was being a bit of a hypocrite. After all, he’d shown Claire his face.

But that was something for another time.

“Yeah… what did you find?” Sam held the phone out between them.

“So, according to the hospital servers, some unidentified drugs were delivered from the port to Lawrence City General today. Normally, that happens quite a lot – privacy and all with clinical trials and whatever – but they didn’t go through any inspection.” They heard laptop keys being tapped rapidly through the speaker.

“They arrived about an hour ago. You’ll have to sneak into the deliveries section.”

Dean glanced up knowingly to meet Sam’s smug smirk.
"That won’t be a problem at all."

The brothers reorganised their journey, making their way to the hospital. Over the ten minutes it took to get there, Charlie had managed to create fake IDs for both of them – the code displayed on their cell phone screens. She had also calculated the best route for the boys to take through the hospital to deliveries without getting caught, and was now beginning to hack into the security cameras.

Dean wasn’t happy with Sam’s deception – but damn could he get used to having a techy sidekick.

Forgoing the bandanna and hoodies by discarding them behind a dumpster in a nearby alleyway, the brothers strolled towards the employees’ entrance just as the night shift began. Entering was easy – all they had to do was hold their cell phones up to the scanner by the door, and they were in.

Sam had set the two of them up with wireless ear pieces linking in with Charlie’s call. In other words, Dean felt like a spy and he was loving it.

Hospital workers flitted quickly around – some dressed, some half-dressed, some eagerly sipping much needed coffee in a corner. To look at least half convincing, the brothers would need some kind of disguise.

“Hey.” Sam tapped Dean’s shoulder, gesturing to the left. A large sign stating a series of locations – most notably ‘LAUNDRY ROOM’, directed them straight ahead. Sam, ever the actor, began rambling about some medical mumbo-jumbo he’d learned God knows where, to which Dean just nodded along, hoping they sounded convincing.

Once they reached the room, they entered inconspicuously, each grabbing some scrubs and a doctor’s coat. They scrambled into the disguises and quickly made their way towards the main building.

“We’re in,” Dean said lowly, finger to his earpiece. Catching Sam’s creased brows and judging expression, he shrugged and offered, “Sorry. I’ve always wanted to say that.”

“No problemo, we’ve all been there,” Charlie interrupted. “Are you near the burns ward yet?”

The brothers stood for a moment, feigning casual conversation as they tried to figure out where they were. The corridor they were in had no signs in sight – it was just long, white, and eerily clean, the odd doctor or two power walking to their respective destinations.

“Wait. I’ve got you on camera. You’re in the general area.”

Feeling a little uneasy, Dean glanced up at the security camera – which was aimed directly at them. Knowing a stranger was watching him was a little… uncomfortable. He pulled at his doctor’s coat absently.

“Okay. Head to your left, I’ll guide you from here… and at least try not to look suspicious, guys.”

Trying to mimic the same thoughtful expressions as the doctors around them, the Winchesters trailed down the corridor guided by Charlie’s voice in their ears.

“Man, I feel like Doctor Sexy,” Dean muttered, glancing approvingly at his brother.

“Dude, you keep insisting you’re not gay, but then you go and say that to me,” Sam remarked, nodding to an unfamiliar doctor who responded similarly – apparently not knowing your employees
was normal.

“So, what? I gotta be gay to like Doctor Sexy?”

“Dean, I’m not sayi-“

“Yes, you-“

“Still in the closet?” Charlie interrupted, acting as a much needed buffer before the conversation blew up into an argument, “I used to try and convince myself I was straight. But then I saw ScarJo, and boy, let me tell you – my life was changed for the better.”

Dean scowled at his brother’s smile at the support from their new sidekick. They made a quick turn into a corridor labelled ‘BURNS WARD’.

This ward was busier than the other corridor, so the brothers remained amiable, indistinguishable from the other doctors – obeying Charlie’s directions until they eventually entered a corridor littered with warning signs; most warned of flammable substances.

According to CCTV, the deliveries room was currently empty; the package they wanted was wrapped in bright green plastic – seems criminals weren’t afraid of making their goods look pretty.

“One of you should go in, and the other should be the lookout. I’ve seen Sam fight, so I think it’s safe to say he should stand outside – he can beat up the baddies.”

“Hey!” Dean protested, earning a glare from Sam – he was being way too loud.

“Sorry. Sam used to hang out with a bunch of stoners, so it just means you’re more reliable around potentially lethal substances.”

Dean turned to his brother with an incredulous expression, but the younger Winchester could barely splutter an explanation before Dean interjected.

“Really? Well, that’s something for share and care later. Right now, I need to get those damn drugs.”

Dean scanned his ID to unlock the door to the deliveries room.

Apparently lights weren’t a necessity when examining medicines because there were no switches, nothing, so Dean tapped on the flashlight on his phone. It didn’t take a whole lot of time to find the package – it’s hard to miss neon-green plastic wrap.

“Yahtzee!” Dean whisper-shouted after a few seconds, scrambling around the other boxes. Someone seriously needed to unbox all their damn mail, he thought.

Dean was surprised to see that the box looked to be the same size as one that a large flat screen TV would come in; there was no way he’d be able to haul it out of the hospital without getting caught.

“Oookay. It looks bigger than I thought – can you open it?”

“Won’t that raise all kinds of alarms? My fingerprints will be all over it and it’ll be pretty damn obvious someone opened it.”

“You’re wearing a hospital coat. See if there’s some gloves in there – people leave things in their pockets all the time.”

Dean huffed, holding his phone between his knees as he fumbled through his pockets. He found a biro and a single plastic glove – it would have to do.
“I got one glove and a pen – what do you want me to do with it?” Dean felt a little strange, seemingly talking to himself in the dark. He wasn’t going to lie, it was unnerving him a little standing in the middle of a room full of unknown drugs.

“Use the pen to rip open the plastic. Then see if you can open up the box. If it’s wrapped with duct tape, it shouldn’t be that hard to get into.” Dean could hear Charlie’s TV in the background – real life heroes weren’t all that interesting, apparently.

The older Winchester did as he was instructed – easily cutting through the thin plastic, tugging it away with his gloved hand. Instead of being duct taped, the box appeared to be glued – tearing it open was an easy task, and once he got in, Dean was met with squares of polystyrene.

Carefully, Dean removed one of the squares, revealing a clear box of syringes – a bunch of images on the front; the most notable being the ‘toxic’ symbol and a black goat with the letter ‘M’ underneath. It wasn’t clear what was inside them, so he opened the smaller box to get a better look.

“The fuck…?” Dean muttered to himself, confused by what he saw. Inside the box, a dozen empty syringes were laid out neatly. It was probably common to get empty syringes delivered, but why would they have so many warnings on them?

“Shit – Dean, watch out!” Charlie yelped through the phone, just as his world went pitch black.

Dean woke up to a sharp jolt of pain sparking down the side of his head. He groaned and touched it gently, feeling a gauze over the wound.

“Dean?” a familiar voice asked.

He hadn’t quite managed to open his eyes yet and his head felt a little heavy. A hand cupped the uninjured side of his face, a sensation Dean definitely didn’t dislike, so he leaned into it. When he finally cracked his eyes open, he was met with the dim light of his front room and Cas’ wide-eyed, worried gaze.

“Hey, Cas,” Dean whispered, relief coursing through his veins. It appeared to be early dawn – the apartment was arranged so that the front room always caught the sunrise. Right now, Cas was sitting on the couch beside his legs, bathed in golden morning light, glasses absent – making the striking blue of his eyes even more intense than usual, dark hair as untameable as ever – sun catching the tips of his hair in a way that cast shadows against his jaw.

For a fleeting moment, Dean was certain he was dreaming (because honestly, who hasn’t dreamed of the love of their life caring for them when in need?), but quickly realised it was, in fact, his reality when a certain overgrown college boy made his presence known.

“Dean, you’re awake,” Sam said, relief in his voice.

Then he gestured towards the redhead beside him.

“This is Charlie – you met her last night, my friend from college, remember? She found you at the bar – after that drunk guy hit you. Do you remember anything?” Sam gave him a barely detectable look, hinting at Dean to go along with the story.

Charlie waved awkwardly, looking between the three of them.

“Uh – kinda. It’s sort of… foggy.” He sat up carefully, disappointed when Cas’ hand slipped from
his face.

Charlie didn’t look like how Dean had imagined – he’d expected a Zooey Deschanel type, but was instead met with a short-haired girl who wore a “What Would Hermione Do?” t-shirt and acid-wash jeans; her Batman Converse also didn’t go unnoticed. He limply raised two and half fingers to wave back at her.

“I’m so sorry, Dean,” she started, her voice sincere and expression guilt-ridden. “I wasn’t really paying attention when I should have been.”

“It’s okay,” Dean replied, shaking his head slightly. “Thanks for finding me, not a lot of people would care about a stranger like that.”

His lips tugged upwards into a small, grateful smile which grew as Sam wrapped a loving arm around his friend. He was at least a foot taller than Charlie, so his long limb practically cradled her like a small child.

“Anyways, it’s like 6am, I should drop Charlie off at her place. I’ll pick up some more painkillers on my way back.” Sam nodded towards his brother and Cas, and the moment Cas turned away, he made an overtly sexual gesture. Dean would have frowned back, but didn’t want to risk opening his wound.

He settled for flipping him off.

Once the door clicked shut, Cas returned to sit beside him.

“I’ve got two Advils left that you need to take. Sam also called Ellen – you’re getting the next few days off. She said something about getting less tips because you wouldn’t be around.” Cas shuffled up to him a little bit more, then leaned around behind him to reach for a glass of water and tablets placed on the end table. Dean was eager to have them, and he enjoyed the care Castiel gave him.

“Huh…” He watched Cas press the two tablets out of the plastic casing, dropping them into the water. “That’s probably the nicest thing she’s said about me since I’ve known her.”

Dean accepted the glass and downed the cloudy liquid, grimacing at the bitter taste, and held the glass in his lap while Cas fiddled with the packet.

“She’s said plenty of nice things about you, you just don’t pay attention,” Cas remarked before changing the subject. “Isn’t Sam dating Eileen? He seems very close to Charlie.”

Dean snorted at the implication, which wasn’t a good idea – it hurt his head to do so. However, it meant Cas began fawning over him again and Dean just didn’t have the heart to push him away.

“Yeah, he’s definitely dating Eileen. I don’t think he’s really Charlie’s type, man,” Dean said, hoping the implication would check in with Cas. His friend’s feather light touch brushed over the gauze, gently peeling it away to examine the injury.

“Oh. Oh. That makes sense. She gave me a speech about Hermione Granger being the most flawless human in existence.”

“Hm. I feel the same about Indiana Jones,” Dean added, too tired and drug-riddled to realise what he’d admitted.

“I don’t know who that is. But I’m fairly sure you don’t feel the same way as Charlie – she also said Hermione was the ‘hottest witch to ever grace the halls of Hogwarts’, whatever that means.”
Dean huffed out a small laugh, wary of hurting himself. Cas held the side of his head and tilted it around slowly so he could inspect the wound with ease. Dean felt his thumb brush carefully around the wound.

“I can’t believe you’ve never seen *Harry Potter* or *Indiana Jones*. Neither of them! You’ve known me since we were fourteen, man.”

Cas pressed the bandage back into place gently, apparently satisfied with how the wound was healing. Fortunately for Dean, he didn’t move away. Instead, his hand just rested in the same position, cradling the back of Dean’s head as they spoke.

“I took the next two days off work – told them I had a family emergency,” Castiel confessed and Dean’s face warmed up significantly at the statement. He didn’t deserve that.

“You didn’t… you didn’t have to do that, Cas.”

Castiel shrugged. "I wanted to."

Dean didn’t know what to say, but Castiel made it easy for him, slipping his hand away and placing it over Dean’s hands, encompassing the glass in his lap. He looked down at the simple touch.

“We should watch a movie,” Cas offered eagerly. It made Dean smile broadly – injury be damned.

“I’d like that,” he murmured in reply into the space between them.

Castiel smiled and stood, taking the glass from Dean’s hand to put it into the kitchen. Meanwhile, Dean straightened on the couch so Cas would have enough space to sit beside him comfortably.

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Sam returned about two hours later – having taken an hour and a half to get to and from Charlie’s house, and another half hour to pick up some painkillers and extra bandages. Entering the apartment quietly, he found his brother and best friend asleep on the couch, the credits of *The Philosopher’s Stone* rolling on the TV. Sam huffed a quiet laugh at the sight of Dean sprawled over Cas, whose arms, in return, were wrapped tightly around Dean’s waist, eyes closed, snuggled together – peacefully asleep.

“Huh. *I’m not in love with Cas*’ my ass, Dean Winchester.”
Chapter Three

Sam had organised a surprise meet-up with Charlie once Dean’s head had cleared up.

After he’d blacked out, Sam had clocked the guy who had smacked Dean in the head with a pipe – then proceeded to drop the unconscious man off at the very hospital they’d been intending to loot.

Charlie, who had officially been dubbed the new ‘technical genius’ on their apparently expanding superhero team, had quickly identified the man as Gordon Walker, a cop who had recently joined the LCPD after a messy divorce.

Dean, always eager to keep as many people away from danger as possible, disapproved of Charlie joining their late-night shenanigans.

“Sam, no! That Gordon guy knows our faces. He could know what we do. He’s probably going to leak our identities and then she’ll end up in jail – or worse – because of your dumbass decisions!” he heatedly protested.

“Charlie deleted all the CCTV footage and replaced it with stuff from earlier in the day! There’s no proof we were even there, Dean!” Sam took a sip of his morning coffee, the action done angrily, and if Dean hadn’t been angry himself he would have laughed.

“Fingerprints, Sam! My DNA is all over that room!”

The moment was interrupted by a sharp knock on the door of his and Cas’ apartment. Currently working an engagement photoshoot, Cas was booked up all day – meaning Sam’s impromptu ‘team meeting’ could go on undisturbed.

The younger Winchester simply rolled his eyes before striding across the hallway to let the new team player in.

“Yeesh. Did I walk in on a cat fight?” was the first thing Charlie said. Trying to stay bitter at her was going to be difficult – she was clad in a black t-shirt and a pair of Marvel themed leggings; someone with such excellent taste couldn’t be hated.

Sam laughed awkwardly, Dean remained silent, and Charlie dumped two duffel bags on the kitchen counter. This meeting is just peachy, Dean thought bitterly to himself as he took a seat.

“Okay, so Sam told me you guys are just running around in hoodies and bandannas. Hate to break it to you, but that’s really not a practical superhero outfit. Neither is skin tight latex… it might make Natasha Romanoff look fantastic, but – anyway.” Charlie coughed awkwardly, unzipping one of the duffel bags and taking out the contents, a mess of what looked like a mixture of red and green biker outfits.

“Charlie – I think you’ve gone a bit too far on the whole ‘hero’ thing – ” Sam began, looking warily at the pile of fabric.

“If you’re gonna go ahead and fight the bad guys, you need to look good and be protected. I kind of stalked your wardrobes while Dean was knocked out the other day – sorry, not sorry – and got your sizes. These babies should fit like a glove.”

Trying so hard to internalise the cringing feeling he felt towards Charlie’s declaration, Dean accepted the forest green material that was flung into his lap. He didn’t even think the colour green was all that
great – the idea of prancing around the rooftops in it was less than exhilarating.

Dean was relieved to see his brother eyeing up the new disguise in a similar way.

“What are you waiting for?” The redhead looked a little too excited on their behalf. “Try them on!”

Briefly making eye contact, the two brothers took their assigned outfits and headed towards their respective rooms.

~*~

During his time off work, Dean had managed to get his room into a somewhat organised state - mostly because Cas had been pestering him about mold and the excessive amount of… magazines that were laying around. Once he had figured out how to assemble the outfit, he could actually look at himself in the mirror before having to, undoubtedly, give Charlie a full-on model-catwalk of the entire suit.

Though it looked like leather, the outfit itself was supple and easy to move in – proven when Dean decided to give it a test drive by launching a few punches and a roundhouse kick at an imaginary enemy. He was fairly sure it was an actual racing-biker outfit – bar the hood, which seemed to have been an addition sewn into the collar.

What really finished off the disguise was the mask – something Dean flat out refused to put on.

Mustering up the courage to withstand the ridicule he’d get from Sam, he opened his bedroom door with a creak, slowly stepping into the light of the combined kitchen and front room. Almost instantly, he was met with a delighted yelp.

“Holy crap – I knew my cosplay skills would come in handy one day! The hood looks great, the Green Arrow vibe totally suits you!”

Though he understood the reference, it didn’t make Dean feel any better.

Charlie was practically vibrating with excitement as the other Winchester exited the guest room, actually smiling and wearing a very similar looking outfit. A scarlet mask was being lowered over his eyes as he walked up to his brother.

“Dude. I got your hero name – Tampon Man.” Dean threw a teasing grin at his sibling who seemingly didn’t appreciate the joke. “No? Doesn’t quite have the same ring as The Righteous Man, I understand.”

“Hey. No fighting in front of your extremely awesome costume designer.” Charlie scurried up to Sam, making a few adjustments to the hood and mask before humming with satisfaction. “Dean, put on the mask.”

The mask was hanging limp in Dean’s hand. He wasn’t keen on the whole costume-party getup and the mask just made it seem even more over the top – what criminal would take a guy in a shitty Zorro mask seriously?

To satisfy Charlie – who was pulling some killer puppy eyes – Dean placed the mask over his eyes and strapped up the back, making sure it was comfortable and secure. It dug into his cheekbones slightly, but other than that, it fit rather well.

“Holy smokes, Batman. This is so cool… You guys look like you walked straight out of a convention.” She promptly tugged her iPhone out of her pocket, skipping across the room to stand
between the two brothers – Dean wondered what she was doing, then saw her open the camera app.

“Are you seriously trying to take a picture of us right now?” He tried to grab the phone from Charlie’s small hand, but she batted it away. “Can’t someone hack you and get that?”

“Hey. Even if they do, you have masks on. I’ll just claim to be a crazy fan.” The redhead held the phone up, Sam briefly frowning at the Pikachu shaped phone case.

“Well, you ain’t wrong,” Dean muttered under his breath, letting his mouth curve into a barely-there smile as Charlie snapped a few photos. Sam suddenly blew out a little puff of air and a small laugh.

“If Cas was here we could have had a real photoshoot, huh, Dean?” He pulled down his hood, his hair already a massive tangle beneath it. “I’m sure you’d like that.”

Dean simply flipped him the bird in response.

~*~

After the ordeal with Charlie – which consisted of hacking, pizza and no real progress whatsoever – she and Sam had headed out to the Roadhouse, leaving Dean behind to get ready for Cas’ office party that evening. He was nervous – many people often mistook them for a couple, and with his especially heightened feelings, he wasn’t sure he’d be able to dismiss it with a few witty jokes and a sarcastically flirty eyebrow raise for much longer.

Dean was satisfied that his red flannel and slim denim jeans were appropriate for a casual office shindig. When he’d asked, Cas had stated his colleagues were more reminiscent of BuzzFeed employees than stick-up-the-ass journalists – a small comfort, considering formal suit-and-tie events made Dean feel out of place.

Dean didn’t have much else to do as Cas got ready, so he resorted to lounging on the lumpy sofa with his laptop, researching Kevlar—which was what some elements of his new superhero gear was made from. Since he didn’t really pay attention to the few lectures on materials he’d gotten in Product Design classes at community college, he had no real knowledge about how the material worked. Though he wouldn’t admit it to Sam or Charlie, he was curious.

As most people do, Dean got a little lost in the internet – eventually, he ended up watching YouTube videos on bulletproof vests being shot at with different calibre weapons. Cas chose to enter the front room at that time, clearing his throat quietly to grab Dean’s attention.

An upward glance revealed that Cas looked like an absolute dream; Dean did a double take at what he was seeing, setting the laptop aside gently so he wouldn’t drop it. How Cas hadn’t dated a single person in his life, Dean had absolutely no clue. He was clad in a fitting pair of black jeans, a pastel-blue button-up with just the right amount of buttons undone, and a charcoal-grey, form-fitting blazer – Cas looked… amazing. His hair was dishevelled beautifully in the way Dean affectionately called ‘sex hair’; his shirt was tucked in neatly, nipping in at his hips and defining his shoulders.

Dean squirmed discreetly, lips parting, and readjusted his own jeans.

“How do I look?” Cas asked, nervousness seeping into his movements in the way he smoothed down his jeans and tugged down the bottom of the smart jacket. He moved his arms out slightly, outfit on display, looking expectantly at Dean. The motion caused the blazer to open and reveal just how goddamn fitting that shirt was.

Dean cleared his throat. “Not bad, Cas,” he commented with an air of coolness, brushing his hand across his face in an attempt to hide a blush. “Makin’ me feel a little underdressed, though.”
Cas examined Dean briefly, sapphire eyes scanning him from head to toe in that slightly intimidating way they always did. Dean could feel the hairs on the back of his neck stand on end at the obvious examination.

“You look great.” Cas’ gaze shifted downwards to his feet, the traces of a smile playing at his lips. Then, he glanced up and nodded towards the laptop.

“What are you looking at?”

Dean didn’t like the subject change and was momentarily speechless, not entirely sure how to respond.

“Nothing important.” He quickly closed the Chrome window and flipped the laptop shut. Cas crossed his arms.

“Can’t I know? Or was it porn?” The sentence came across as light-hearted, but Dean could tell Cas seemed a little annoyed at his vagueness.

“No, man. I just don’t have to tell you everything, y’know?” Dean realised what he’d said was a little too harsh the moment it left his mouth. He was unpleasantly rewarded with a puzzled look on Cas’ part.

“We’ve known each other for eleven years, Dean. There’s nothing to hide.” Cas perched on the arm of the sofa, his higher level a little daunting for Dean, considering the circumstances.

“Well… there isn’t, is there?”

By the look in his eyes, Cas definitely suspected something was going on.

“Ugh, man,” Dean grumbled. “I don’t want you to Dr. Phil me.”

“Dean, for the past five months or so you’ve been acting weird, going out a lot at night. I know you aren’t always working at Ellen’s like you say you are.”

Five months ago was when Dean had taken on the vigilante role.

Dean’s teeth sunk into his bottom lip anxiously – he needed a good excuse for Cas’ questioning. It was either come out as a hero or come out as…

“I’m bisexual,” Dean blurted out.

The words hung in the air for a moment. Cas’ expression was totally blank with what could only be surprise; a small raise of the brows accompanied by parting lips.

Dean averted his gaze, cheeks heating.

“I’ve been going out late because… distracting myself was better than thinking about it, okay? But I went and talked to… the community.” Dean waved his hands around in a collective gesture, feeling like he was offending every single human who didn’t identify as heterosexual.

“Uh. And then I figured it out.”

Dean coughed awkwardly when the silence between them became too much.

“I wondered why you hadn’t dated for a while. I’m guessing this is the reason?” Cas finally responded quietly, staring at the coffee table instead of looking at Dean.
“You could say that.”

Another silence.

It was broken eventually, by Cas snorting out a laugh.

“I kind of suspected a long time ago.” He clamped a hand down on Dean’s shoulder. “Even though I don’t know who Indiana Jones is, your comments definitely didn’t go unnoticed. Also--” Cas pointed at the various posters that were stuck on the apartment walls, “- don’t think I didn’t notice all your posters of conventionally attractive men. Believe it or not, I’m not actually as oblivious as you think.”

“I dunno, Cas.” Dean smirked, heart feeling lighter. “You seem to be pretty oblivious about everything else.”

Cas swatted him playfully on the head, then remembered his friend had been injured a few days earlier.

“Shit – sorry!” He gently stroked his fingertips along Dean’s temple, his expression guilt-ridden.

Dean was ready to bite back something elusively flirtatious, but instead allowed himself to revel in the moment. It was nice, Cas’ fingers warm and careful against his skin. They paused at Dean’s jaw; blue eyes twinkling in the low light, he looked a little marvelled at something. Despite the quiet between them, Dean didn’t feel a shred of awkwardness – until Cas’ eyes focused on his slightly parted lips.

“Shouldn’t we be leaving?” Dean spoke a little too fast and a little too loudly, when the staring got to be too much.

“Oh… Oh! Yeah. You drive there, I’ll drive back?” Cas briskly stood up and swiped a hand through his hair, mussing it up even more.

“So I can get wasted? Fuck yeah.”

~*~

The office party was a much bigger scene than Dean had imagined. Usually, the companies Cas worked for were the kind of quirky and independent ones that got a fifth of the amount of readers as the mainstream papers – this one was obviously not one of those.

For the first hour or so, people had been schmoozing Cas for discounts on photos or for him to work the odd favour for them – to all of which he replied that he was totally booked up for commissions. Rightly so, Dean thought to himself each time, because Cas is a freaking amazing photographer and artist. He’s too good for you.

A few of Cas’ colleagues had eyed Dean with wariness – notably a woman named Hannah, who Cas had mentioned before as being one of his close friends; her eyes were a similar piercing shade to Cas’. Over the course of the evening, Dean had come to discover that they also shared the same knife-sharp glare.

Music pounded and the alcohol was plentiful as the overcrowded office space heated up, though Dean suddenly didn’t feel like drinking. He always joked about being an alcohol lover, but he hadn’t had anything since his encounter with Gordon Walker. It had only been a few days, though Dean considered that to be a long break for him – and Cas certainly noticed.

“Thought you wanted to get wasted, Winchester.” He had to lean into Dean’s ear to be heard, sliding
his free arm around Dean’s waist as he clutched a glass of something fruity-looking. His voice was rather slurred. The alcohol was getting to him; Cas was a total fucking lightweight and was either a cuddly or angry drunk – there was no in between.

“I dunno, man. I don’t wanna risk hurting myself even more. Also, I don’t think you’ll be allowed to drive in your state.” Cas clearly hadn’t heard a word of what Dean said as he left his glass on top of a filing cabinet, lazily embracing Dean. He inhaled sharply at the sudden close contact, knowing that literally everyone could see.

By the looks of it though, everyone was too wasted to care. Very BuzzFeed, indeed.

“How important is lipstick to you, Dean?” Cas garbled dangerously close to Dean’s neck; hot breath brushed over his skin, making it tingle involuntarily.

“How... do you know you’re... bisexual?” he asked, eyes narrowing in genuine curiosity.

Dean stuck a plastic cup under the dispenser.

“’Cause I’ve liked girls and boys. That’s the point.” Boy, singular he really meant.

Cas hummed drunkenly, grabbing the cup before it was even full and downing its contents.

“I’ve just liked boys.”

Dean’s head whipped around in shock at the alcohol-induced admission. There was no way whatsoever in the eleven years they’d been friends that this was the first time Cas could have ever confessed to being gay. He was ready to bombard this oddly honest, drunk Cas with rapid-fire questions – but was interrupted by a loud pop and pitch-blackness drawing in around them as the music fell silent.

Dean’s ears rung with the absence of the blaring music, which just made the situation that more ominous. Varying exclamations of confusion echoed throughout the room, and Dean spun around helplessly in the dark, reaching out for Cas only to grab at air, until someone slammed him right into the wall.

Their arm pressed sharply into his neck, trapping a gasp of surprise in his throat.

“Righteous Man....”

As the words were breathed into his ear, he felt nauseous, his stomach flipping like when he went upside down on a rollercoaster. The voice was a female, a total contradiction – ditzy sounding, but speaking lethal words.

As she leaned closer, Dean could feel something cold against his neck – the girl was wearing glasses. Night vision goggles.

The moment he came to this conclusion, he heard a louder yelp to his left.
“Dean!”

That was all he needed to sharply kick the woman right in her knee – she cursed loudly, and Dean could hear her topple in front of him out of shock. Without hesitation, he knelt down and felt around her general location until he managed to nab the glasses.

The voice had been Cas, and Dean was fuming.

He knew he didn’t have much time – once the goggles were on, he could clearly see exactly where he needed to go. There were two options: stairs or window – which would get him to his car first?

Naturally, he chose the fastest option: the window.

Dean’s suit was in a duffle bag in the back of his car, along with a couple of weapons and equipment he’d taken the liberty of stealing from his dad’s old hunting and rock climbing kits – along with a few additions. Namely, a grenade launcher.

Although Dean seriously wanted to use it against whoever dared to take Cas from him, his common sense told him it was a really ridiculous idea.

He vaulted up on top of the printer and scanner, eliciting a shriek of fear from the party-goers standing close to him. To his dismay, it was double glazed and reinforced – meaning he had to waste precious time unlocking and opening it.

Adrenaline made the fiddly task difficult, hands slightly shaky, but Dean managed to unlatch the window and hauled it upwards, surveying the drop. It wasn’t bone-shatteringly high – maybe 12 feet maximum – but Dean wasn’t keen on risking a sprain that could potentially hinder his mission to save his best friend.

An idea struck him, and he leaned back into the office.

Dean looked down at the wall, searching for a plug socket – happy to see there was one only a few feet away from the printer, clearly its power source. Roughly shoving past the clueless office workers, he snatched up the wire, glad to see it was at least 7 feet long.

Dean wrapped his hands around the wire and flung himself out of a window.

He didn’t anticipate how slippery the wire would be and only managed to stop his momentum by practically cutting off the blood flow in his hand. Hanging precariously in mid-air was something Dean did often; he used the rings whenever he did gymnastics training.

Now only subjected to a small drop, Dean landed stealthily, bones bearing the weight of the drop once his feet met the ground.

Knowing he had absolutely no time to waste, he sprinted across the car park, unlocking the Impala’s trunk hastily and snatching up the duffle bag. CCTV could be dealt with later by Charlie, so Dean changed right in the open.

“Time to see if this piece of shit costume works,” he murmured to himself as he began stripping away his party clothes in the open parking lot and suiting up in his vigilante gear.

With an array of guns, zip lines, and knives strapped to his suit, Dean felt like a government assassin – he was sure his mind set was similarly, too, considering some assholes had just taken his best friend.
Not entirely sure where to start looking, Dean debated calling Charlie or Sam, but knew they’d be plastered to the floor from the amount of alcohol they undoubtedly consumed. He huffed loudly, deciding to start with the stairwell.

A good idea, Dean realised, when he literally walked in on a small group of men dragging Cas out into the back of the office block. He was clearly conscious but confused as he struggled in their grip; a black sack had been tied around his head and for some reason, an old tax accountant coat was wrapped around him.

Dean whipped out a gun that was loaded with tranquiliser darts – intended for animals, but he wasn’t all too bothered if they did something worse, no-kill policy be damned. The blood rushing through his veins at the sight of Cas in danger was enough to make him careless. Without hesitation, he fired three of them straight at the men before they could even react. The only thing that covered their faces was a pair of crappy glasses and their necks were totally bare.

All the darts hit their targets and it only took a second or two for the drug to settle in. They passed out almost instantly, and nearly dropped Cas in the process.

Cas, still slightly inebriated, groaned under the mask. Dean tore it off, relieved to him see him in good condition save a small welt beginning to form on Cas’ forehead and a trail of dried blood staining the bridge of his nose. The situation could have been so much worse, but he tried not think about that.

“Nice coat, Constantine.” He purposely enunciated his words and raised the pitch of his voice a little more, drowning out the lazy drawl he’d developed over time. Choosing not tell Cas he was the Righteous Man was a big risk at this point – clearly the new enemy knew exactly who he was and how to tug at his heartstrings.

“It’s not mine… It’s Michael’s.” Michael was the guy who ran the newspaper, the only worker who actually took anything at work seriously.

The drunken slur of Cas’ speech had disappeared; clearly the unexpected kidnapping had sped up the sobering process.

“Can you walk?” Dean asked, just as the door to the back alley swung open – the woman he’d stolen the glasses from held a silver gun, teeth bared, and furiously fired a shot before Dean could even blink.

Fortunately for him, her blind-rage had screwed with her posture – the bullet ended up embedding itself in a concrete wall behind them.

“Fuck,” Dean uttered, quickly snatching a knife from his boot and flinging it at the woman. It hit her in the thigh – which was only covered in a pair of combat pants – but Dean knew she was only weakened momentarily. He didn’t hesitate to toss Cas over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes and began clambering up the stairs.

“Don’t you dare barf down my back,” Dean hissed, heading towards the roof.

Dean had underestimated just how exhausting it would be to carry a six-foot former-marathon runner up four flights of stairs. Fortunately for him, just as the ache became unbearable, he reached the rooftop.
The hero laid Cas on the ground carefully, treating him like he was made of glass, then proceeded to think of a rapid getaway plan.

“What are we gonna do?” Cas groaned out, clutching his head. Dean knew his friend probably felt nauseous from the head injury and excessive movement – he needed some medical help.

“Blondie’s probably called up her kidnapper friends to come catch us.” It hurt his throat to change his voice, but it was working – Cas was looking at him like he was a total stranger. With a huff, Dean unzipped his jacket to grab his phone.

The panic was settling in his mind too quickly, any attempt at figuring out a logical plan to escape and get Cas some help was quickly becoming futile, so he called Charlie. Unfortunately, the chances of Charlie answering depended on whether Ellen had given her and Sam the luxury of discounted vodka shots.

After a few rings, Dean almost gave up, but then he was met with the familiar bustle and yelling of a bar crowd.

“Dean? It’s Sam. Charlie’s kind of… not available.”

He sounded sober enough.

“Hey, uh, it’s… the Righteous Man.” Dean winced as he stated his codename, trying hard not to reveal his identity to Cas.

“Why the hell are you talking like that –”

“There was an attack. I’d really appreciate it if you could help a guy out.” He tried to hide his annoyance, and when he turned to his friend, Cas was pulling his confused baby face; brows creased, nose scrunched, blue eyes wide with apprehension and something akin to fear. Dammit.

Dean lowered his voice to an irritated whisper, taking a few strides away. “Cas is fucking hurt, man. Hurry up.”

“Oh – right – shit. I’ll come over… right now.” Dean could hear protests from his brother’s end of the line – most of them consisting of ‘watch where you’re going!’ with an array of drunken expletives. Although the extra help would be all merry and good, Dean was working with a limited time frame.

“I need a quick escape from a rooftop. I’ve got Dad’s old climbing equipment – any ideas, college boy?”

Sam paused for a few seconds.

“I don’t have that much time!” Dean snapped.

“You got the grappling hook?” Sam replied, sounding much clearer since he’d apparently left the bar.

 Feeling a little shaken from the pressure, Dean searched his supplies belt and tried not to jump for joy when he saw the grappling hook attached along with a long line of rope.

“Yeah, rope, too.”

“Okay. This is a shot in the dark, but do you have that mini crossbow on you?”
Dean knew he hadn’t added that to his arsenal, considering it was only mini for giants like Sam. It was a pain in the ass to haul around for the average-size human.

“No.” He resisted adding any snark, not wanting to waste time.

“You’re gonna have to abseil down. Call the police, call an ambulance, it won’t look suspicious on your phone since you’re a party attendee. Good luck, man, I gotta go - I need to drive over.”

Sam hung up, and Dean instantly began to set up his method of escape until Cas called him.

“Hey. Hey! I-I need to call Dea- my friend. I don’t know where he is. He came with me to party, he could be hurt or-or… worse.”

The two men stood at the edge of the roof, looking down at the parking lot below. If either of them fell, it could be fatal.

“If he’s not okay, I will kill you.” Castiel remarked quietly, looking down at the drop worriedly. Dean could do nothing but smile in amusement. He chose not to reply to Cas’ threat.

“If it’s gonna work. You’re gonna need to hold onto me, I’m gonna pass this rope through my belt, and we’re gonna abseil down. If you fall, you die. Capiche?” It hurt him inside to be so
harsh, but they had no time to waste.

“Yeah.” Cas watched as Dean passed the rope through his belt, letting the slack fall to the ground below.

“Okay, Constantine. Piggy-back time.” He turned around, feeling a buzz of something electric shoot through him as Cas sheepishly wrapped his arms around Dean’s neck, hauling himself up onto his back.

“Put your legs around my waist, and hold onto the straps on my jacket,” Dean instructed, biting back a yelp as Cas’ foot sharply brushed his crotch. Jesus, if Cas ever found out he was the Righteous Man, Dean was gonna give him a real big lecture about sensitivity.

“This is gonna be the worst bit – I’m gonna step over onto the wall, and I might drop suddenly when I get started. So… hold on me tight.”

Cautiously, Dean let the rope tighten around his hand, holding the slack with the other – having to belay himself was one his least favourite things about climbing. Thank God his dad had been weirdly obsessed with nature and hunting, or Dean would have no idea how to do any of these things.

As predicted, Dean dropped a little bit as he leaned back – causing Cas to yelp in his ear, similarly to a scared kitten. Despite the dire situation, Dean had to swallow down a laugh at the adorable sound.

Pacing down the wall with a grown man on his back was one of the scariest thing he’d done to date. Whenever he fought bad guys with Sam, he knew the guy was skilled enough to fend for himself – this was not the case with Cas. Not only was Dean responsible for his own life, but also for the guy he loved.

Damn. Heroes have sucky lives.

His boots scraped against the brick walls, the extra-grip soles stopping him from sliding around. Dean silently thanked Charlie for the costume, knowing his worn-down logger boots would have been of no use whatsoever tonight.

The two men had descended the majority of the wall when their attackers spilled out on the roof, causing a ruckus from the amount of noise they made. There were multiple questioning yells – nobody knew where the Righteous Man had disappeared.

Peering behind him was a task, but Dean saw the roof of a red Prius beneath him, and happily landed on it with a dull clang of metal.

“We’re safe,” Cas mumbled, as if trying to reassure himself. He climbed off Dean’s back, but didn’t let go of his shoulders for a moment, steadying himself. “Thank you.”

Dean leapt off the car, holding out his hand to support his friend. Cas took his hand, joining him on solid ground – landing close enough for Dean to feel his breath on his face. The mask seemed to work – not a shred of recognition flashed across Cas’ face.

Dean didn’t know if he was disappointed or relieved.

“It’s okay – I got you.” Dean murmured into the space between them, feeling heady at their sheer proximity.

He watched Castiel’s gaze track over his face, a twitch of intense curiosity displayed by the slight crease between his brows. There was a familiarity here and he was sure Cas could feel it. The
amount of times they’d looked at each other – over a bowl of popcorn on movie night, helping each
other study for finals, exchanging a shared teasing look when Sam had expressed interest in a girl,
over a beer when either of them had had a shitty day at work.

It was too much and it was too familiar. Cas would find out, Dean was sure.

But not tonight – glass smashed loudly and it broke them apart.

“‘I need to go, they’re here for me.’” He was reluctant to let go of Cas’ hand, but he didn’t want to risk
Cas getting hurt any further.

“Wait! I want to know who you are.” Cas reached for Dean’s hood before he could react, and it fell
back against his shoulders. Knowing the situation could only get worse, Dean immediately shoved
past Cas and sprinted across the car park, hood bouncing against his back.

~*~

After calling the emergency services, Dean sent a quick text to Charlie to alert her of the necessary
erasure of CCTV and quickly changed in the Impala. He stepped out just as two police cars and an
ambulance swerved onto the scene, sirens as deafening as ever.

Dean noticed Cas sitting on the stone wall outside the offices, looking a little dazed; his adopted
trenchcoat was gone.

A medic and a cop were talking to Cas, probably surveying the damage. Once the cop left, the medic
hung around a little longer – tending to Cas’ injuries before heading back to the ambulance to get
something.

“Cas!” Dean called once she was gone, running towards his friend. He needed to authentically look
as if he’d been wandering around outside, playing the one lucky guy who managed to escape the
crime scene.

“Dean – I… I got taken – The Righteous Man – he saved me… I – where were you?” Cas reached
out towards his friend, snatching the sleeves of his flannel, eyes wide.

“Shh, buddy. Take a breath, why don’t you?” Dean eyed Cas’ injuries, placing his hands on the side
of his face in a panic. “I managed to sneak out and call the cops.”

Cas closed his eyes for a moment, making the effort to inhale deeply.

“Good thing that guy saved you, huh?” he started, taking his hands away to shove them deep into his
pockets. “I almost lost my best friend tonight.” Though his tone was light, Cas opened his eyes,
raising his head to meet his friend’s gaze.

“I’m glad, too, Dean.” With a sigh that could be heard rattling in his still frail lungs, Cas sat back
down on the wall, gesturing for his friend to join. Cas shuffled along the damp slate until his thigh
pressed against Dean’s, and he latched his nimble fingers around his wrist.

All the blood in Dean’s head instantly drained to his feet as he felt Cas remove his hand from his
pocket, instead entwining it within his own. Dean’s mouth began flopping open like a dying
goldfish’s, eager to say something, anything, but he was interrupted.

“Dean – don’t say anything. Not right now.”

Years of brutality in boxing rings and gymnasiums had made Dean’s fingertips rough, starkly
contrasting Cas’ soft ones that seemed to soothe the gradual swelling of his knuckles. When Cas had asked, Dean said he’d clocked a guy in the face when making his great escape – a seemingly acceptable excuse for Cas.

Butterflies danced wildly in Dean’s stomach as he felt the weight of Cas’ head on his shoulder. He fidgeted around a bit, trying to get comfortable. Dean could hear him breathing heavily, a giveaway that he was thinking hard about something.

Dean dared to take a quick glance at their hands, beaming goofily at the sight, heart running around in ridiculous circles in his chest.

“I thought I was going to die tonight,” Cas whispered, which instantly wiped the smile from Dean’s face.

“I – I thought the last memory I’d have of you would be how… how terrified you were when I got dragged away. I didn’t want that.” The grip on his knuckles tightened as Dean felt a hot teardrop land on his thumb.

“Hey.” Dean did something he thought he would never dare to do, and cupped his free hand beneath Cas’ lightly stubbled chin, forcing him to look him in the eye. “You’re here. No more ‘what ifs’.”

Ironically, Dean felt like that kind of advice could have been aimed at him.

So he took it, too.

Despite the chill that hovered ominously in the early summer-night air, Dean felt inexplicably warm as his fingers gripped Cas’ jaw. Chewing his bottom lip for a brief moment, Dean debated the weight of the situation, then thought ‘fuck it’, as his gaze flicked downwards towards Cas’ lips.

In the little light that was provided by the flashing of the ambulance and cop cars, Cas looked …beautiful. Messy hair (that was tameable, if Cas chose to), the wound on his forehead that starkly contrasted his soft skin and wide blue eyes, oh God, the eyes; so open and accepting, fanned over by long, dark lashes that he was sure he would feel brush against his own skin if he leaned in a little more.

The darkness obviously didn’t mask his staring, as Cas was doing the exact same thing – the atmosphere around them suddenly seemed compressed, and it felt like someone had injected a bucket-full of caffeine straight into Dean’s bloodstream; his heart pounded erratically, and he was weak in the face of his desires.

Though every fibre of common sense he possessed screamed ‘no’, his heart was whispering ‘yes’ as he took a chance and pressed his lips to his best friend’s.

Dean had had his fair share of kisses, some great, some not so much, but none were ever fuelled by years and years of built-up feelings and intense longing.

For the first time ever, he was fuelled by pure love.

Surprise initially jarred Dean’s emotions, but as he felt his friend kiss back, a kind of happiness he’d never experienced in his entire life hit him like a truck, making him cling to Cas even more; angling his head so he could encompass the entire spectrum of his emotions about this boy into one press of their lips.

Movie kisses can suck my dick, he thought proudly, this is the best kiss of all time.
Then, it all fell to pieces.

Cas jerked away a lot faster than Dean expected, his eyes still teary with the overwhelming amount of emotion.

In that moment, Dean was so close to telling Cas he was the Righteous Man, that he had saved Cas. But he swallowed it down, because suddenly Cas was standing up and on the verge of hyperventilating.

“You – you used me!” he heaved out, his back to Dean.

“What – what – no! Dude, this has nothing to do with me saying I was bi earlier –”

Cas rubbed roughly at his eyes with his knuckles, and Dean could see his shoulders shaking as he started to cry.

“Dean! You didn’t even ask for permission! That was meant to be for someone… Someone I – oh, fuck.” He marched away, voice thick with frustration, despite the fact that the medics had probably insisted he stick around to get a check-over. Dean immediately leapt up, a lick of rage and a sea of confusion bubbling in his chest.

He hadn’t misinterpreted the signs… had he?

“You kissed me back, Cas!” he counteracted, catching up with his friend’s long strides. “You can’t tell me you didn’t want that! You fucking kissed me back!”

His tone had roughened to the point of a growl when Cas swung around to look Dean right in the face – his cheeks were soaked with tears; his pupils dilated with red-hot anger.

“Well… you didn’t exactly give me time to push you away!” Cas stammered, voice breaking slightly. Dean could tell Cas knew his argument was weak, which just made him even more confused. To avoid any more conflict, Cas stomped away, blazer flapping.

This time, Dean didn’t bother to stop him, frustration and sheer confusion halting his tongue.

“What the fuck…” he murmured, watching Cas walk away, leaving him in the dark, heart in pieces.
Chapter Four

Sam arrived at the crime scene twenty minutes after Cas had stormed off, hopping out of his borrowed yellow Beetle from Charlie the minute he spotted Dean pacing up and down the office carpark. He strode up to his brother, worried and clueless as to what the situation was, and placed a hand on his shoulder, visibly bringing Dean out of his thoughts.

“Is Cas okay?” was the first question out of his mouth, almost expecting the worst from how devastated his brother looked. Dean shook his head, grateful for the hold Sam had on him – it was diminishing the anxiety that was trying to bubble up in his chest.

“I kissed him,” Dean confessed, far too quickly and far too quietly, then exhaled deeply.

Sam had suspected for years that Dean was in love with Cas – probably even before Dean knew himself. No matter where they were or who they were surrounded by, they only had eyes for each other – even when his brother was dating Lisa. Dean was in love even at that time… but not with his girlfriend.

It was also pretty obvious Cas felt the same way.

Lisa was one of the smartest people Sam had ever met; it didn’t take her very long to realise she was second-best in Dean’s eyes. Dean broke up with her before she could knock some sense into him (and maybe knock his lights out for leading her on in the process).

However, now was not a time for teasing his brother about silly crushes – something had happened, and Dean never admitted when he was upset unless it was about something important.

“He went on about how I… took something from him. He wasn’t happy, Sam.” Dean’s eyes stayed glued to the ground, his boot scraping the concrete restlessly. “I’m pretty sure those fuckers in there had something to do with Gordon. Th-they knew who I was – they took Cas to try and hurt me. He isn’t safe anymore, Sammy.”

Despite the urge to ask what exactly had happened, Sam let his brother continue.

Venting would be more beneficial for Dean; pent-up emotions and crime-fighting was a deadly combination.

“I think I’m in –” Dean stopped abruptly, swallowing his words.

Sam inclined his head to catch his brother’s eye, a hint of suspicion in his eyes. “What is it?”

*I think I’m in love with him.* The phrase ghosted over Dean’s lips for a few seconds, but he choked them down. If he said it, it would be real; his heart on his sleeve, there for all the world to see.

There was no coming back from that.

Everything would be different.

No.

This way was safer.

Sam knew just enough, so it could wait.
Dean cleared his throat and blinked back the tears forming in his eyes.

“I need a drink,” he concluded briskly, looking up at Sam, a clench in his jaw and a resolute plea in his gaze for his brother to lay off the questions.

Sam wasn’t insensitive, he simply nodded and gestured towards the garish car, despite the fact that it was clear that he knew precisely what Dean had wanted to say.

“Wanna join me and Charlie at the Roadhouse? Ellen gave us discounts.”

Dean smiled, a quiet gratitude in his expression.

“Sounds like a plan.”

~*_~

For the rest of that week, Cas had been “busy.” Suddenly, he seemed to be loaded with commissions, going out before Dean woke up and purposely coming home while Dean was at the Roadhouse. Even on Sunday, the day they had reserved for going to the park together every week for months, Cas insisted he was swamped with work and had locked himself in his room.

So, Dean went to the park by himself.

His world felt dreary, despite the fact that the sun was beaming brilliantly, highlighting all the vibrant shades of green in the world. Children ran around in their bathing suits, cackling and shrieking as they shot water at each other with tacky plastic weapons; a dog chased around after them, delighted at all the action even with their father yelling at them to be careful.

Dean huffed amusedly.

He ended up at the bench built in memory of Cas’ father – noticing someone was sitting there as he strolled up to it. Hair tumbling past her shoulders in perfect curls, Claire Novak was sitting on the bench, tapping at her phone. The cross necklace was still hanging from her neck.

“Hey.” Dean’s voice was coarse; he sounded miserable. Claire frowned at him when she looked up from her phone.

“What’s got your panties in a twist?” Though the comment was sarcastic, it had an edge of concern to it. Dean sat down next to her, then swiped a hand roughly across his three-day stubble.

“Boy problems,” he deadpanned. Claire huffed a laugh. It was nice to see her smile, even when it contrasted with her grunge appearance.

A silence settled between them for a few long seconds – they barely knew each other, but both knew important things about one another at the same time. Not to mention that there was a seven-year age difference; onlookers must have thought something odd was going on.

“I… I need your help again,” she began, unusually hesitant. Dean had been distracted by nothing in particular, and turned to face her.

Claire brought up her phone screen, displaying an article:

**MISSING:** Alexis Anne Jones, female, 18 years of age, former student of Lawrence City High School. Last seen: Thursday evening walking past Sunset Point Bakery.
If you have any information, please contact Lawrence City Police Department immediately.
An image of the girl was also included underneath – it was a school photo, showing her pin-straight, jet black hair and icy-blue eyes. A pang of sadness hit Dean – in another life, she might’ve been related to Cas.

“She’s my girlfriend,” Claire stated, voice void of emotion. Dean marvelled briefly at her ability to sound so careless about everything – if Cas or Sam or anyone he cared about had ever gone missing, he’d be more than distraught.

Perhaps she was the kind of person who just silently tolerated how unfair the world could be.

“I think there’s something up with the police right now. My mom – Jody Mills – she said she keeps having to fire people for not doing their job properly. Evidence is being tampered with and false reports are getting leaked to the papers.” She sighed and pushed a long strand of blonde hair around her ear, eyes downcast.

Dean placed a comforting hand on her shoulder.

“I’ll do what I can.” He paused for a moment, debating whether Claire should be updated on the situation in Lawrence City. It was unlike him to spill information to every sob story he met, but seeing the look in her eyes, he relented.

“Look, I’m not supposed to be tellin’ you this,” he began in a hushed tone, “but do you remember the reports about Meg Masters and Ava Wilson going missing?”

Her expression twisted into confusion for a quick second before smoothing out into realisation and intrigue.

“Well, they were high out of their minds on some crap this psychopath found in a hospital dumpster, acting totally insane… and ended up dead in the back of his van. My… partner and I, we sorted it out. This might be something to do with that, too. Had Alexis been acting strangely at all recently?”

Claire shook her head.

“Alex doesn’t do any of that stuff because it freaks me out.”

Dean was admittedly surprised at her statement. She certainly looked like the kind of kid who’d be smoking grass behind the bleachers every day, but appearances could be deceiving – he, of all people, should know that.

“I can tell you’re judging me,” Claire scoffed, rolling her eyes.

“The only reason I’d judge you is for lying about your name.” Dean thought back to the news report from the night of the convenience store attack and smirked as Claire bit her lip – she’d been caught, but she quickly replaced it with a smirk of her own.

“Well, I didn’t know yours… so fair is fair.”

Dean huffed amusedly. This kid was something else.

“I’m Dean Winchester. You can even look me up, I’m not lying. It’s just a coincidence – my best friend’s surname is Novak, too.”

“Your best friend is Gabriel Novak?” she asked. The name was spoken with a harshness that he didn’t expect. Dean furrowed his eyebrows.
"No… Castiel Novak. Gabe’s his big brother."

Dean had met Gabriel once or twice over the years – he was pesky, childish, and had a wild imagination. He always dreamt big, and it was always go big or go home with him, so once he had a real shot at achieving his dream of owning a candy store in New York City, he fled his hometown in a flash.

Cas received the occasional call and box of candy on special occasions, but that was all they ever heard from him.

“Gabriel Novak is my biological father.”

Dean stopped.

“Wait. Wh-what?” he asked, doing a double take. He needed a moment to process this.

Claire shrugged, carelessness set deep in the movement.

“He knocked up my mom when she was sixteen and left her. Jody adopted me,” she elaborated; tone acidic, eyes hard.

Granted, he didn’t know Gabriel that well, but going off Cas’ opinion—the dude wasn’t too bad; certainly didn’t seem like the type to abandon a child.

Claire shook her head sadly. “My mom left me with the police before jumping off Stull Bridge. Postpartum depression, apparently.” Her gaze was dejected, jaw clenched, anger and frustration set in her tense shoulders.

Thinking back, he had only been seven when that incident was reported on the news, so he couldn’t recall the event in detail. Stull Bridge was infamous with jumpers – some even said that the bridge itself was cursed.

Not knowing what to say except to offer his sympathies, Dean simply placed a hand cautiously on Claire’s leather-clad shoulder.

In all honesty, Dean was unsure whether Cas even knew that any of this had ever happened. Gabe was twelve years their senior and Chuck Novak had an amazing PR team – the scandal of the mayor’s son getting a young girl pregnant could have been covered up easily.

Besides, even if he wanted to tell Cas this information, he couldn’t – his best friend was still angry with him.

“I’ll help you find your girlfriend. Is her house boarded off for investigation?”

Claire shook her head.

“Alright. I’ll give you my number. Text me her address.”

~*~

“So, tell me again, why are we looking into this missing person’s case?”

It was a little past three in the morning, and the two brothers walked down the alley situated right next to Alex’s house. It was nothing special – a very small bungalow for two people. If any drug-lords had kidnapped her, it definitely wasn’t to do with the riches it offered.
Dean sighed at Charlie’s question, prodding at his earpiece uncomfortably.

“Because it might be related, okay?” Dean snapped. He didn’t want anyone to know it was a favour for Claire – it was actually possible she’d just run away, considering Claire told him her mother was a real piece of work.

“She does have a history with drugs, Charlie,” Sam supported, scrolling through the police records Charlie had hacked into. There were a few minor cases of public intoxication and traces of alcohol found in her system – nothing major, just a teenager being reckless.

“So do you, Sam. Doesn’t mean you’re shooting yourself up and going batshit crazy.”

Dean glanced at his brother at Charlie’s comment, knowing he’d have to address that particular piece of his brother’s past at some point.

“Sorry. I just don’t think this is related to anything.”

Dean decided not to contribute any further to the conversation, and instead pulled the lock pick from his back pocket as he approached the house. They’d already checked the driveway and peeked into the windows – nobody was home.

The thin line of metal clicked against the locks easily, giving in to experience and a little nudging, allowing them entry to the house.

The goal was to find evidence that might link to the drugs or any other possible leads – a simple mission for the night. Dean still felt very bitter about his situation with Cas; he truly wasn’t in the mood to deal with any bad guys tonight.

Charlie had hacked into the alarm system, meaning the police wouldn’t be summoned at any random point. The brothers were free to explore the house. The floorboards creaked under Dean’s booted feet as he edged towards the left, entering a dingy kitchen that was blanketed in darkness.

Sam had gone the opposite way, so Dean began his task.

He started with the kitchen cupboards – upturning any bowls or glasses and feeling around for false backs or any unseen objects in the very back. He even resorted to opening up boxes of food, but found nothing except the actual contents listed on the packaging.

The refrigerator was reasonably full – a box labelled LUNCH – DON’T TOUCH was placed on top of a bunch of microwave meals, their seals intact. The message made him quirk a smile. He checked the milk and juice cartons for anything, shaking them around and unscrewing their caps.

Nothing.

That only left the walls.

There was one picture hanging slightly crookedly on the far wall, usually a dead giveaway for a safe or secret storage. Dean snatched it away, disappointed to see solid wallpaper behind it.

Something had to be wrong – Claire wouldn’t have approached him if she hadn’t been suspicious. He tapped the wall, frowning when all he heard was solid wood.

“Dean?”

Sam entered the kitchen holding a narrow, pearly white object in his hands.
Dean’s heart fell into his stomach.

The goat, the M, the toxic warnings – they were all there. The empty syringes from the hospital. However, this one was half full: an ominous blue liquid sloshing around inside.

“Found something?” Charlie asked. Without the aid of CCTV on this mission, she needed verbal guidance.

“You could say that.” Dean took the object from Sam carefully, examining the packaging.

This meant that the case of Meg Masters and Ava Wilson might potentially be linked to Gordon Walker’s attack on the brothers. Dean didn’t have a doubt in his mind that the attack at the office party had been because of Gordon.

“Bring it back to my place. I’ll run some tests,” Charlie instructed.

Dean pocketed the piece of evidence, and the two brothers cleaned up the house before leaving the scene – ensuring there was nobody around to notice their swift exit.

~*~

The Winchesters took their typical rooftop route back home, which meant that they always ended up landing in the back alley of the lingerie store beneath Cas and Dean’s apartment. Nobody ever went out into the back, fortunately for them, and the only things around were dumpsters and high fences. The space was just used for smoking breaks.

The Winchesters always kept a change of clothes underneath the paper recycling bin. It was rarely emptied and kept out of the rain, so it was an ideal place to store spare stuff in.

Sam had just tugged on his jeans and was sporting a bare chest as he straightened his shirt, figuring out where his head went, when he spoke.

“The drug thing with Brady is obviously linked to Gordon. He must have remembered your face, but surely the knock out would have made him forget. Did he already know who you were?” he wondered aloud, pulling his head through his shirt, looking at Dean—who still had his jeans around his ankles—as he smoothed it down.

“Dude, I’m practically fucking naked.” He yanked up his jeans anyway, turning away to do up the zipper.

Sam ignored him and continued. “How did they even find out Cas was important to you in the first place? Gordon couldn’t have known —”

Dean threw a glare at his brother that he didn’t see.

“Sam, could you at least wait till we’re dressed?” he asked, irritably pulling a wrinkly white t-shirt over his head, mussing up his hair as he did so. If they were going to talk, Dean wanted the two of them to be fully clothed.

Sam dressed himself in his usual layers before talking again.

“Hey, I’ll go to Charlie’s. You should talk to Cas —” Dean tried to interrupt, but his younger brother simply continued talking. “I know you want to, man. Cas is just too stubborn to talk first.” He gave his brother a reassuring smile.
Dean wondered when his brother had gotten so much better at existing than he had.

Clearly, Sam had inherited his wisdom from their mother, because Dean knew that the way he consistently felt lost must’ve come from their father.

It was sad. He didn’t dwell on it any further.

Dean scooped up his costume, making sure to brush off any dirt as best he could. He pulled the syringe in question out of the back pocket and handed it to his brother.

“I’ll be back tomorrow afternoon,” Sam said. “Talk to Cas.”

The younger Winchester waved a quick goodbye before jogging towards his car, hair flopping everywhere. *Damn, he really needed a haircut.*

Dean shoved his costume in his duffel bag and slung it over his shoulder – it needed a wash, he could just do it while Cas was at work the following day. Grabbing the spare key from behind a loose brick just outside their front door, he unlocked it cautiously and stepped inside.

~*~

Much to Dean’s surprise, Cas was out cold on the couch – lips parted, a little sliver of drool making its way down the cleft in his chin as he sported a classic case of bedhead. The room was also unnaturally chilly – Cas had probably forgotten to turn the air conditioning down… *again.*

He shoved the duffel bag right into the bottom of his wardrobe – a place Cas *never* looked, not after the time Dean had dumped all of his porn mags in there and Cas had discovered them unceremoniously when he was looking for one of his t-shirts. He walked back into the open space that formed the kitchen and lounge, taking a moment to watch over his sleeping friend.

The remote for the fan lay on the back of the sofa, so Dean reached over carefully – hoping not to disturb his friend’s slumber.

He was surprised when Cas shot up immediately – his head knocking right into Dean’s sore shoulder from hauling his best friend up six flights of stairs barely three days ago.

“*Jesus, Cas,*” Dean groaned, the remote falling out of his hands as he grasped his strained shoulder, struggling to bite back his noise of pain.

“Dean?” Cas tried to blink blearily awake.

“It’s… *six in the morning,* where have you been?” he asked roughly, squinting at his watch with puffy eyes, voice heavy with fatigue. Under other circumstances, Dean probably would have admired how cute his concern sounded.

“Out,” Dean answered, realising too late how harsh his tone was. He grimaced; Cas didn’t really deserve his apathy. At Cas’ hurt look, his gaze softened. Sam had insisted that they talk.

“Sorry. I was at Charlie’s with Sam. We were gaming.”

Dean let the lie tell itself; Cas seemed to accept it as the truth.

“Alright.”

With a sigh, Cas hauled himself up from the sofa, scrubbing away the dried saliva from his jaw. He was dressed in just a hoodie and sweats – the zipper of the hoodie was undone, revealing that he had
nothing on underneath.

Dean nearly swore out loud in utter frustration—how was he supposed to sufficiently apologise when someone like Cas came along, throwing him completely off course?

Fortunately, Cas realised he was half-naked thanks to Dean’s ogling and awkward stuttering—he zipped up the hoodie quickly, then made a weak attempt at taming his unruly hair. It was obvious Cas was ready to leave the room if Dean didn’t say anything.

“Cas, man.” He paused, feeling nervous, reaching out for him as if that would stop him from leaving the room.

“I-I’m sorry… about the other night.”

He was cautious, not wanting to hurt his friend even more. Cas wasn’t looking at him. Instead, he tugged the ends of his sleeves over his hands as if he was four again, and folded his arms defensively over his chest.

“It’s fine, Dean. Goodnight.” Cas brushed it off and tried to hurry past him to his bedroom, but Dean tugged him back by his hood.

With a yelp of “Hey!” Cas was finally looking Dean right in the eye. The sharp motion had caused Cas to lose his balance, but Dean was there, ready to catch him. He heard the sharp intake of breath as they ended up pressed against each other, chest to chest, Dean’s arms around Cas, and the other boy’s clutching at the front of Dean’s t-shirt for support.

If he wasn’t a selfish person, he would’ve let Cas go faster, would’ve straightened them with efficiency, like his months of training had taught him, would’ve placed Cas back on his feet in no time at all.

But he was selfish.

He knew how he grabbed and chased every last piece of physical affection he was allowed from his best friend.

The best friend he was hopelessly in love with.

“Dean…” Cas intoned, breaking him out of thought.

Dean cleared his throat and straightened them properly, taking a step back to a more friendly distance.

“Look, with any other person I would avoid talking, but please can we just—” Dean made a circular gesture with one hand, “- clear the air?”

Obviously reluctant, Cas made his way back to the sofa where Dean joined him—at least two feet between them, a pillow in between them acting as a blockade. The worn leather creaked beneath their weight, much too loud in the awkward silence that had settled between them.

Dean could practically hear the nagging he’d get from Sam if he didn’t try, so he forced himself to speak.

“I was really happy to see you alive.”

“It didn’t mean anything.”
– exactly when Cas did.

Dean’s heart sank, disappointment sitting heavily in his stomach like a boulder.

He wanted to puke.

The certainty in Cas’ voice hurt him more than Cas’ rejection. He knew he should try and meet those blue eyes, but he just couldn’t. Cas was tearing his heart in two without even knowing it.

That was the worst part. Dean couldn’t even blame Cas for anything. It wasn’t his fault he didn’t feel the same way Dean did – all Dean could do was curse his rotten luck. All of his goddamned pining was for absolutely nothing.

Cas wrung his hands together, but he had no reason to be nervous.

“I don’t know why you kissed me. I know you said it wasn’t the bi thing, but even so, we are platonic friends and I would like to continue our friendship as it is. I don’t feel that way about you and I understand that people act irrationally when they’re experiencing heightened emotions.”

If Dean had looked up, he’d have found that Cas hadn’t been looking up at him, either.

“If it’s okay with you, I’d like to act like none of that happened.” Cas’ voice sounded empty, like he had rehearsed the speech in his head several times.

And that’s what really put the icing on the cake.

Dean rubbed his eyes roughly with his fingers before letting them drag down his face – taking with them any tears that had formed.

“Y-you’re… okay with that, right..?” The question came out hesitantly.

Dean was too emotionally exhausted to even try. It was too late anyway, now he knew the truth – nothing could be done. He’d respect that.

“Yeah, man.” He could do nothing else but accept Cas’ feelings. He nodded jerkily and gave Cas a smile. It probably wasn’t convincing at all, but he couldn’t find it in himself to pretend he wasn’t at least upset.

“Good talk, Cas. Well, I’m beat – I’ll see you in the mornin’, ‘kay?”

Unable to look up at Cas’ expression, Dean heaved himself off the sofa – grunting at a new ache that seemed to stretch across his entire body – and made his way to his room. Once the door was kicked shut behind him, Dean didn’t even bother to take his clothes off. He collapsed, heavy hearted, on top of the covers, and gave himself away silently to the dark.

~*~

Dean was awoken abruptly by the shrill tone of his phone ringing. Peeling his face away from his slightly drool-stained pillow, he peered blearily at the screen – Sam. Dean scrambled to answer, despite the soreness that seemed to have permanently resided in his shoulder. That’s what you get for saving the guy who’s never gonna love you, he thought bitterly, then shook his head, internally scolding himself for being sour.

“Find anything?” Dean asked, voice coarse with sleep as he rolled onto his back, duvet tangled around his legs.
“Some guy that clearly likes Charlie actually works in forensics… Anyway. He found Alex’s fingerprints on the needle. We have a match on the goat logo, too – Milton Medical, apparently,” Sam answered quickly.

A cold wave of shock did a great job at waking Dean up.

“As in the centre opened by Lucas Milton, the mayor?”

“Yeah, I guess so. The one in the old LCPD Station just past Stull Bridge.”

Dean’s frown deepened.

“Didn’t some wackjob claim it was on top of a gateway to hell?”

“So?”

“Weird place to have a medical centre, all I’m sayin’.”

He remembered Cas had covered the photos for the reopening story, taking Dean with him to help minimise his nerves from the superstition he seemed to have developed. Cas might have hated it, but Dean couldn’t help but have a good time – he got to hold his best friend’s hand twice.

Dean’s heart dropped as he remembered the conversation from earlier in the morning, realising everything they had ever done… it meant nothing.

Sam sighed into the phone.

“So, basically, it’s a great place to hide some insanity-inducing drugs, huh?”

He couldn’t believe he hadn’t made the connection. Dean blamed his broken heart for the oversight.

“Drink some coffee, Dean. I’ll meet you near Stull Bridge in an hour, we’re looking at ideal places to set up Charlie’s equipment. We need to close this case so we can get back to hunting down Azazel.”

~*~

Dean lugged his duffle bag filled with his superhero suit and weapons out into the living room – big mistake.

Cas was sitting at the kitchen counter, chugging down a few large gulps of what could only be coffee.

Shit.

Dean had totally forgotten it was Cas’ day off. He stopped abruptly in the hallway, immediately searching for a way out before Cas looked up

“Good morning, Dean.”

Too late.

Cas didn’t even look up from his paper when he spoke. He was doing the crossword, a mundane activity he seemed to enjoy on his days off, brows creased in concentration, top of the blue pen tapping at his bottom lip as he thought.
“M-mornin’,” he replied, forcing a cheerful tone. Luckily, it seemed to fool Cas, though Dean still felt overly sensitive from the heartbreak he’d had to endure the night before.

He tried to walk as normally as possible from the entry of the hallway across the floor space, past the counter, hoping, praying, Cas wouldn’t notice the-

“What’s with the bag?”

Cas gestured to Dean’s duffle with his coffee cup before bringing it to his lips. _WORLD’S WORST BARTENDER_ was written across the cup with an arrow pointing upwards towards the drinker. It was originally a birthday present for Dean, but Cas had taken to using it after Dean had bought an entire collection of coffee cups with captions that were much too graphic for him.

Dean’s favourite was _SATIN PANTIES ARE MY JAM_, much to Cas’ irritation.

“I’m gonna go to the gym. Practice some ring stuff,” he lied.

Though Dean had been an almost-professional gymnast once upon a time, he’d rarely practiced since he became a vigilante. Real life had proven to be as much training as he needed, apparently.

“You haven’t been for a while. Don’t break anything.” Cas gave him a small, wary smile. Dean wondered if he’d made it obvious he was hurt by Cas’ complete rejection last night, so he hastily pasted on a smirk.

“Pfft, please. I’ll be awesome at gymnastics even when I’m retired,” he gloated, filling a flask with coffee to drink on the way to meet up with Sam and Charlie.

“Hm. You should probably lower your opinion of yourself, Winchester. I heard people find that unattractive.” Cas’ eyes were twinkling with humour when Dean glanced up at him from the coffee maker.

For a moment, he could pretend Cas was _his_ – the earthy scent of coffee, the wide blue eyes staring into Dean’s own, the domestic clutter of newspapers and magazines that littered the kitchen island – it made Dean yearn for the domestic life he’d always dreamed of when he finally settled down with someone.

He fastened the lid on his flask – little Stormtroopers patterned all over it – taking a quick sip before leaving. The hot liquid scalded his tongue, but it was better than the way lingering around Cas made him feel.

“Don’t forget to wash your sweaty gym clothes when you get back, they always stink!” Cas called after him. Dean could hear the smile in his voice and it involuntarily brightened his own mood. He hated it.

“Shut up! Have fun being a loner all day, asshole!” he called back, Cas’ laugh following him all the way to the frame of the open front door.

He allowed himself a brief moment to turn back to Cas, looking all ethereal, bathed in the golden, midday sun that poured through the windows… and closed the door behind him.

He took a deep breath. _Today is gonna be a long day._

~*~

It was something about the air around Stull Bridge. Anyone who visited the surrounding area could
probably instinctively tell that something about it was off. The atmosphere always seemed colder, the buildings greyer, the trees barer. It gave Dean the heebie jeebies.

After turning the corner, Dean noticed an ugly, monstrous Land Rover parked in the old gas station. Sure, the Impala was monstrous, too, but it was a pretty kind of monster – this car was just an abomination. He steered his baby into the space beside it. Just as he opened the creaky car door, Sam and Charlie appeared in front of him, eager to huddle together.

His brother looked tense, lips pressed together in a thin line, gaze darting around the area nervously. Sam had hidden it well from Charlie, but this was Dean’s brother – the kid was as transparent as crystal. Charlie, on the other hand, looked too pale for Dean’s liking.

“You okay?” Dean asked, nodding at the small redhead. She fiddled with the loose chain that hung from her neck and forced an awkward smile.

“Yeah. This place is just… creepy.” Her gaze shifted downwards, her fingers still hooked around her necklace.

“Pretty Walking Dead, right?” He gave Charlie a quick pat of sympathy on the shoulder before turning to his younger brother.

“Alright, Sammy. What’s the plan?”

Sam frowned at his sibling.

“Why do I have to have the plan? Weren’t you a superhero first?”

“You're my sidekick. Sidekicks always do shit for the superhero. Haven’t you ever read a comic book?” Dean retorted as he unlocked the trunk of the Impala to grab his equipment.

“In fact – don’t answer that. You obviously aren’t cultured like myself and Felicity Smoak over here,” he added, nudging Charlie, trying to lighten the mood.

It seemed to work. Dean looked up to a rather prominent bitch-face from Sam, but the reference visibly cheered Charlie up.

“Jerk,” Sam said, shaking his head in amusement. He spoke again before Dean had a chance to retort. “Anyway – I do have a plan, lucky for you.” Sam paced over to the car and opened up the door.

Dean’s jaw dropped.

He could only describe the arrangement as something from the set of Mission: Impossible.

Sam had totally rearranged the backseat so there was a singular car seat and an entire freaking desk in the back. Two screens were attached to the backs of the front seats, which in turn had wires linking them to a single laptop – Charlie’s, obviously; the keyboard was glowing with rainbow colours. A few cameras and a box of fake IDs were stored in a plastic box underneath the desk, along with a few others that Dean couldn’t name the contents of. Since the back windows were blacked out, nobody from the outside could tell there was a mini spy headquarters hidden in the back.

“Awesome,” Dean whispered in awe. Sam smiled smugly at the comment. Charlie hopped up into the back and took her seat, looking very proud of herself.

“Sam and I built it in my… parents’ old car this morning. Pretty neat, huh? It’s all just the basics for
now, but soon… Well. I really plan on pimpin’ out my new crib.”

The two brothers smiled at their partner. Dean was slowly beginning to realise that perhaps Charlie was becoming the sister he didn’t know he needed.

“Anyways, you guys should suit up. Oh, and just one last order of business before we proceed – very important, highly classified…” The brothers waited.

She looked between them before her smile grew excitedly.

“I want a superhero name.”

“Woah, woah – I don’t even have a superhero name,” Sam replied immediately, grabbing his bag – the sleeve of his red jacket hung out of the top.

Dean rolled his eyes. “Jesus. Let me just alert the media and tell them the Righteous Man’s sidekicks are pissed off they didn’t get cool names.”

He eyed the gas station, noticing the bathroom sign saying that it was situated in the corner. It probably hadn’t been cleaned in years, and the idea made Dean’s skin crawl.

“Dude, rock, paper, scissors: who changes in the shitty bathroom over there and who changes in your less shitty – but still shitty – car.” Dean put his hand out, not letting Sam back down.

“Hey!” Charlie gasped, and Dean gave her a quick wink.

With a roll of his eyes, Sam put out his own hand. The two brothers pumped their fists against their open palms three times… Dean chose scissors, Sam chose rock.

“Dammit,” Dean mumbled disappointedly, looking extremely disgusted as he turned back to face the abandoned bathroom. Sam simply grinned, then shooed Charlie out of the car.

“You realise you could just change after I’m done, right?” Sam told his brother before he closed the back door.

“Shut up, Sam,” Dean snapped back. Out of pure stubbornness, Dean strode over to the bathroom determinedly, not wanting to give Sam the satisfaction of being right.

~*~

The Winchesters snuck around the back of the police station after Charlie had dropped them off in the foliage behind it. Going on a mission in broad daylight was never really a great choice. People would be working, people would be loitering around, and people would always notice something was wrong – unless someone created a massive diversion.

_Ugh. People._

“Alright. I’m connected to the power grid. You boys ready?” When the brothers had left, Charlie’s face had been alight with the ominous glow from the laptop screen, making her look less like a superhero and more like a supervillain.

“Yup. Earpieces are working well, we’ve got a ton of weapons and ammo. Turn the lights out, Queen of Moons,” Sam replied.

Dean’s gaze flicked over to meet his brother’s, squinting with judgement.
“Queen of Moons? What kind of anime do you think we’re in?” Dean latched a hand around his pearl-adorned pistol.

“Charlie LARPs, and her character is the Queen of Moons,” Sam explained quickly, swiping his weapon of choice out of his belt: an angular, satanic-looking knife – especially with the possible devil-worshipping symbols carved into the blade. At least, that’s what it looked like to Dean.

It didn’t help that Sam had taken to coating it with corrosive substances. When Dean had suggested that he dip it in sulphuric acid before every fight, Sam had lectured him on how they weren’t supposed to kill people.

“I have no idea what that is. I’m calling her Queenie.”

The brothers bickered as if Charlie wasn’t eavesdropping.

“Righteous Man… and uh…okay, I can’t think of a name right now, but still. Get your shit together,” she ordered, her voice crackling in their earpieces.

“I still stand by Tampon Man –”


The back of the police station looked pretty much how anyone would expect: it was fenced off with barbed wire, alarms dotting every wall – although, they were probably inactive now that Charlie had had her way with them. According to Sam’s research, it was a relatively unused pharmacy with some private medical rooms in old prison cells.

It made sense – Alex could be trapped in one.

Since they were clad in all leather and Kevlar, the fence didn’t seem so menacing. Dean bolted towards it, launching himself halfway up before scaling the rest of it, the metal clanging a little too loudly for his ears… and Sam’s, too, as he shushed him from the other side. Dean gracefully flipped over the top, landed neatly on his two feet, and then flipped off his brother.

Sam followed suit, clambering over in record time thanks to his long limbs, and let himself drop silently over the other side.

“CCTV is back up and hacked. So far, all I can see is the pharmacy itself. Everything’s pretty normal – there’s a girl at reception. Nobody else in the store.”

“Describe her,” Sam said, stepping cautiously behind his older brother towards the building. They were ready to strike at any given moment, their weapons raised and stances expecting aggression.

“The images are all black and white, but her hair looks light - probably blonde. Looks about late teens or early twenties. White.”

Dean let out a small sigh of irritation – without CCTV of the whole area, it would be really difficult to find Alex.

“Alex has black hair, five-one, average build,” Dean informed them, despite the fact that Charlie had her police file on hand.

A pleasant surprise: the back door was unlocked. Dean whipped his gun around the moment they entered the corridor, fully expecting someone to be guarding the premises. With the power gone, the
move was useless anyway. Everything was covered in a blanket of darkness-

Until something clicked behind him. Sam had brought flashlights.

“You’re welcome,” he muttered, handing one to Dean, who quickly positioned it above his gun. A long, eerie corridor stretched out in front of them. There were a few doors lining the halls, and when Dean raised his light a little higher, he saw the metal bars.

Holding cells.

Dean slowly edged towards the first cell, noticing the bars were worn, covered in rust and dirt. He grimaced.

“That’s a case of Tetanus right there. Good thing you had your shots, huh?” Dean remarked to Sam, who just retorted with a look of disapproval.

It was clear that nobody had been back here in a long time; LCPD had moved out just over four years ago. Once he reached the cell, he peered through the doorway, moving his flashlight across the room slowly. The light cast against the bars made vertical shadows that stretched across the abandoned room.

With a sigh of both relief and annoyance, Dean gestured for his brother to follow him further down the corridor.

“Hey, did you talk to Cas?” Sam asked, pausing at a cell on his left and peering inside. Once again, nothing of interest there.

“Is now really a good time, Sam?” Dean hid his expression by peering into the cell on the other side, which was identical to the previous two.

“Well, since it looks like there’s nothing here…”

“Yes, we talked, okay?” Dean spun around to face his younger brother, glad that his mask somewhat concealed his expression. Not wanting Charlie to hear his business, Dean tore out his earpiece and held it tightly in his fist.

“Cas and I are just friends. There’s nothing else between us.”

Sam laughed in disbelief and tugged away his own earpiece.

“Yeah, you keep telling yourself that,” he said and strode forward, apparently more interested in what was at the end of the corridor.

“What the hell’s that supposed to mean?” Dean said, annoyance lacing his tone. He shone his flashlight at Sam, who squinted against the sudden brightness and raised a hand to cover his face.

“I know you, Dean. You’re so stubborn that you won’t even let yourself realise that you’re in-“

He couldn’t take this.

“…he said he doesn’t!” Dean interrupted, far too loudly for the dim corridor. Sam stopped to face him.

Dean didn’t look at his brother. He leaned back against the corridor wall, gun and flashlight down by his sides, gaze unfocussed and looking just past Sam at the opposite wall.

“…what happened?” his brother asked concernedly.
Dean shrugged, gaze dropping to the floor.

“We’re just friends. The kiss, it didn’t… it didn’t mean anything.”

“He said that?”

Dean nodded.

Sam strolled towards the last cell, turning to face Dean.

“Well, for what it’s worth – I’m sorry.”

Dean shrugged carelessly again and pushed off the wall, ready to move further down the corridor and never talk about this again.

“Who gives a shit.”

Suddenly, Sam flinched, jumping back from the cell.

“What the fuck?!”

Cast in the light of Sam’s flashlight, staring at the vigilantes as if they were the Devil himself, sat Alex Jones.

Her eyes were grotesquely bloodshot, shining scarlet in the beam of bright light. The layers she wore did nothing to hide the fact that she was unhealthily thin, her skin pasty white, her hair scruffy and tangled. She looked animalistic.

It only took a few seconds for Dean’s eyes to land on the pile of at least a dozen empty syringes by her thigh.

“Alex?” Dean questioned cautiously in slight disbelief, hunching over to make himself less intimidating for her. She didn’t respond, and Dean briefly wondered if she was catatonic from whatever had been injected into her.

His idea was quickly disproved when Alex shrieked.

Seconds later, the door next to Sam swung open – a man in a white lab coat, looking rather disgruntled, immediately set his eyes on the two brothers. He was clutching a taser, and he immediately aimed the device at Sam and sent him tumbling to the ground with a cry.

Dean charged towards his only exit, but his attempt was futile. Alex grabbed at a strap on Dean’s boot from inside her prison cell, still shrieking like a banshee, and Dean hit the dirty floor face-first.

Fortunately for him, the humiliation didn’t last long – the jolt of electricity paralysed him before it knocked him out cold.
Chapter Five

Dean’s day passed in a blur – he was unconscious, and his senses were totally dulled down to a state of grey. Each time he came to, thinking finally he could wake from his slumber, he would be dragged back under a blanket of darkness seconds later.

Everything merged together, dreams and consciousness intertwined, until he could no longer differentiate between the two. Dean absently wondered about Sam – what had happened to him? Where was he? Was he okay?

His thoughts drifted to Charlie after that. Dean knew in the back of his mind that he should be worried about her, guilty that the two brothers had left her in the dark, but his body didn’t seem capable of reacting. It was as if it was saying ‘we can deal with it later’ and sticking a damper over Dean’s emotional capability.

He then thought about Cas. But he always thought about Cas. A random memory of his best friend rooted itself in his brain: Cas’ 23th birthday.

Cas had stepped outside for a moment – the party inside their apartment had gotten a little out of hand, thanks to Jo stealing a bunch of alcohol from the Roadhouse. Sam was away for the summer, travelling in South America or something equally as adventurous with his new girlfriend.

The remnants of summer meant the air was cold, but in a way that was pleasant. Sipping on a bottle of beer, Cas stared up at the stars – the sky was clear that night.

Dean had been feeling off about Lisa for a few weeks, and the fact that she got hammered in the first hour didn’t help. Seeing his friend had snuck outside, he joined him, searching for the stability he always seemed to provide.

“Hey,” Dean had said, taking a swig of some fruity, probably girly drink that had barely any alcohol in it. It was the kind of thing Lisa hated.

“Can I... talk to you?” Feelings were never his strong point, but he was desperate to confess his uncertainty about Lisa.

“Of course. You know I always enjoy our talks,” Cas had answered, not needing to turn to face his friend. He always had that weird ability to just know whenever Dean was close by.

“I’m just gonna say it how it is. I hate talkin’ about these things, but hey - it’s you.” Dean had rambled, moving closer to his friend who remained quiet. He swallowed, nervous and guilty about his confession.

“I don’t think things are working with Lisa.”

Cas finally turned to look at him, the dim porch light making his eyes gleam.

“How so?” He looked unsurprised, and Dean cursed at himself. He hadn’t intended to make his feelings obvious.

“I dunno, man. I just don’t really enjoy spending time with her anymore. I’d rather be hanging out with you.” Dean took a sip of his drink, the sweetness of it masking the chemical taste of alcohol as it slid down his throat.
“I had noticed that you were meeting up with me a lot more these past few weeks,” Cas replied, peering back up at the stars.

Dean hated to admit it, but his friend looked pretty as he looked up at the sky – the white moonlight highlighting his cheekbones and the curve of his jaw, dipping his hair and figure into the dark contrast of the night sky.

“Yeah. I... seem to enjoy your company more than Lisa’s.” The comment made Cas turn to him once more, a curious smile crossing his lips.

“You’re not crushing on me instead, are you, Winchester?” He raised an eyebrow at Dean. He was surprised to witness such flirtatious sarcasm. Dean observed his friend intently, and noticed the tell-tale flush on his neck and cheeks – he was definitely not sober.

“Pfft. No. You’re butt-ugly,” he immediately replied, smacking Cas playfully on the shoulder.

His drink must have contained more alcohol than he expected, because he found himself actually considering the idea of dating Cas. He would be lying to himself if he didn’t think his friend was attractive. For the past four years, Dean had gone weeks at a time without seeing Cas because he went to college. Every time he visited Lawrence City, he seemed to have grown up a little more, becoming more muscular because he’d started running, filled out his body the way puberty does, and tamed his unruly hair. It didn’t help that he often decided to wear glasses instead of contact lenses these days, despite the fact he always complained they got in the way when he was taking photos.

Cas was adjusting said glasses. He’d said something, but Dean hadn’t heard.

“Hm?” he hummed in question. “Sorry. Alcohol must be finally getting to me.”

“I said: maybe if I don’t start dating someone by the time I’m fifty, I’ll date you.” Cas pressed the top of the bottle against his lips and took a few gulps, and Dean found himself mesmerised by it.

Cas had never dated anyone, and at times Dean just suspected he wasn’t interested in romance. He was totally fine with the idea, because it meant he would never have to deal with the jealousy of having his best friend give his everything to someone else.

Maybe it had been the alcoholic haze but, he was sure he wouldn’t be okay with Cas ever dating anyone else.

“In all seriousness, I think if you’re doubting it, you should end it. Dragging it out will hurt both of you even more, and could end your friendship altogether. And I know you value her as a friend,” Cas added sincerely, placing a hand clumsily over Dean’s elbow. The touch shouldn’t have felt so… right. But he realised it always felt that way whenever Cas showed him affection.

“Don’t tell Sam about this?” was all Dean felt he could answer, and he downed the rest of his drink to try drown out his thoughts.

“What? That we’re gonna date when we’re fifty?” Cas dragged his fingers down the sleeve of Dean’s shirt, leaving a trail of goosebumps behind as his friend smirked drunkenly. He released an inebriated hiccup, then his expression morphed into one of seriousness.

“I won’t. Thank you for confiding in me.”

Dean just nodded, feeling drawn to his friend. They were looking into each other’s eyes rather attentively, which wasn’t abnormal for them, but Dean felt it was somehow different this time. At
least for him it was.

In that moment, it hit him like a ton of bricks: he loved Cas the way he was supposed to love Lisa.

The memory played itself on repeat as his state of awareness ran around in circles, almost driving him insane, until something blocked the path, and he thoughtlessly fell into the longest sleep he’d had in years.

~*~

Dean sluggishly came back to full consciousness, his brain feeling like it had been blown up like a balloon, like it was six times too big for his skull. His head was pounding, like he’d downed a few too many tequila shots the night before. It took him a moment or two to realise his face was plastered to cool, tiled flooring, drool leaking precariously from his open mouth.

He rolled over onto his back and swiped lazily at his mouth. He was met with stark lights that were too bright in his sensitive state – he squeezed his eyes closed, groaning until they stopped aching relentlessly. When he risked peeling them open, he took in his surroundings: he was in an eerily white room that reeked of floor cleaner and plastic.

Dean could faintly hear something scuffling near him, but felt too lightheaded to turn to see the source. His ears were ringing and his stomach grumbled loudly – how long had he been here?

He rubbed at his temples slowly, trying to eliminate the pounding headache, but found himself being yanked into a sitting position, which just made the shooting pain worse.

“Hello there, Righteous Man.”

The voice sounded smooth and monotonous, and was right in his face. Dean winced, the sound grating at his headache, like nails on a chalkboard – he was definitely dehydrated, and what he supposed was a headache was probably a full-blown migraine. He was met with a vaguely familiar face, the owner’s skin a strong contrast against the harshly white walls. “It’s wonderful to finally meet you formally.”

Dean stared into the man’s hollow, almost black eyes – he was so close that he could see his reflection inside them.

The man leaned back slightly, and Dean noticed he was holding a forest green cloth in his hands. No – a mask. Dean’s mask.

Shit.

“I must say, when I saw you for the first time, I didn’t know your real name.”

Dean watched as the man twirled the band of the mask around his fingertips, a slight look of amusement playing on his face.

“I obviously knew you were the Righteous Man. That guy fighting crime all the time, it didn’t take me long to put two and two together.” The man smiled, though it didn’t reach his eyes.

“You didn’t have a name until you saved the sheriff’s kid. She gave it to you. Said you handed her a cross necklace and described you as… A righteous hero.”

Dean watched as the man raised his free hand, clutching Dean’s face and squeezing it tight.
“Your brother was rather gracious about leaving me in the hospital. What a kind soul.” His voice washed over him, not in a pleasant way, and sent a shiver of recognition through him.

“Gordon Walker,” Dean mumbled, his speech restricted by the grip on his jaw.

A flash of surprise crossed over Gordon’s face, but he recomposed himself quickly.

“I see you did your research.” His fingers clamped into Dean’s face tighter, right until the moment Dean could feel his flesh burning, then rapidly let go. He stood up, pausing for a moment before dropping the mask in Dean’s lap.

“I did mine, too, Dean Winchester.”

Dean glared up at Gordon, imagining that he could shoot goddamn lasers from his eyes, because being Superman in that moment would have been way more useful than being the Righteous Man. Hearing his name come from this man’s lips was the opposite of what he wanted.

“And I’m guessing that’s Sam.”

Gordon pointed to their left, and Dean became aware of the shuffling he had registered before.

Sam was strapped down to a table, each limb clamped down with zip ties that dug into the material of his vigilante suit. He, too, was missing his mask – it had been replaced with a thick strip of silver duct tape over his mouth. When Dean looked at him, he began crying against the gag – the muffled panic causing the blood to drain from Dean’s face.

He was helpless.

“Sam!” Dean cried, hauling himself to his feet. With the pounding in his head and the stiffness in his limbs, he ended up stumbling around like a baby deer – he managed to claw his way to Sam’s side before falling painfully back to the cold floor.

“I wouldn’t try that, Dean.” Gordon sounded too calm. “You’ve been here for two days. You’re weak.”

Two days?!

Dean tried to spit back something witty, something to piss Gordon off, but was stopped by a rushing feeling in his head that blacked out his vision. Once again he squeezed his eyes shut, waiting for the pain to pass.

“Don’t worry. Once we’re done we’ll let you go.” Gordon circled the table, and Dean could see his feet on the other side. Beneath his white lab coat, Dean could actually see his goddamn police uniform – the LCPD emblem was on his boots. “If you don’t play nice, we’ll keep you here longer. That’s why Sam is on the table. He didn’t play nice.”

Dean heard the table legs clatter against the floor – Sam was moving again, but Dean couldn’t see what he was doing. His own body was holding him hostage, he was so weak, so hungry and dehydrated, he couldn’t force his body to move.

Please. Dean begged silently to anyone, anything, watching spots dance in his eyes as he lay helpless on the floor.

“I want you to see this, Dean.” Gordon’s voice bounced across the white room, which Dean was beginning to realise was much smaller than he initially thought, and heard two pairs of different
footsteps approach him. Through his spotted vision, Dean could see two men in similar lab coats bend down next to him and snatch up his arms, forcing him to his feet. He let his body be carried around like a damn sack of potatoes, and had a random flashback to saving Cas.

Maybe this was how he felt when Dean had saved him.

*Cas must be worried sick.*

The two other people dumped his limp body in a chair that scraped against the smooth floor, distracting him from his thoughts.

One of them suddenly slapped him in the face – his pain tolerance seemed to have decreased tenfold, because his cheek stung like a motherfucker. However, it minimised the spotting in his vision, and Dean supposed that was the intention, because now he could see a set of three needles being held to Sam’s bare neck.

And it didn’t take a rocket scientist to figure out what was in the tubes.

Gordon tore the duct tape off Sam’s mouth, leaving a red rectangle across his face.

“*No! No!*” Sam protested, his voice frantic and rasping, as if he had a bad cold. Dean’s eyes widened as the metal prodded at his brother’s throat, radioactive-blue liquid splashing around inside the syringes. Though Dean couldn’t see any text from where he was sitting, there was definitely a logo of some kind – the M, the goat. The toxic symbol.

“What the fuck do you want, jackass?” Dean managed to cough out, trying to scramble out of his chair. One of the men snapped him back into a sitting position – he didn’t look that strong, and it surprised Dean for a moment, but then he remembered he was in a weakened state.

“Azazel insisted I go after the children. Sam is one of them. The perfect… experiment.” Gordon smirked, as if he knew exactly what Dean and Sam had been looking for all of these months.

And he did.

*Azazel insisted.*

Dean momentarily forgot where he was, what was happening, because this was it. *The drugs and Azazel were connected. Brady hadn’t been a false lead after all.*

And when a scream brought Dean out of his thoughts, he realised he was watching Gordon empty the syringes into Sam’s veins.

~*~

Gordon was faithful to his words. After Sam had been injected, he had happily cut the zip ties, threw two water bottles and their masks on the floor, and gestured for his men to leave Dean alone. All three of them calmly exited, as if they were simply walking down the damn street.

Dean ignored the ache in his skull and launched himself out of his chair. The world spun for a moment, and he struggled to get the four feet to the table, but managed to collapse against it at Sam’s side.

“Sammy?” Dean gripped his brother’s wrist. Sam was conscious, and let his gaze fall to Dean’s.

“I’m alright,” he confirmed, and easily sat upright on the table. Dean could barely move, so he
marvelled at the action.

“I actually feel… really good. And that’s not good.”

Sam moved Dean’s hand, and instead took his brother’s wrist. He knew Dean needed the support more than he did.

“He gave you… Meg and Ava had that. Alex. It’s the same thing.” Dean watched as his arms trembled against his will, trying to hide it from Sam – he couldn’t show weakness. Then Sam wouldn’t care for himself.

Sam clearly noticed.

“Dude, we need to get you out of here. When was the last time you ate?” The younger Winchester slid off the table quickly, looping a long arm beneath Dean’s shaking shoulders. He easily took the weight of his brother, and it unnerved Dean – that was his role. He was the big brother.

“Uh… The night we went to Alex’s house. So three days ago,” Dean admitted, clutching at his brother for support. He could feel his knees wanting to give out beneath him.

“Your crappy diet really isn’t helpful here. Your body wants –”

“Jesus, Sam, I don’t care! We need to get Alex and go – fuck, we need to get that shit out of you!” Dean hissed, trying to force Sam forward with his weight. The door to the room had been left ajar, opening onto a dark hallway.

“Alex can wait. I’m fine. We need to get out. Ellen’s probably gonna fire you, Charlie has no idea where we are, and Cas is definitely going insane with worry.” Sam snatched up the water bottles from the floor, unscrewed one of the lids, and shoved it roughly into Dean’s free hand. “Drink it.”

Sam then scooped up their masks, shoving them in his pocket.

It’s not like they needed them anymore.

Dean only drank the water because he didn’t want Sam to have to carry him if he passed out.

The brothers slowly made their way to the hallway, meandering their way down it – turns out they were trapped in the next room over to Alex’s, which was now empty, pretty much a metre away from where they had been tasered. Dean grunted when he realised.

Escape could have been so easy if his damn body hadn’t given out so easily.

Sam guided Dean out of the door they had walked in through, wary that someone might be around to attack them – escape seemed too good to be true, and he was clearly disturbed by how simple it had been to be set free.

Dean felt his gaze gloss over after that, not really processing the world around him. He was aware of Sam next to him, the fact that it was probably midday and totally boiling outside, but couldn’t bring himself to place his full attention on anything. He was so zoned out that he didn’t realise they’d made it back to the gas station they had stopped at two days previously.

The younger Winchester let Dean rest against the convenience store, shaded beneath the awning.

“I’m gonna find a phone. Stay here.” Sam’s voice rang around in his head, and it took Dean a while to register what he had actually said. He found himself nodding about five minutes later, right when
Sam had gotten back.

“Charlie’s on her way. Ellen seems to think we went on a two-day bar crawl downtown. She’s really pissed off.” Sam shook Dean’s shoulders suddenly, but the lethargic feeling that stiffened Dean’s limbs didn’t go away. “Dude, this isn’t normal. I think you need to go to a doctor.”

Dean tried to reply, but felt bile rise in his throat instead.

He ended up vomiting all the water he’d consumed over himself, and when that was gone, he dry heaved for a good two minutes after that. The pounding in his head increased, and he felt himself moan – though he felt as if he was distant, dreaming the events rather than experiencing them for real.

“Shit,” he heard Sam mutter, but didn’t pay much attention. He let his eyes close, the sunlight and heat too much to deal with, and dozed for a little while.

It was like being back in Milton Medical – Dean would wake up a few times, get a blurred and inaccurate sense of his surroundings, then pass out again. He felt panic in his mind, wondering if the escape had just been a dream, but his body wouldn’t let him wake up.

~*~

There was a cold sensation on Dean’s forehead. It felt… fucking amazing.

“Alright, soldier. Gettin’ a little too happy ‘bout that cold towel.” Jo’s voice made Dean open his eyes, and he was glad to see the room was dark. He was in Bobby’s living room, his head propped up against the arm of the sofa.

“Drink this.” Jo held up a large glass, a straw aimed towards Dean’s mouth.

“I… I ain’t usin’ a straw. That’s girly,” Dean protested, and Jo practically growled and rolled her eyes.

“You’re fuckin’ dehydrated and had a migraine, I’m sorry you care so much about your precious reputation. Besides, what the fuck’s wrong with being a girl? Drink your damn juice.”

Dean didn’t protest again. He even let Jo hold the glass as he sipped at the contents. Jo was demanding, making him take a couple sips every few minutes. A silence fell between them, though it wasn’t uncomfortable, and as the liquid made Dean more alert, he realised Jo was not supposed to have any idea about what happened.

“How much do you know?” Dean asked the second his mouth caught up with his brain.

“How much? How much of a fucking idiot you are? A lot.” Jo held up the glass again, waiting for him to take another few sips. Dean pushed the straw away.

“About how this happened to me. What do you know?” He flipped over the towel on his forehead, sighing at the icy sensation.

“Sam told us everything. Me, Mom, Bobby. And we’re mad, but we have to fix you up first, you needy bitch.” Jo shook the glass, the ice in it clinking against the ceramic.

“Drink up, Captain America.”

Dean couldn’t think of a reply. He decided doing what Jo wanted would be the best way to handle
the situation.

Jo turned on the TV after that, switching to some crap Dean had never heard of. She seemed to trust him with his own glass now, so he happily drank the rest of his juice until it was empty.

The show was some chick-flick shit. The Straight White Very Hot Male was flirting with the Straight White Very Hot Female. It made him cringe internally, and when they kissed, he was reminded of Cas.

Oh God – Cas had no idea what had happened.

“Did you say anything to Cas?” Dean burst out. Jo and Cas had a rather special relationship that was based on Cas’ general misunderstanding when it came to sarcasm, but she definitely valued him as one of her best friends.

“He called Mom yesterday. She said she thought you guys had gone on some weird drinking binge and were probably hungover in a motel. He said you told him you went to the gym.” Jo twirled her hair as she watched the movie – the kissing was becoming disturbing.

“How long have I been here?” Dean panicked, sitting up. He forgot there had been a towel on his head, and grumbled when the wet material fell down his face.

“About an hour. You weren’t out for long. I guess you got a migraine from dehydration – they’re goddamn nasty –”

“Shit – Joanna Beth, I need my phone. I need to call Cas!” Dean scowled at Jo, who shot back an equally annoyed expression.

“Jesus, calm down. I’ll get you the phone so you can call your boyfriend.” Before Dean could claim otherwise, Jo was across the room and into the kitchen, probably to get the landline.

She came back with her own phone and a full glass of orange juice.

“Drink first. Phone after.” Jo held out the juice, and Dean could see she was secretly enjoying this. She was so tiny and so young in comparison to Dean; she usually had no power over him and was revelling in this role reversal. Usually he had the upper hand when it came to teasing, although Jo wasn’t afraid to bite.

He took a long gulp of the liquid and clunked the glass down by the sofa. Jo held out her phone and Dean snatched it from her as if they were kids and she had stolen one of his favourite toys.

“I’ll give you two some privacy.” Jo gave him a smarmy look, and before he could say anything back, she had walked out of the living room and closed the door behind her.

Though mildly annoyed at his sister, he didn’t waste a minute after that – he speed-dialed Cas, and anxiously waited for the call to go through.

“Hey, Jo. Do you know if Dean’s back yet? I’m kind of worried.”

Dean felt his heart flutter – he was Cas’ first thought, first worry. He then felt a little guilty, because he was revelling in the fact that he was his best friend’s major burden.

“It’s – it’s me, actually. Hey.”

He wasn’t sure what else to say, but knew he couldn’t keep Cas in the dark anymore about being the
Righteous Man, not now that it was serious. Gordon knew who he was, who Sam was, and he obviously knew who Cas was, too. Dean wouldn’t put it past Gordon to be responsible for Cas’ almost-kidnapping at the office party.

The line was quiet for a while and Dean pulled the phone away to check if the call was still connected, before the spill of accusations came thundering down the line.

“Where the fuck have you been? You said you were going to the gym. You’ve been gone for nearly three days!” Cas’ voice deepened with anger. “Ellen thinks you and Sam went –”

“A bar crawl. I know.” Dean paused for a moment, waiting for the right words to come to him. He had to say something.

“It wasn’t. I – I can explain.”

He cursed at himself. He sounded like the asshole boyfriend who broke the girl’s heart.

“Then where the hell were you?” Cas’ tone was incredibly stressed, and it struck Dean right to the core. He couldn’t do it over the phone, he just couldn’t, he knew in his heart he needed more time to gather up the courage to tell Cas exactly what he needed to hear.

“I think I should… It would be better to explain in person. Are you at home?” He heard Cas sigh on the other end of the phone.

“I will be in an hour. You better have a good excuse, you… assbutt.”

Ah. Insults were always Cas’ weak point.

Dean tried not to chuckle, knowing Cas was being fully sincere.

“Alright. I’ll be there.”

~*~

Dean was grabbing some saltine crackers from Bobby’s kitchen when Ellen marched in, Sam close behind her.

“Alright, since you’re up and about now, I need you boys to explain to me why the hell you think prancing around the city like a pair of reckless idiots is a good idea. I don’t care what you think – it’s not okay!” she snapped.

“Alright, since you’re up and about now, I need you boys to explain to me why the hell you think prancing around the city like a pair of reckless idiots is a good idea. I don’t care what you think – it’s not okay!” She glared at Dean, who had shoved a cracker in his mouth. He stopped chewing for a minute, eyes shifting from Sam to Ellen a couple times, then hurriedly swallowed.

“Ellen, we didn’t do it without researching first. Or training. We have guns –” Sam protested, but was brutally interrupted by his mother-figure.

“Oh, so that makes it better?” she snapped.

Sam was a good foot taller than her, but she made it look as if it was the other way round.

“Guns didn’t help you when you disappeared for two days! Not to mention all the other crap I’ve read about you two doing in the damn papers or on the news. You beat someone half to death!” Ellen was talking about Brady, and Dean couldn’t help but feel a sense of achievement that they’d managed to actually lock a guy up that unknowingly benefitted their case against Azazel.

Sam’s jaw clenched, and Dean witnessed something he had never seen: Sam lost it.
“For fuck’s sake, Ellen! The dick who got our damn parents killed is running around drugging people, probably planning his next fucking murder and you’re asking us why we’re doing it?” The younger Winchester flung his arms out angrily, leaning down so he was at Ellen’s level. She held his gaze, raising her chin to try to regain power.

“We disappeared for two fucking days trying to save an innocent girl! And then we failed because some douchebag had to go ahead and drug me up instead!” Sam was downright scary. His eyes were alive, not with the usual hopefulness for life, but with fury. Usually he was a nerdy, puppy-loving gentle giant… Dean frowned. This was way too out of character.

“Alright, alright. Sam, calm the fuck down.” Dean moved to place a hand between Sam and Ellen, genuinely worried that he might pound her into the ground.

“Fuck off, Dean,” he barked, swatting his brother’s arm out of the way. He redirected his angry stare at Ellen.

“We’re doing this for the right reasons, don’t tell me what to do. You’re not my mother,” he spat, “Bobby isn’t my father. You don’t tell me what to do!”

And with that, Sam stormed out of the kitchen and out the front door – slamming it shut so the house shook.

Ellen was left shocked, her eyes glossy. Even though she acted like nothing could hurt her, sometimes it became too hard. Dean knew that first hand.

“Ellen?” He tried, not wanting to be on the receiving end of an enraged outburst.

With a blink, her gaze broke away from the kitchen door and she mumbled, “I’m alright, Dean,” turning her face away so Dean couldn’t see her expression. With a sigh, and a far too easy slump in her shoulders, she made her way to the door, placing her hand gently against the doorframe.

“I know I can’t stop you from doing what you’re doing. I’m glad Sam brought you here instead of trying to fix you himself… but Jesus, Dean. Please be careful. We may not be your family, but we love you.”

Before Dean could reassure her that yes, we are your family, we love you, too, and we’ll be careful, she spoke again.

“I expect you to be at work tomorrow. I don’t care what comes up. If not, you’re fucking fired. No more special treatment, you can go out and get yourself a real job.”

Ellen didn’t wait for a reply. (He’s sure he didn’t have had the guts to, anyway). She left the kitchen, hand over her face, and made her way upstairs. He heard her slam a door shut, and stood silently in the kitchen as the creaking of water pipes filled the room. Whenever something put Ellen in a mood, she ran herself a two-hour bath.

Dean thought back to their shouting match. Ellen was used to outbursts like that from Dean, but Sam? Never.

Dean inhaled a few more saltines, took a long swig of juice, and marched into the scrapyard. He knew exactly where Sam was.

~*~

The searing heat of the day was fading as the sun set behind the scrapyard, painting the world in
muted pinks and oranges. It looked rather blissful, and Dean was sad that he would miss a nice evening with Cas. On days like this, they would drive to a diner on the outskirts of Lawrence City, get burgers, and watch the sun until it finally turned in for the night.

Then they’d go home, do their own thing for a while, and go to bed.

Dean stopped his thoughts for a moment. In his head, he really made it sound like he was married to Cas. How desperate was he?

*Cas is pissed at you. And he’s going to be even more pissed at you when you tell him you’re the Righteous Man.*

Dean’s boots crunched against the gravel path that circled the entire scrapyard. Sam and Dean had found out very early that if they followed the path, it led to a small forest. Most of their childhood had been spent there, so Bobby had built them a tree house one year.

The two brothers were obviously too big for it now, but the sentimentality was comforting.

Dean found Sam sitting beneath the treehouse on the dirt floor of the forest, the back of his head resting against the aged bark. His eyes were closed, and when he sensed he had company, his relaxed hands became taut fists.

“I got pissed off. That’s it. No need to come here and lecture me.” Sam opened his usually sea-green eyes, which looked like an empty teal in the shadows of the trees. Dean shoved his hands in the pockets of the sweats Bobby clearly dressed him in, considering there was a gaping hole in the knee.

“All right. Care to share your feelings with the class, then?” Dean toed at the dirt, making an indent with his boot.

Sam looked up at his big brother.

“Since we left Milton Medical, I could… feel something. I knew it was whatever Gordon gave me, I’m not stupid. But I didn’t want it to affect me, so I pushed it down. Then, I got so angry… I couldn’t hold it back, and when Ellen started having a go at us…” The younger Winchester half-shrugged and looked down at his hands.

“I was so shitty to Ellen, I even scared myself.” Sam shook his head, pausing as his brows came together.

“I’ve never felt such rage in my life.” He turned to look behind the tree.

“I… I should probably show you this.”

Dean could read Sam like a book. Something had absolutely terrified him.

Without commenting, Dean followed his brother a couple of feet past the treehouse. It didn’t take long to realise what his brother was showing him.

An admittedly small, but an entire *goddamn tree* that had been broken in half stood in front of Sam. The other half was a good six metres in front of them.

“What the hell?” Dean couldn’t help but comment. Discreetly, he took a small step away from Sam.

“I did that,” Sam admitted, and inhaled deeply.

“Whatever Gordon gave me… It’s doing something. I –” He turned around, taking a few steps away
from his older brother before turning back to him. His eyes had gone wet with tears.

“I don’t want to end up like Meg and Ava.”

Sam sniffled, and Dean could feel his own heart breaking for his brother.

“Hey, hey. We’ll figure it out,” Dean insisted, softening his voice in an attempt at comfort. With a huff, he launched himself at Sam and swung his arms over his brother’s shoulders, wrapping him up in a much needed hug.

“I… I need to go tell Cas about the vigilante thing right now. But I’ll be back when I’m done – Cas’ll probably kick me out for a few nights.” Dean slapped his brother’s shoulders as he leaned away.

“Hey, look at it this way - we’re like real superheroes now, though, right? One of us is cursed and the other can’t… get the girl.”

Sam gave him a half-hearted laugh.

“Yeah. But you can get her – him. Trust me.” He punched his brother lightly in the shoulder, and Dean actually found it hurt more than normal. He tried his hardest not to let the surprise register by backing away to make his way to his car.

“Can’t be a superhero without the tragic heartbreak, right?” Dean replied with a bittersweet tone. “You coming back to the house?”

Sam shook his head.

“Think I’m gonna Facetime Eileen. It’s been a while.” He slid his phone out of his pocket, smiling sheepishly at Dean.

“I’ll be fine. I’ll leave Ellen to herself for a while and apologise later.”

Dean nodded, shooting an affectionate smile at his brother, and made his way back up the path to the Impala.

~*~

The door to Dean and Cas’ apartment burst open just as Dean was searching for his key.

“Dean.”

Cas didn’t wait one extra moment to yank Dean’s body into his, sliding his arms around Dean’s neck and squeezing tight. Today, just like every other day, he smelled like coffee and warmth. After such a tense time at the Singer-Harvelle household, it was refreshing to come back to something so familiar.

The world slowed down as he wound his arms around Cas’ waist, pressing his chin into the crook of Cas’ neck, letting himself just have this for a moment. Their friendship was one of the most precious things Dean has. Though it didn’t feel like he hadn’t seen Cas for a few days – since he’d spent the majority of it unconscious – it had been two whole days for Cas. They hadn’t been apart for more than twelve hours in months.

“I’m mad at you, but I’m happy to see you,” Cas murmured in his ear. After a long few seconds, Cas loosened his grip, but not completely – his hand slid down to grip Dean’s bare wrist, gently guiding
him into the apartment.

Cas didn’t take his eyes off him for a moment, and Dean could feel his brain doing that dumb thing where it forgot that time passed because *oh my God, Cas.*

Dean hadn’t realised how desperate he was to just talk to his best friend. It was a longing sensation, and his body was hurrying him along to fix it, as if it was something primal – a need like hunger or thirst.

“I missed you so much.” Dean let slip. He hadn’t meant to do that.

“I –” Cas looked like he was going to say *I missed you, too,* but instead his face twisted into an firm glare.

“Tell me what’s going on. Right now.”

Dean had fully prepared himself. His mask was in his pocket, his costume (washed of vomit) was folded up in the Impala. He had even rehearsed a small speech in his head: *Hey. Yeah. Those guys on the news? Me and Sam. Yeah.*

Some speech.

Cas was standing there, looking effortlessly gorgeous with his stupid dorky glasses and button-up shirt. It was short sleeved, so Dean could check out his *fucking biceps.* Even his hair, which he had clearly been messing with, looked just as tousled and sex-hairish as ever. Even his goddamn *eyes* looked more beautiful, and Dean wanted to slap himself silly for waxing poetic about Cas every fucking time he saw him. It was getting embarrassing.

He was sure he groaned out loud, because he couldn’t let his friend down again.

“Dean.” Cas’ voice was demanding, and Dean’s breathing quickened.

It was now or never.

With trembling hands, he pulled the mask out of his pocket, and waited for Cas’ reaction.

*Oh God oh God oh God -*

“Are you… going to a costume party?” Cas’ brows creased together, and Dean wanted to cry because his response was *so adorable.* He planted his free hand on Cas’ shoulder.

“Don’t ever change.” Dean let his gaze bore into Cas’ for a moment, and couldn’t help but beam affectionately at him. His friend continued to frown, so he cleared his throat.

“Cas, uh, I’m – I’m not gonna sugar coat it, because quite honestly, I have no idea how to tell you any other way.” Dean let his hand brush down Cas’ soft arm, knowing the next time he spoke he might not be able to touch him in a similar way for a long time.

He found himself clutching the mask tightly in his hands afterwards, suddenly contemplating whether becoming the Righteous Man had been a mistake. What had been a petty revenge plan had become something bigger than his own selfish needs, bigger than just him – his brother was involved, his surrogate family, new friends – even strangers.

And he had saved people.

*No.* It hadn’t been a mistake. He had made the right choice.
He was going to save Cas by telling him.

“I’m the Righteous Man.”

Dean’s voice sounded hollow, monotonous, and he disliked the way he’d said it. His eyes drifted upwards hesitantly, meeting Cas’.

“Sam and I – we’re the vigilantes.”

The second statement came with more punch, like he truly meant what he was saying, that he was proud of what he was – which was true. For the majority of his life he’d done barely anything, pretty much waiting for an opportunity to be handed to him on a silver platter. It was his brother who was meant to be the success story, after all.

But this – being a hero… perhaps it was his opportunity.

There was a loud crack as Cas’ hand collided with his already sore cheek.

A silence fell after that as Dean pawed at his throbbing face. That was his second slap of the day, and his body definitely wasn’t happy about it. He stepped away from Cas, waiting a moment for the dust to settle, and found himself feeling very… empty.

He had known from the start that Cas would be mad at him, but a slap to the face… it was almost laughable. They hadn’t even had play fights, let alone actual fist fights, and Dean had no idea how to comprehend it.

*It was just a slap. You’ve had much worse.*

Dean dared himself to turn around, and was met with an absolutely fuming Castiel. In another life, if he had taken after his namesake, Dean was fairly sure he would have been a pile of ashes by the time he’d uttered the word ‘righteous’.

“Hey man, I get it –”

“Shut up,” Cas snapped, interrupting Dean’s sad attempt at reparations. If someone had told Dean a year ago that he could ruin his friendship with Cas by uttering barely a dozen words, he would have laughed.

Cas continued to stare at him, utter disbelief and shock littering his expression, and the longer the silence went on, the more it became uncomfortable. The quiet stretched out into ten seconds, then fifteen, then twenty, and then, finally, it became *unbearable*. Dean raised his hands in surrender and walked away into the kitchen.

If he was going to fight with Cas, he needed some goddamn alcohol to get through it. And probably an ice pack.

He could hear the patter of Cas’ socked feet following him as he hauled open the fridge, internally grumbling when he saw there was only a bottle of beer and a half-empty can of cream soda.

“Dean.” Cas’ tone was unreadable, and Dean nabbed the bottle with a sigh.

“What?” was all he replied, mirroring Cas’ tone. Facing him was hard, he admitted to himself, and tried to put all of his attention into opening his drink. His skin got caught between the crinkled metal, and he grumbled loudly.
“I’m sorry.” Cas was handing something to him – a bottle opener, something Dean always refused to use – but he took it. He supposed it was a very small and slightly sad way of apologising for hitting him.

Screw the beer, Dean decided, dropping the small piece of metal on the table, raising the bottle to his rapidly swelling cheek. He briefly closed his eyes, sighing at the cooling sensation against his hot skin.

“It’s fine. I would have slapped me, too.” He could hear Cas rooting around in the freezer behind him, and once he was done, he held out a bag of frozen peas to his friend. Dean gratefully took them, clunking the beer on the kitchen island.

“You’re a good guy, Cas.” Dean pressed the pack to his cheek delicately.

“You’ve got one hell of a swing, too. Perhaps you can bitch slap your way into our team, make it a trio instead.” The joke came naturally, but he suddenly realised what he had implied – he was ready to give Cas a lecture on how he would never join the team, but his friend beat him to it.

“No, thanks.” Though he sounded bitter, Cas took the frozen bag from Dean’s grasp and held it up to Dean’s face for him.

He paused before saying anything, watching the sense of wariness in Cas’ eyes. The two of them were treading on thin ice at this point, not daring to say something that could make the situation worse than it already was.

“I’m guessing you have questions,” Dean hedged, nervously licking at his lips. For the slightest moment, Cas’ eyes flickered down to watch – dammit, Dean. Now isn’t the time.

“Did you… did you lie about being bisexual just so you wouldn’t have to tell me you were a vigilante?” Cas was searching Dean’s expression, because apparently that had to be the one burning question he had.

“I, uh… I did lie, sort of. I never went and got… help, or whatever bullshit I spewed. That was my vigilante cover-up there.” Dean shuffled a little, swiping his hand up the side of the cool beer bottle, tracing a line in the condensation.

“I’m… yeah, I’m bisexual, though. That wasn’t a lie.”

“Good,” Cas replied curtly, and Dean raised his eyebrows.

“Good?”

“I’d be more pissed off than I already am if you lied about that.” Cas moved the bag of peas away and placed it on the kitchen island, clenching his hand to regain some warmth. Deciding that wasn’t sufficient, Cas reached for the coffee machine to brew them a hot drink. Dean, in the meantime, prodded at his numb cheek. Though the ice had helped the rawness, his skin still felt rather stiff from the swelling.

Dean was never one for detailed explanations. Words never came easily to him, and he could tell it was what Cas needed.

“I… wanted to tell you for a while – about the vigilante thing, I mean. I’ve been meaning to since – since about February. Sam and I, we took out that guy –”

“I remember. Drug dealer named Brady, right? It was the first big story about… you. I was working
with the *Lawrence Gazette* while they covered it.” Cas stepped away from Dean, pressing at buttons on the coffee machine.

It was going to be a long night.

“Actually, Hannah was working on the story. She asked me to try take photos of you, but I declined.” Cas turned to rest his back against the counter, his hands latched around the end of the wooden surface.

“Why?”

“Because to me, it was just a pair of idiots running around the city, desperate for validation.” He pressed his lips together sheepishly.

“That is, until you saved me. Then, my opinion changed.”

Oh God. Dean had briefly forgotten the scenario at the office, and realised it probably changed the entire situation for Cas.

He prayed it was for the better.

“Now that I think back, it’s kind of funny. I thought you sounded like Sam.” Cas’ sight lowered as he remembered his own rescue, though his tone was anything but light.

“I guess I wasn’t completely wrong.”

The two of them became quiet; the only sound breaking the silence was the clicking of the coffee machine as it brewed. Dean supposed they both needed a moment to let their exchanges digest, to come to grips with what had just happened. Where would they go from here? Would everything stay the same?

“Everything kind of makes sense now.” Cas had moved to the sink, rinsing out two dirty coffee cups with some dish soap. Dean watched as bubbles stuck to his smooth hands.

“How so?” Dean almost subconsciously handed his roommate a dish towel, briefly surprised by how familiar the gesture had felt.

“You kept *working* until five in the morning, your room is a complete disaster, like you’re *begging* for an accident to happen. You live off protein and coffee.” Cas swept away water droplets from the cups, then placed each one on the kitchen island in front of Dean before grabbing the carafe. Cas’ expression became more serious after that.

“You’re on edge all the time. I thought… it was because of the case with our parents, I knew how much it meant to you. You look at me like you think I’m made of glass.” He moved closer and poured the coffee into their cups, and Dean’s breath hitched because of their close proximity. Cas looked up at Dean, his eyes dark.

“And the last time we were this close, you kissed me.” To get the point across, he stayed close for another dragging moment, Dean’s heart almost stopping in his chest. He felt constricted – there was no escape from this confrontation whatsoever – and then Cas moved away, placing the carafe back in the machine, and Dean breathed.

“I’m sorry,” was all he could manage, trembling from the exchange. He was adamant that Cas had kissed him back, but he wasn’t going to bring that up again – although there was the illusion that
Dean had moved passed it, he was still hurt.

Why am I apologising for that?

“Why are you bringing that up now?” Dean raised his chin slightly, trying to mimic confidence.

“This is – this is about me being the Righteous Man, not about… us. All… that.” He gestured between them, emotional constipation apparently in full force. It was the first time he had acknowledged there was something between them out loud, and when Cas didn’t deny it, Dean felt his heart race.

But then, Cas spoke, exasperation and frustration dripping from his tone.

“This is about us, Dean. We haven’t lied to or argued with each other once in eleven years! In the past week alone you’ve caused two arguments and just now I discovered you happen to be the fucking vigilante all over the news!” That struck a chord with Dean, because Cas wasn’t exactly innocent, either.

“Yeah- well- you didn’t tell me you were gay!” Dean snapped back, and immediately recoiled.

Dick. Move.

The blood drained from Cas’ face – he was mortified. Dean had felt fine with telling Cas he was bisexual, expecting absolutely zero hate, so the confession hadn’t been so hard for him. But apparently it was a deep, dark secret for Cas.

“What.”

“Shit – that wasn’t, ugh. That doesn’t even compare, I’m sorry –”

“How do you know?” Cas had gone still as a statue, and looked just as grey.

“The office party… you told me when you were drunk.” Dean hated to admit it, knowing all too well how drunk confessions went down. In fact, he started dating Lisa because he had drunkenly confessed to her one night that he had a huge crush on her.

Dammit. Alcohol truly was the bane of his existence.

Cas was shaking his head, a look of pure devastation on his face. And Dean had done that. Dean had directly caused that.

He was not having a good day.

“Is that why you reacted the way you did to the kiss?” Dean had little else to lose, so he decided he might as well get all his facts straight.

After a long hesitation, Cas answered.

“I assume we’re being honest with each other tonight.” Cas waited for some kind of confirmation, and was satisfied when Dean gave him a quick nod.

“You have to understand, I’m not okay with it myself yet, I’m still figuring out if it’s right for me –”

“Dude, it’s 2016. Everyone’s accepting of it, nobody gives a rat’s ass.” Dean had intended to sound supportive, but he riled Cas up even more.
“Jesus – for you, yes! But I care! I wasn’t ready for you to know yet!” Cas smacked his hands together in exasperation, and Dean felt a pang of something in his gut. Why wouldn’t Cas want him to know?

“Why the hell not? I’m not the kind of jackass who’s gonna assume you want me just because you might have the urge to suck a dick occasionally!” Dean knew he was being harsh, and knew it wasn’t fair, but the adrenaline and leftover emotions from the past week were catching up to him. Boy, he needed to lie down for a few hours, maybe a few years.

“I don’t understand! You want me to be honest with you but you’re not honest with me – I mean, what do you want?!”

Cas looked like he was holding his breath, like he was going to explode – and then he blurted out the only thing Dean’s ever wanted to hear.

“It’s you I want!”

Dean froze.

He was sure he shut down for a minute, had to be rebooted, and mentally went through a series of long, gruelling, metaphorical updates.

He couldn’t have heard that right, his mind had to be playing tricks on him – that had happened a lot, and he wasn’t going to fall into the trap again.

As soon as the words exploded from his mouth, Cas had clamped his hands over his mouth, like he was a dumb middle-schooler who had accidentally told the girl he’d been crushing on that she was cute. Dean didn’t move, hardly let himself breathe, because this had been the moment he’d been praying for, fantasised about, and had been the one thing nagging him at the back of his mind forever. The amount of times he had gone over this scenario in his head had to be unhealthy, but now that it was reality… what the hell was he supposed to say?

Cas finally shifted his hands, hurriedly stumbling backwards, determined to get away from Dean. He ended up walking back into the kitchen counter.

“Th-this should be about the vigilante stuff… I’m sorry. Ignore that. Pretend you never heard it, whatever – we can move on. I’m fine with it.” The stuttering made Dean’s heart ache, bringing him back to reality, and that was when it all came to him. He knew what to do.

Dean drifted towards Cas slowly, letting himself take it all in just because he damn well could. Almost greedily, he let his eyes roam across Cas’ body, and when he had made his way right into Cas’ personal space, he focused on his friend’s lips.

He pinched the frames of Cas’ glasses, pulled them off, and leaned forward to carefully place them on the kitchen counter, making sure not to get his fingerprints on the lenses. He then took both of Cas’ hands in his, cupping them gently to his chest, and pressed their foreheads together.

“I’ll stop if you want me to,” he murmured quietly enough that just Cas was able to hear him. His best friend’s exhaled shakily, hot breath hitting Dean’s lips welcomingly.

“I don’t want you to.”

*Those five words*. . . *better than Christmas.*

Dean nudged Cas’ nose with his own and tilted his head slightly, then shyly grazed their lips
together. It was a surreal experience, kissing the person he loved knowing that he felt the same way. Their first kiss had been magic… but this was something entirely different, something Dean couldn’t define with words. He wouldn’t have been even moderately surprised if he was dreaming – until Cas slid a palm around the back of his neck.

Cas began kissing him like he really meant it, despite the fact he had no experience whatsoever, pressing as close as he could manage. It definitely broke Dean out of his reverie, the way their lips moved roughly together, the sensation making the rest of the world melt away around him. It was clumsy and unpractised but Cas’ enthusiasm more than made up for it.

Dean’s hands moved to grip the countertop beside Cas’ hips for dear life. It brought them closer, chests pressed together, lined from top to toe, and Dean thought he could literally feel Cas’ heart beating between the fabrics of their clothes – it was fast, erratic, and it made his own heart race even more.

After a long press of their lips, Dean briefly pulled away, watching Cas’ eyes as they hooded over – so damn beautiful. It was even better than he could have ever imagined.

“You have no damn clue how long I’ve thought about this.”

Dean was startled by how thick his voice sounded with emotion, and so was Cas – he could see his friend’s eyebrows rise slightly. He said nothing, and instead pulled Dean back into him roughly by the neck of his shirt, their lips sealing together once more.

Knowing Cas wanted more, Dean pulled back slightly and latched his mouth to the curve of Cas’ neck, revelling in the way the stubble on his jaw rubbed against his own. His ear was also right next to Cas’ mouth, and he could hear every single heavy breath as they escaped Cas’ lips. Oh God.

“Dean.” Cas’ voice was already raspy, but damn, his hot-and-flustered voice was something else. He moved his lips along Cas’ jaw until he could look at him face-to-face.

“Hm?” Dean’s lips felt swollen from all the kissing, but he was still raring to go. He felt a pair of hands lightly shoving at his chest, making him move away – had Dean done something wrong?

Fuck.

Then, he heard someone clear their throat from behind him, and holy shit, he didn’t even have to turn around to know it was Sam fucking Winchester.

“Fuck.” Dean muttered as he hung his head, swiping at his lips.

“Sam – could you just… give me a minute.” He wasn’t sure he could face his brother after that preliminary make-out session. He hadn’t kissed anyone in over two years, and it was definitely doing things to him. Time had taken its toll, and he had become weak.

Sam obliged and began loitering around their living room – which wasn’t helpful, considering the apartment was mostly open-plan.

“Sorry about him, he wouldn’t do that if it wasn’t important,” Dean whispered, not daring to look Cas in the eye. If he did, he’d probably end up kissing him whether Sam hung around or not.

“I know,” Cas muttered back, reaching out to run his fingers through the hair on the side of Dean’s head. He couldn’t help but lean into the touch.

“I’ll be in my room. And if… if it’s something Righteous Man-related, tell me.”
Dean didn’t let himself watch Cas go, because he knew he would follow him like a damn puppy if he did.

Now, he had to face the sibling who had insisted he was in love with Cas, which he had firmly denied, who had just walked in on them making out filthily against a kitchen counter like a pair of horny teenagers. *Wonderful.*

Dean snatched up his coffee cup, pouring the no longer freshly brewed liquid inside, quickly gulping down a good amount, and reluctantly went to face the music.

“Before you say a *thing* –”

“Dude. All I’m gonna say is I’m happy that finally happened. You deserve it.” Sam was… actually beaming, and Dean almost expected him to start waxing poetic and crying happy-tears.

“…Alright.” He briefly swiped his thumb across his lip, which felt hypersensitive after… everything.

“So, what’s up? I’m guessing something happened.”

Sam’s little moment of happiness appeared to break then; an air of graveness settled firmly in his eyes.

“Dean… *Alex is dead.*”
Oh God. Oh God. Claire. Claire is going to hate me.

I let her down.

Dean could do nothing but stare blankly at Sam – he refused to believe it. He hadn’t failed Lawrence City once yet—he had caught criminals, gotten leads on his parents’ death… this couldn’t be real. At least a drug dealer or thief was just another criminal on the loose that the police could capture – but an eighteen-year-old girl, dead?

Someone’s kid, girlfriend, student - gone.

Just like that.

That was unforgiveable.

And Dean could have so easily fixed that.

“The police think she jumped off Stull Bridge, suicide from a severe depressive episode caused by ‘unknown drugs.’ Guess we know what it really was.” Sam swiped a hand through his floppy hair, tucking it behind his ear.

“She – the bottom of the river is covered in rocks –”

“Alright,” Dean snapped. He had to stop his brother because his mind flashed with images of Claire, sobbing, throwing away the cross necklace he’d entrusted with her, because he broke a promise. A truly meaningful promise.

All because he’d been half-asleep the entire time.

Alex had died the same way Claire’s mother had. Something like that could destroy a person.

“I know it hurts, I know you blame yourself, but don’t, please. It was Gordon who ‘found’ her, Dean.”

With that little extra snippet, Dean felt the most jarring emotional shift in his life – from a gloomy ache in his chest to a raging inferno in his gut.

“That fucking prick,” Dean cursed.

“What kind of psycho kills a kid? That’s – that’s fucking disgusting.” He shook his head, needing to take a few long paces before continuing.

“I’ll fucking kill him.”

Sam’s lips parted, and he stepped into his brother’s path.

“No – you don’t mean that. I think we should visit Jody tomorrow, in costume. She probably has answers, and knowing what you did for her kid, she’ll give them to you.”

Dean knew his brother was trying to be supportive, but that just made him hurt more. He hadn’t done anything for Claire, not really, and Sam needed to know the truth.
Tonight’s really the night for confessions, huh.

“Claire asked me to find Alex.” Dean stared at a crack in their saggy leather sofa, not exactly thrilled by the idea of seeing his brother’s ‘I’m gonna tear you apart’ rage face.

Dean had broken a golden rule: letting someone else get involved in their business.

“She saw my face at the convenience store, it got attacked while I was paying for stuff. I – I gave her my cross necklace, told her she could trust me and I’d be there if she needed me.” He absently remembered what Claire had told him, that Gabriel Novak was her dad, and made a mental note to let Cas down even further by telling him that later.

Dean dared himself to look up for a moment, seeing Sam had his hands pressed into his hips and a look of quiet disappointment on his face.

“Mom’s necklace. I wondered why you weren’t wearing it.” Sam sounded stoic, and he briskly paced past Dean towards the guest room.

“You know what? I’m too tired for this right now. We can talk in the morning.”

A tell-tale sign that Sam was silently furious – he needed to go sulk in his room like a moody teenager. This had happened many a time over the course of their lives, most notably during their early-teenage years when Dean would try to insist everyone was wrong about their parents’ deaths, but Sam would refuse to agree with him.

Dean was about to walk away when Sam paused in front of his borrowed bedroom door.

“Did you tell Cas everything?” Again: a similar devoid tone, like he was desperate to give his brother the silent treatment. Necessary communication only.

“No all of it. But I’m going to.”

Sam clicked open his door, avoiding his brother’s sight. Dean could see the muscles in his jaw contracting.

“Good.”

And with that, Dean was back to the gloomy ache in his chest. He only knew of one thing that could make it disappear.

~*~

The door to Cas’ room creaked as it opened, and Dean peered inside. His best friend sat cross-legged on his immaculately made bed, precious camera in hand, as he probably evaluated his footage. With squinting eyes – his glasses were still in the kitchen – he addressed Dean’s entrance by giving him a wary smile. In fact, Cas seemed to be overall rather nervous – his posture straightened too fast, and he took in a deep breath.

Well, after what had just happened between them, he had a right to be.

“Hey,” Cas greeted, voice soft and mellow, something soothing after such a long day.

“Hey,” Dean repeated, and closed the door behind him. He knew what came next: discussion about what had just happened, a real heart-to-heart conversation, also known as Dean’s least favourite thing to participate in.
“Can we talk?”

“Of course.” Cas nodded and set his camera on his bedside table – he had a goddamn stand for it and everything; he treated the thing like it was his own child. Wordlessly, he patted the free space of sky-blue duvet next to him, and Dean obliged.

The plush mattress was welcoming against Dean’s sore muscles, and he sighed gratefully when his head hit Cas’ pillow. While he fidgeted a little, getting as comfortable as possible, Cas watched over him, eyes bright and content. He then lay down with Dean, resting his hands over his stomach while Dean lay on his side.

And before Cas could do anything else, Dean began to recite his vigilante story from the beginning – all the way from the news report in December, to fighting petty criminals who were totally unrelated to his plan for revenge, to Brady, to Sam, Claire, Charlie. Every single detail that he could remember, he let it out all at once, as if he was a broken dam that couldn’t be controlled. In the back of his mind, something was telling him to stop, but he couldn’t – there had been enough lies, and he couldn’t let himself betray Cas any longer. If he did, he knew in his heart that it would eventually tear them apart.

When he was done, it was as if someone had turned him upside down and emptied him out. His emotional baggage, something he usually classified as one of his defining traits, no longer felt so heavy. Dean couldn’t decide whether what he was feeling was relief or emptiness.

Ever the empath, Cas always knew what Dean needed the most: he had listened to every word, no interruptions, and simply let Dean finish.

“I’m sorry it took so long for me to tell you… But Sam telling me about Alex-“ he swallowed around the lump in his throat.

“-it made me realise this isn’t just about me and my selfish need for revenge anymore.” Dean felt the lump growing bigger, blocking his air passage slowly but surely.

“A girl is dead because of me.” He choked out.

Cas moved his hand, brushing his fingers down Dean’s forearm before sliding them between his.

“That wasn’t your fault, Dean. Even you have to know you couldn’t have done anything because of what Gordon did to you.” Cas met Dean’s eyes, a sad smile on his round lips.

“You can’t save everyone, my friend. Though you try.”

Dean examined Cas’ face for a minute, wondering how the hell someone so pure had worked his way into his life. He had his own share of demons, a ridiculously troubled past, and a forever-increasing list of bad things he’d done in his life, giving him a valid reason to label himself as a terrible person. When he thought the darkness inside his soul would consume him, all he had to do was turn to Cas, whose light would reignite his faith in the world, faith in himself, reassuring him that he too could be good.

Nothing inspired Dean more than Cas. And that’s why he loved him.

“As for Gabe and Claire… It doesn’t really surprise me. He had a lot of secrets, family reputation and all, and he was at college during the time Claire would have been born. He… always wanted to rebel in his own way.” Cas chewed on his lip, finally breaking his gaze from Dean’s.

“With Dad being Dad, it’s no wonder I never knew.”
Chuck was a loving yet secretive man, and when he had gone missing, Cas’ home-life had become broken. Untold secrets kept the family in the dark as to why Chuck was gone, and all they could do was throw accusations around or theorise where Chuck could have gone without a shred of actual evidence. Being the mayor automatically gave him enemies, people who disliked his policies, but nobody had ever really considered it could get him seriously hurt.

Dean remembered the day Cas told him Gabriel was moving to New York with Anna and his mother, insisting Lawrence City was toxic for their family relationship. Stubborn as usual, Cas decided to stay put, insisting that Lawrence City was his home. And that’s how he ended up moving in with Dean barely a week after his family had left him behind.

Anna visited sometimes, but Cas hadn’t seen the others for almost two years.

“Should I meet up with her? She’s my niece. Perhaps I could be of comfort.” Cas traced a pattern on Dean’s hand with his own.

“That’s a nice idea, but I don’t think she’d appreciate it at all. She’s kind of… a very angry person.” Dean sighed.

“I think after Alex she isn’t gonna want anything to do with me, you, or Sam.”

Cas didn’t say anything for a minute, but the quiet wasn’t awkward.

If Dean was in Cas’ position, he was sure it would be overwhelming to find out he had another relative, especially when his immediate family had rejected him in recent years. Dean firmly believed family wasn’t defined by blood, but even so, there was always going to be some kind of special connection by sharing it with someone else.

He just hoped it didn’t get Cas hurt.

“I’m sorry I was so pissed off before,” Cas began, “I’ve… calmed down now. I understand why you wouldn’t say anything to me.” He moved onto his side, so he had no choice but to look at Dean face-to-face, their breaths mingling because they were so close.

“I was your normal in all of this.”

Dean felt the corners of his mouth turn upwards. The kiss crossed his mind, and by default he was about to curse himself for it – but then he remembered that he could do that now, that he could just go for it. However, Cas continued to talk.

“When you saved me, that kiss did mean something. It kind of scared me, because it just confirmed how I felt about you after I’d been trying to suppress it for years.” Cas’ eyes flitted downwards; he was looking at their entangled hands.

“I kept telling myself I wasn’t ready to be out, to be with someone, but now I know that that was an excuse. I am ready, I was terrified that you just… kissed me in the heat of the moment, and that you would think nothing more of me after.”

Dean shook his head and snaked his hand out of Cas’.

“God, you’re stupid,” he muttered before rolling over, kissing Cas before he could say another word.

This kiss was calmer than the one in the kitchen, to reassure Cas in a way that Dean couldn’t quite say out loud that yes, I’m in love with you.
It was then that Cas’ inexperience began to show: he kept having to part for air, his breath hot in Dean’s mouth every time; he found it difficult to move his arms and mouth at the same time, so he kept going stiff sporadically against Dean’s lips.

“Word of advice when kissing,” Dean smirked when Cas pulled away for the fourth time, red in the face and lips swollen, “breathe through your nose.”

Seeking Cas’ gaze for reassurance, he swiftly pressed their lips together again, angling his head so that they could be closer. Losing himself in the moment, he dragged his hand up Cas’ side, hoisting up the material of his shirt as he went. With his warm, tanned skin on display, Dean pressed into it with his fingertips, feeling the muscles move beneath them.

“Dean.” Cas rasped breathlessly, and pulled away as Dean’s hand edged further up his bare side. Dean removed his hand, not wanting to make Cas even more uncomfortable than he probably already was.

“Sorry, I get it, it’s all new –”

“No… I was actually wondering if you wanted to sleep here? Maybe it’s not a great idea for you to… be alone.” Cas stumbled over his own words.

“I mean, I don’t want you feeling upset by yourself.”

The corner of Dean’s mouth quirked upward, solely out of adoration, because Cas was too sweet.

“Yeah.” He made sure his voice was gentle, not wanting to overwhelm Cas by coming across too strong. With a peck to Cas’ lips, he clambered off the bed and swiftly undid his belt – which was a mistake because Cas’ jaw dropped to the floor as he saw what was going on.

“Oh, sorry, I meant –”

“Crap – I know. I was just gonna sleep in my boxers – I can get something else.” Dean fiddled with his belt, struggling to do it up again.

“No, no, it’s okay.” A red blush clung to Cas’ cheeks as he swung his legs over the edge of his bed, moving to stand in front of Dean.

“That’s… okay.” A cautious giggle emerged from Cas’ lips, and Dean could feel himself smiling goofily from how cute the sound had been.

“Yeah?” Dean searched Cas’ eyes, sliding his belt out of the loops in his jeans to drop it on Cas’ floor.

“It’s not like I haven’t seen you in your underwear before.” Cas was referring to Dean’s infamous laundry days, where he would wash everything he owned all at once except a pair of boxers because it was more convenient. Then, he would sit in front of the TV for several hours in his underwear while Cas sat next to him and sent off emails.

Dean nodded, hastily tugging down his jeans and stepping out of them, and stood up straight to find himself feeling sheepish about the situation. Everything had changed between them, at least temporarily, and for the first time in eleven years their entire dynamic would be changing. Needless to say, it was daunting for Dean.

The two smiled at each other briefly, and it seemed to reassure Cas enough to unbutton his shirt. Dean didn’t want to look like he was ogling, but he also didn’t want to not ogle, because Cas
certainly needed to be aware of how gorgeous he was.

When the shirt came off, they looked like a pair of idiots: one of them without pants, the other missing a shirt, standing opposite each other with a foot of space between them. Dean began laughing, because not once in his life had he ever acted more like a gawky teenager, not even when he was one – it was clear that Cas felt the same, because his own laughter wasn’t far behind.

Still laughing, Dean let his eyes drift down to Cas’ bare chest; the light from his bedside lamp emphasised how toned he was, which wasn’t surprising, considering Cas went running every evening after work. If Dean reached out to touch him, would Cas mind?

Cas proceeded to strip down to just his underwear, a pair of basic navy boxers, and dumped his clothes absently next to Dean’s. They could sort the mess out in the morning.

With a shaky inhale, Cas then raised his hands to rest just above Dean’s pecs, and despite the warm contact, Dean shivered beneath his touch.

“Shall we?” Cas whispered, as if the lack of clothing made him vulnerable. In a way, it did – there was no safety blanket, nothing to hide behind anymore. It was just the two of them, each like an open book.

Dean silently nodded, gripping Cas’ wrists before he could move. Then, with the intention of it being brief, he swept his lips swiftly over Cas’, as if to say goodnight. When he pulled away, his friend followed, apparently having to be the one to have the last input.

Well, Dean wasn’t complaining.

With a cloud-nine sigh, Dean let go of Cas’ wrists, standing out of the way as his friend moved to get comfortable in his own bed.

When Dean slid under the covers, the cool material silky against his skin, he felt an overwhelming sense of right wash over him, like this was what he had been missing all along. The pieces fitted neatly together in Dean’s head, filling whatever hole had been inside him that he hadn’t totally known he’d had.

Reaching over Dean, Cas flicked off the bedroom light, then pressed the length of his body against Dean and flung an arm lazily over his stomach. In other words, Dean was the little spoon.

“Y’know,” Dean whispered, gliding his hand over Cas’, “by the state of our clothes and ourselves, Sam’s gonna assume we had sex.”

Cas jabbed him in the stomach sharply in response.

~*~

After Dean crawled out of Cas’ grasp carefully the next morning, he padded into the kitchen to find that Sam was already making himself quite at home. He was happily munching at some cereal-fruit-yoghurt combo that made Dean’s insides squirm, standing at the kitchen island whilst scrolling through his phone.

Dean was in a fairly great mood after his night with Cas, which was quickly destroyed when Sam registered his presence with a short glare. One thing was certain: Dean was not in the mood for a drawn-out fight with his brother.

“Dude. It’s eight in the fucking morning. What the hell are you mad about?” Dean rubbed his eye,
the word coffee bouncing around in his thoughts.

Sam supplied him with one of his renowned bitch faces, then proceeded to lay down all of his issues.

“Look. Yesterday I was exhausted, and worked up because of this – whatever drug. Anyway, I get it – you couldn’t exactly not tell Claire who you were given the circumstances, and that’s fine. I’m not mad about that.” Sam put his bowl of health-mush down.

“It’s the fact that you found her, told her you’d do something for her, and got her involved in this vigilante business. That isn’t fair, Dean. Jesus – so many people probably want our personal help. And now she’s gonna be on the radar of whoever wants to get back at us.”

Dean was grateful Sam had woken up early – some coffee had already been brewed, still boiling in the carafe, and he happily poured the rest of the thing into the biggest coffee cup he owned.

“You gave her Mom’s necklace, one of the only things we had left of her. Why are you giving some kid special treatment? And why didn’t you tell me earlier?”

Dean turned to face his brother, lips pressed into a tight line as his brother continued.

“How didn’t you know she was Jody’s? We’ve known her for years, we knew she adopted a girl. Hell, you’ve probably seen Claire’s picture on Jody’s desk since you got into that much trouble as a kid.”

Sam grunted inwardly, regretting his choice of words, and opened his mouth, intending to apologise and, Dean, I didn’t mean it like that. Now, it was Dean’s turn to fight back.

“I promised her I’d help if she needed it, because she was fucking scared. I ran into her in the park, totally by accident, after I had that fight with Cas, alright? I wanted to make myself feel better by helping her get her girlfriend back. Look how that turned out.” Dean’s voice got louder and louder, and he made himself tone it down; he didn’t want to wake Cas.

“As for knowing her from Jody, yeah, maybe I did see her photo on her desk – but, y’know, I was kinda busy either being drunk, high, a mix of the two, or crying over my dead parents.”

Dean could feel his temper bubbling over the edge, because how could Sam be so hypocritical about lies, when there was the giant elephant in the room: Sam’s previous drug problem.

“And how the hell can you stand there and lecture me about lying, when you have this whole secret past I still don’t know a thing about?”

Sam dropped his gaze to his feet, nodding reluctantly.

“Fair enough.” The younger Winchester tapped his fingers against the surface of the kitchen island, teeth sinking into his bottom lip for a moment.

“Alright. School was hard, and I felt… the worst I’ve ever felt. I felt empty all the time. I didn’t tell you because, well, therapists cost a lot.

“I was friends with this girl, she was in the same major as me, but she liked… to party, is the nice way of saying it. She did drugs. Crack, ecstasy, whatever she got her hands on. I wanted to feel fine, I – I asked her for help.” Sam’s voice cracked as he began gripping the counter for dear life.

“Freshman year was basically me being high, drunk… until around Valentine’s day, I got so smashed at an out-of-town party that I threw up everywhere and blacked out. Luckily, Charlie was
there, not drinking because she was her friends’ designated driver, and called an ambulance.”

Dean squeezed his eyes shut, not believing what he was hearing.

“The doctors said if Charlie had found me an hour later, I’d probably be dead. I was out for two days, and by this point Charlie and I were pretty good friends, so she guessed you guys wouldn’t want to hear a thing. She did something, I still don’t really know what, and managed to keep you guys in the dark while being given the role of my official carer.”

Sam swallowed, his fists clenching.

“She – she hacked the medical bills so it looked like I paid for it, and said she’d keep it between us if I let her help me sober up, get better. It took a long, long time, and when I went travelling that summer, I was actually just with her.”

Dean felt like a ton of bricks had been dropped on him – the fact that his brother had been in so much pain, and he had been clueless the entire time. Crap. He should have realised sooner.

“I’m fine now. I don’t go to parties anymore, period, unless it’s a movie night with Charlie and her friends. And… Eileen knows. She’s kind of the reason why I’m okay now.”

All Dean could do was stare at his brother, his inner turmoil probably written all over his face because he didn’t have the power to hide it. His heart was breaking, mostly out of sympathy for his brother. How could he be mad at Sam for similar things he had openly done at a much younger age?

“But yeah. You’re right. I shouldn’t have gotten so mad at you about Claire when I had that shit locked away.” Sam tried to smile, although it came out as a wonky grimace because he was trying too hard.

“And I told Charlie what we do without asking you first. Guess I am pretty hypocritical.”

Dean couldn’t help the irrational laughter that bubbled out of him. He took the few short steps towards Sam crushed him into a hug. He didn’t think his forgiveness could be expressed in words, and he definitely didn’t have the energy to be angry after that emotional retelling of Sam’s past.

Sam shuddered against Dean’s chest, and let out a short sob.

“It’s okay, little brother.” And as he said it, he felt his baby brother’s arms tighten around him, and suddenly everything didn’t seem so unbearable. He had Cas, he had Sammy, and with those two by his side he was sure he could fight whatever the world pit against him, Gordon and Azazel be damned.

“We should probably get ready to talk to Jody.” Sam pulled away, wiping his hand across his nose and eyes briskly. Though he tried to hide behind his mop of hair, Dean could see his quivering lower lip and bloodshot eyes.

“Hey. We got all day, soldier. No need to rush.” Dean placed a hand on his brother’s shoulder and turned his head when he heard a third person yawn loudly to his left.

“Oh – everything okay?” Cas’ voice was thick with sleep, and his hair was sticking up everywhere, which made Dean want to run over and kiss him. He internally scolded himself, because it was Sam who needed him right now, not himself.

“Yeah – yeah, just Sammy’s on his period. Y’know, cause he’s Tampon Man.” Dean let the sarcasm roll easily off his tongue, and even Sam let out a short huff of amusement at what had now become a
Winchester inside joke.

Cas gave him a priceless look of confusion.

“I don’t understand that reference.” Cas was wary of Sam’s presence, making the long way around the kitchen so he wouldn’t have to go near Dean to get his caffeine fix. Sam had cleaned up his teary face with a square of paper towel, and quickly put on a less than convincing smile of support.

“Don’t mind me, guys. Go ahead, PDA away. I’ve been waiting years for this.” Sam playfully clapped the two of them on the shoulders, letting his touch linger on Dean for a moment, a brief and silent note of forgiveness and thanks. Cas turned from the coffee machine, blushing red like a damn tomato, and sucked in his bottom lip. Dean was fairly sure he sported a similar look.

“Dude…” Dean whacked his brother in the stomach, “-just ‘cause you wanna jerk off to it, you fucking fangirl.” He gave his brother a look of amusement, but quickly caught his eye, as if to say ‘you good, dude?’ and was given a barely-there nod in response.

Sam would be okay. If he could deal with borderline-alcoholism and drug abuse at the tender age of 18 without the help of his family, Dean was more than certain he could handle whatever else the cruel world decided to throw in his path, including this shit with Gordon, Azazel, and his parents.

“Gross, Dean.” He circled the kitchen island, taking another swipe at his nose. “I’m gonna go shower, get ready for our meeting with Jody.”

“I stand by what I said,” Dean shot back, knowing the pointless banter would improve Sam’s mood somewhat. He couldn’t have his brother running around being miserable all day.

“Go kiss your boyfriend!” Sam retorted as he made his way down the corridor, leaving his brother and Cas alone.

The man in question was nursing his fresh cup of coffee, leaning back against the counter. Apparently wary of his morning state, he had flattened his hair down slightly, though the sex-hair vibe was still there.

Dean sighed like a lovesick fool at the sight.

“Morning.” He looked at Cas through his lashes, suddenly feeling shy at the prospect of what could happen. Last night had been mostly fuelled by pent-up emotions, and now that they’d had the night to reset, Dean suddenly felt awkward about their new romance.

Cas leaned away from the counter, taking a chance and stepping into Dean’s orbit.

“Good morning. Did you sleep well?” Though the phrase would normally be considered small talk, Cas had added a flirtatious edge that ignited a wave of butterflies in Dean’s gut.

“I dunno. I guess.” Dean tried to keep a neutral expression to effectively pull off his sarcasm, but ended up grinning ruthlessly because… he was just happy to see Cas. That was literally it. God, when did he become such a sap?

“I guess?” Cas repeated, playfully offended at Dean’s mediocre review.

He guessed this feeling was what people called the *honeymoon phase*, and though it implied the feeling wouldn’t last, boy, did Dean feel pretty damn good about it in that moment. And that was all that mattered.
Dean’s smirk grew wider at Cas’ response.

With a raise of his brows, Cas put his drink down and looped his arms around Dean’s neck. Almost subconsciously, Dean moved his hands to rest low on Cas’ sweatpant-clad hips – something that Cas barely reacted to, much to Dean’s dismay.

“Something funny?” Cas muttered, flirty edge still present, and Dean was pleasantly surprised by Cas’ sudden air of confidence.

“Just myself.”

“Oh? Should I leave you two alone, then?” Cas wormed his way out of Dean’s grasp, but didn’t have a chance to get away – Dean grabbed Cas’ wrist, pulling him back in and trapping him against the counter.

“Hell no.” Dean bumped his forehead against Cas’ lightly, anticipating what was undoubtedly about to happen with bated breath. He didn’t think he’d ever get tired of waiting for a kiss from Cas, and if he ever did, he would personally travel forward in time and slap his future self in the face.

Cas was the one who closed the distance between them, and Dean was glad to realise that the majority of their future morning kisses would taste like coffee. Perfect.

“There we go!” Sam called, and for fuck’s sake, twice?! Twice in 24 hours. His brother’s cockblocking reputation had multiplied tenfold.

“Jesus Christ, Sam!” Dean waved his hand in exasperation.

“Sorry. I forgot my phone.” Sam stretched over the kitchen island, thanks to his abnormally long limbs, and snatched up said object. He threw a knowing smirk at the pair of them.

“Carry on!”

His sounded so smug. It sickened Dean to the core.

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Later that afternoon, Sam, Dean, and Charlie were crammed in the back of the team’s truck outside Jody’s house. Explaining the situation to Charlie had actually been fairly easy: when the boys had disappeared for two days, she had spent the same amount of time trying to hack them out, but someone on the inside knew what she was trying to do. For the first time in her life, Charlie had some good competition – unfortunately, she never managed to make her way in. When Sam had called her to update her on his state, she had barely even realised more than a few hours had passed. That didn’t mean she wasn’t worried sick, and firmly insisted the boys never remove their earpieces again. Even if they wanted to bitch about her on the job.

“Okay. Looks like Jody is leaving the office now. Give it about fifteen minutes.” Charlie tapped away at her keyboard, the cameras from the police station on screen.

“You boys better get into position.”

The brothers were in their suits, save for their hoods and masks, which they quickly put into place.

“So, how does this voice changer work again? I’m so confused.” Dean fiddled with a microphone that had been attached to his collar along with a mini-speaker, which actually turned out to be pretty loud.
“Holy crap, Dean. We can’t have Jody knowing who you two are since, y’know, she’s known you for years.” She swivelled in her chair, poking around at the device on Dean’s neckline.

“It’s just like those dumb voice changer apps. Basic tech at best. Don’t think about it too much, I’d hate for you to hurt your pretty little head.”

Dean scowled at that, and Sam barked out a quick laugh.

“Remember: speak quietly, or she’ll be able to detect your real voices. The speakers will do everything for you.” Charlie gave the two boys a quick slap on the shoulders.

“Now, go break into your long-time friend’s house and scare her shitless.”

As he had been instructed to earlier, Dean flipped on the switch of the small speaker, then practiced a reply.

“Thanks, Queenie.” To his delight, he sounded exactly like Batman. And with that, he pushed open the back doors of the car and leapt out like the true hero he was supposed to be. The move would have been way more badass if he didn’t stumble slightly on his landing.

“Ladies and gentleman, the Righteous Man,” he could hear Charlie say to herself as Sam slammed the doors shut. With two slaps of the window, Charlie zoomed off to park the car in a safer and more secretive place just down the block, foot on the pedal in case the Winchesters needed her.

The Winchesters had broken into many homes during their time as vigilantes. In the beginning, mostly for practice, they had picked the locks of criminals’ homes, put the fear of God into them, recorded confession tapes, and shipped them off to the LCPD without any second thoughts. Many petty criminals had been locked up thanks to them.

At this point they were practically professionals, particularly Dean, who continued the jobs whilst Sam went back to college.

So when they reached the front door, lock-pick handy, and Claire answered the door, they were absolutely shell-shocked.

Crap. Oh crap.

“You.” Claire’s face looked naked without the thick rims of eyeliner that Dean had gotten so used to, which made her facial expression even more devastating. It was clear she’d been crying: her eyes were veiny and red, the rest of her face a ghost-like shade of grey.

“Fuck you!” Claire screamed, pouncing at Dean like a cat would with a mouse, fists ramming into his Kevlar-clad chest. Because Claire was probably a third of his weight, being a tiny, less-than-average-height teenage girl, Dean easily swung her over his shoulder and rather rudely let himself into her home.

“What’s going on?” Charlie’s voice crackled through their earpieces, but neither brother answered; they had a rabid teenage girl to handle.

Sam - who closed the door as fast as he could to prevent the neighbours from hearing anything - quickly proceeded to help Dean restrain the girl who was kicking and slapping at Dean’s torso as hard as she physically could, a shrill cry that rattled in Dean’s ears pouring from her mouth. Sam yanked her off Dean’s shoulder, looping his arms under her armpits like a parent would carry a toddler throwing a tantrum, and held her close until she wore herself out.
“She’s fucking dead.” Her voice was raw, her face tear-stained and scrunched up tightly as she looked helplessly at Dean. And he couldn’t help but think that if in another life he was in Claire’s position, he would be seriously contemplating whether life would be worth it without Cas.

Claire sank limply into Sam’s arms, tears spilling from her eyes. When Dean looked at Sam, hoping for support, he simply saw his brother clench his jaw and slowly lift Claire so that he could place her on her sofa.

She looked like she’d had her soul sucked out of her, every reason for getting up in the morning… gone. And it was Dean’s fault.

He didn’t have the heart to say anything, not even sorry. Nothing he did could bring Alex back, nothing he did could possibly help her.

Except…

“Claire, I swear on my life, I swear on Alex, that I will find the guy responsible and beat him to a damn pulp.” Dean’s voice-changer made the statement sound even more ominous, and it hung in the air for a good thirty seconds with no answer. When Dean side-eyed his brother, he could tell he was standing by him; he gave him a swift nod, reassuring Dean that he felt it was the right thing to do. Sam was usually the lawful good in these situations, promoting morality over anything else, so Dean was surprised to see him going against his usual values.

“It’s too late,” Claire sobbed, hiding her face in her hands. Dean so desperately wanted to comfort her, fix what he had done to her, but he knew he was the worst possible person for the job. If he tried, he would just be adding fuel to the fire.

“It’s never too late to give someone what they deserve.” Sam’s voice came out bitterly through the filter, adding a frosty bite to his declaration. Dean wasn’t sure how he felt about the coldness in Sam’s statement, and briefly wondered if it was truly his brother speaking or the drugs he’d been injected with.

“No – that’s not what I meant.” Claire hiccupped through her tears, and let out another heart-wrenching sob.

“I told Judas Azazel who you are.”
Chapter Seven

Claire took a deep breath.

“After you saved me, the Mayor took me aside - said he wanted to ask me some questions. I was scared and tired, and when the leader of your goddamn city approaches you, you don’t say no.” She glanced at them, a hint of guilt lacing her expression.

“He asked who you were, and I told him I didn’t know. Because at the time that was the truth - I didn’t. He… was pretty pissed about it, to say the least, and started yelling at me. Told me he knew how to make me tell him.”

She gestured with a hand and wiped at her nose with her sleeve.

“But then Jody came and got me, gave the Mayor a downright terrifying lecture on how he should be treating the Sheriff’s daughter, and took me home. I thought everything was fine.”

She looked down at her hands, and was quiet for a few short seconds before she spoke again.

“A few days later, I got an email from a blocked ID. There was a video of Alex in her house, and one of Jody in her office. Someone was spying on them. The email said if I didn’t say reveal your identity - I’d regret it. I ignored the messages. I knew I’d get a ton of jackasses harassing me, being the first person to be saved by you, instead of someone being locked up.”

“Then, they took Alex, and they told me to contact you or they’d… h-hurt her.” Her voice cracks. Dean doesn’t blame her. He couldn’t imagine what he’d do if they had threatened Cas.

“So, I waited for you at the park bench, telling the person to just… wait. Wait a few more days. I have never… I didn’t sleep for days. They told me the longer I took to tell, the more they’d hurt Alex. Until, finally… you came to the park bench, like you said. And you told me your name.”

Dean watched her eyes flick up but she couldn’t meet theirs.

“After you left… I told them.”

She took another calming breath.

“Around 10:30 last night, I got a call, probably from the emailer. They told me they were right outside Jody’s office, and they’d – they’d hurt her. They explained exactly how they were going to hurt her, and I knew they weren’t lying. I don’t even want to repeat what the… monster said. It was the same thing as the email: If I gave them your name, then they’d leave her alone. I yelled at them, saying I’d already told, but they just kept asking. And I answered again, because they kept threatening me, threatening Jody.”

She looked up at him then.

“You have to understand –” she pleaded. “-they were threatening her – both of them, and I- I couldn’t-“

“It’s okay. What happened next?” Sam interrupted.

“I asked who was calling, not really expecting an answer. And then they gave me a name: Judas Azazel. He hung up, and I tried to call back, even gave Jody the number to trace – but it was a
burner. Jody convinced me it was just some jealous asshole who wanted to be the Righteous Man’s favourite, so I called it a day and went to bed.”

Claire shrugged.

“Then, Jody came to my room at about twelve, woke me up, and told me there’d been a suicide. And that it was… her. Her.”

There were tears in her eyes again, unshed, lingering at her eyelashes – one blink and they’d tumble over the edge.

“I’m telling you this because I can’t… I can’t have the same thing happen to you. I don’t want anybody else to hurt like this.”

Dean’s gut churning was with a sea of emotions – mostly guilt. Guilt for Claire because she was the one suffering in his place. She had gone through hell, just so Azazel could know his name.

He wanted to throw up.

Sam brushed his hand over Dean’s shoulder. In dire situations, it was clear how different the pair of them could be: Sam remained calm and collected, but Dean became chaotic, letting his emotions cloud his judgement – not exactly ideal traits for someone who was supposedly a hero.

He glanced at his brother, envious of his ability to separate himself from the situation. He had gone still in thought, eyes slightly narrowed, lips pressed together. Dean could see the cogs whirring in his head.

“I’m so sorry, Claire – but I have a question?”

Claire nodded her approval.

“Do you think… maybe two different people asked you?” Sam’s voice was pondering, and Dean had never been more grateful for such a clever brother. He really knew how to find the intricacies in things, like a true lawyer.

“It would make sense. I definitely wouldn’t rule it out – a team of psychotic murderers.” Claire rested her head on the arm of her sofa, trembling, but not crying anymore. She twirled her finger around a loose thread on the sleeve of her hoodie, defeated - because that’s how it felt to lose the person you loved.

Dean guessed she was exhausted – he remembered when his parents passed. He had reached a point where he got too tired to cry, too.

Sam approached his brother - back to Claire so she couldn’t hear - biting his lip in thought before flipping off his voice-changer and whispered.

“I’m guessing the first guy was Gordon. Explains why he suddenly knew who we were when he captured us.” He rested his hands on his hips, taking a quick glance back at Claire.

“But it doesn’t explain why Cas got attacked, though. Gordon wouldn’t have known who you were then.”

“It’s kind of shady how Gordon knew who you were but Azazel didn’t. Why would Gordon not tell his leader about it?” Charlie butted in, startling Dean because he had totally forgotten she had been listening in on the entire conversation from the van.
Dean was about to join the thinking-out-loud discussion when he heard the door click, and oh shit, Jody was back. Their original plan to ask Jody more about the death of Alex was probably still of use to them, but now Dean was itching to get to the bottom of the new questions they faced.

They had next to no time to confer on what to do next, because the front door was right next to the sofa Claire was curled up on.

“Mother of –” Jody dropped all her things on the floor the moment she spotted the two boys, who, Dean supposed, must have look pretty intimidating. Two muscular dudes, both over 6 feet tall, who fought off criminals for (almost) a living? Quite scary.

Sam flipped on his voice changer again, straightening his spine so he stood at his full height.

“Sorry to intrude.” It was like he had transformed into a totally different person – a cold-hearted soldier, ready to fight for his cause, not caring who got in the way. Dean attempted to do the same thing, but he felt like an idiot.

“Jesus – I guess I’ll let it pass, considering who you are.” Jody crouched down, bundling her dropped belongings into one massive pile and dumping it on the coffee table in front of Claire. Dean didn’t miss the glint of guilt in her eyes when she saw her daughter, ghostly pale and quivering.

Dean was about to rattle off some information, some that Claire needed to hear, but realised it would probably make her feel even worse. But putting himself in her situation, he knew he would want to know all the details – no matter how much it hurt.

“Alex Jones was kidnapped, drugged, and potentially murdered by Gordon Walker, a cop on your force.” Dean ripped the bandage off right away, and felt a pang in his gut when Claire released yet another pained sob. Jody’s brows furrowed together, but she didn’t look too surprised as she sat on the sofa, encircling her child in her arms as she wept.

“I fired Gordon today,” Jody admitted, brushing a strand of hair off Claire’s face. She pressed a kiss to the top of her golden hair, and Dean felt a yearning in his chest.

“Well, the brothers certainly knew why he had gone MIA for the few days before Alex’s death.

Jody’s eyes scanned Dean’s outfit, and a nagging feeling of paranoia made Dean lower his head so that his hood concealed his face, despite the fact he knew his mask did a good enough job. The last thing he wanted was for Jody to realise the reckless teenager she used to watch out for was now being equally as reckless as he was back then, this time in a skin-tight suit and with his college-boy brother as his sidekick.

That would be far too much to add to her already busy plate.

“We believe Gordon is working for Judas Azazel, and is injecting people with a strength-enhancing
drug that only seems to work on a few individuals. After we encountered him, he referred to these compatible people as The Children - like he chose them specifically.” Sam said seriously.

Sam reached into his pocket after he spoke, and out came the half-empty syringe from Alex’s house. The radioactive-blue liquid sent a chill up Dean’s spine… that crap, the very substance that had killed Alex Jones, was pumping through Sam’s veins, too.

Without saying a word, Sam handed the object to the sheriff, who pinched at the small object delicately. She raised it so the contents caught the light, looking even more ominous, and watched the liquid slosh around as she tipped the syringe back and forth.

“What if someone isn’t compatible?” Jody questioned, but it looked like she already knew the answer.

“If Ava and Meg are anything to go by, it seems that if you aren’t one of The Children - it’ll kill you,” Dean hurriedly answered before Sam could say another word about Alex, though Jody seemed to connect the dots pretty fast. She squeezed Claire’s shoulders comfortably once more before she stood up.

“Righteous Man, perhaps we can discuss this in the kitchen?” She spoke his name like he was the president; proudly, but with a strong note of caution.

“I’m sorry – I don’t know what they call you. But can you watch over Claire?” She gestured awkwardly at Sam, whose lips angled upwards in a small smile.

“Of course.” Sam remained put, even clasped his wrists behind his back like he was Claire’s personal security guard, as Dean and Jody headed into the kitchen.

There were no walls or doors to separate the rooms, so Jody spoke in a hushed voice and in close proximity to Dean.

“Alex’s death was nothing like Ava’s or Meg’s. I read all three autopsy reports,” she hissed, her eyes boring directly into Dean’s. Again, he had a brief moment of fear, hoping Jody wouldn’t recognise him just by the bottom half of his face – something that Charlie had insisted was pretty memorable, with his *Kylie Jenner lips* and *Ken Doll jawline*.

“Alex’s insides… it was like she’d swallowed bleach. Ava and Meg died because their bodies suffered unbearable withdrawal from whatever they were given. Their bodies simply shut down. Alex wasn’t like that.”

Dean thought back to Brady, locked up in that metal chair, all those months ago, trying to remember exactly how he had described the two women who died at his hands. *They went around causing hell like they were fuckin’ possessed by the Devil!*

Unless… Dean’s initial thought that the drugs had been incompatible with them was wrong.

Sam had felt unbearable anger when the drug finally kicked in, and he tore a goddamn *tree* in half. One could say he was acting as though he was ‘possessed by the Devil.’

Cogs continued to turn in Dean’s head, and Jody was staring at him expectantly – an idea was forming, something big, and he needed to inform Sam and Charlie as soon as he possibly could.

“Sheriff, I need you to raid Milton Medical. Get everyone on your team that you trust, and shut the place down. At least we can cut off what appears to be the source, hopefully slow down whoever is behind this.” The way he ordered the sheriff around was a foreign concept to him, something he felt
like he shouldn’t be doing – but being the Righteous Man seemed to give him an extraordinary amount of authority.

“Of course. I owe you, for what you did for my daughter.” Jody held Dean’s gaze for a long few seconds before he couldn’t bear it any longer and he averted his gaze. She kept trying to catch his eye and hold it – like she could see straight through his façade.

“Thank you for your time, Sheriff Mills.” Dean adjusted his hood ever so slightly, and was preparing to march off when Jody spoke again and stopped him in his tracks.

“Don’t take me for an idiot, Dean Winchester. I know it’s you under that mask.” He didn’t dare to turn around, unwilling to face the pressure of her gaze.

“And I don’t have a doubt in my mind that that’s Sam with you.”

His heart pounded heavily in his chest, erratically beating against his ribcage, sending an healthy dose of adrenaline through his veins. Panic had him frozen to the spot, hardly breathing, because he had no idea how Jody would react to his life choices.

“I only just figured it out when I walked through my front door. Two tall guys, one slightly shorter with bow legs and the other built like a string bean? Narrows it down pretty fast.” Dean could hear the smirk in Jody’s voice, probably because she was proud she had figured it out so quickly.

Her tone became sincere. “You don’t need to answer. Go. Save the city. Fix what that asshole did to your parents. I’ve got your back.”

Dean relaxed immensely at her supportive words. With a grateful smile on his face, he peered over his shoulder to willingly meet her gaze. She was looking at him the exact same way she had when he’d broken his leg by trying to climb a tree while totally shitfaced – amused.

“Thanks, Jody.” Dean threw a cheeky wink her way, just because he could, and ran off to fetch his brother.

Dean had been hesitant to leave Claire at first, because she seemed like the kind of person who got revenge on those who left broken promises. When he had said a reluctant goodbye before making his way to the door, she had grabbed his wrist, stopping him in his tracks. Sam loitered in the doorway for a moment, then made his way out, giving them some privacy.

“De – Righteous Man.” Her eyes were red with irritation, but the burning rage from earlier was absent from her ice-blue gaze. Again, they reminded Dean of Cas’, and he supposed it made sense now – they were related, after all.

He gave her a once over, wary, because her tone was inconspicuous.

“I’m still wearing it.” She revealed the silver chain around her neck. It had been hidden beneath her hoodie, not torn off her neck in a fit of rage like Dean had thought. His lips parted, heart lifting with relief; another enemy would do him no good, and he sent a silent thanks to nobody in particular that Claire didn’t really hate him.

Her expression tightened after that, reminiscent of the Claire he’d come to know. There was a growl in her voice as she spoke. “Go destroy those sons of bitches.”

He nodded, swallowing down the lump of guilt because of Alex that had lodged itself in his throat. That was blood on his hands - blood that stained.
“I’m so s-sorry.” His voice cracked, and he knew his apology was useless. The more he said it, the less meaning it would have – words couldn’t fix the problem at hand.

Claire slid her grip down to squeeze his hand.

“I don’t blame you. I blame Azazel.” She pushed open her front door, where Sam stood – inconspicuously in front of a bush so the world wouldn’t realise one of the vigilantes was hanging around in their neighbourhood.

“I know you can get my revenge for me. Go.”

Dean looked Claire directly in the eye after that – those were the words he needed to hear. He couldn’t fix Claire the way he wanted to, but he could try and fix the situation as much as he could.

Sam had apparently alerted Charlie while they were gone – her van was at the end of Jody’s driveway, and he knew that he couldn’t waste anymore time.

“I will.” Dean promised.

Though he didn’t know if he could keep his word this time, he had to try.

~*~

The brothers piled into the back of the van, slamming the doors shut just as Charlie pressed her foot down on the gas pedal.

“You boys are smart. That visit actually gave me a lot of theories –” Dean could tell she was about to go on a ramble about all of her ideas, which were great, but Dean really needed to get his own idea off his chest before he forgot any of it.

“Meg and Ava were compatible,” he interrupted, “-they just had an overdose. Brady couldn’t have known how much stuff to give them to make the super-strength shit kick in, so he just gave them everything he found in that dumpster.” Dean scrambled up the car, putting his head between the two front seats – which was a struggle, considering how many wires and boxes Charlie had littered all over the floor of the backseat.

“We have no proof,” Sam insisted from behind him. He was gripping at the car walls for dear life as Charlie took a sudden turn to the right. Dean gripped the headrests, waiting out the turn, then faced his brother.

“Jody said Meg and Ava’s autopsy reports were totally different to Alex’s – like their bodies got hooked on something. They couldn’t survive without it, because they became dependent on it – Brady gave them too much. Alex was just…” Dean shook his head, wanting to move on. He didn’t want to think about what the drugs did to her.

He turned to Sam. “You’re angry and antsy because of this drug, right? Brady said the same things about them.”

“Is that…” Sam removed his mask, and Dean could see every single shred of fear in his eyes.

“Does this mean that’s going to happen to me?” The question was directed at nobody, because nobody in the car could possibly know the answer.

“Gordon only gave you a bit of it. And anyway, you can bet your ass I’m not gonna let it happen.”
Dean clutched at his baby brother’s shoulder. In reality, he had no idea what he could possibly do to stop what was happening inside Sam. Charlie certainly didn’t, and unless they could befriend some medical genius, he doubted they ever would.

Dean had to keep his poker face up. In the end, this was all his doing – he had to keep everyone else going because he was their leader. He’d been doing this the longest - it was their job to do what he said, and he knew exactly where they had to go next.

“Charlie, head to Lawrence City Prison. We need to ask Brady a few questions.”

Dean had been arrested during his teenage years, sure, but he had only been shoved in holding cells for a maximum of 24 hours. Stepping into an actual prison made him so anxious that he actually struggled to ask the woman at the front desk, who looked utterly terrified of the pair of them, if Brady James was available for visitors.

She didn’t call security – and the Winchesters were glad she didn’t, because they were already making one hell of a scene just by showing up in their costumes. They were escorted to the visiting area by a prison guard – who started to gush about the pair of them, insisting at least half the people they’d caught this year were locked up in this prison – and Dean felt no better about the situation. If anything went wrong, there were at least ten people who wanted their heads on stakes.

When they entered the room, they were immediately rewarded with the sight of Brady slouching behind the clear glass, wearing a garish-orange jumpsuit. He had an expression on his face reminiscent of a moody teenage boy who had been sent to the principal’s office. Dean knew it all too well – that look had been his default face for the entirety of freshman year at high school.

When the brothers scraped back the rusted steel chairs, Brady looked up - and he fucking smiled. He picked up his telephone on the other side of the grimy glass, and the Winchesters followed suit.

“Batman and Robin. I like the new digs.” Brady’s smarmy voice made Dean’s skin crawl as he held the phone up between him and Sam. The scenario must have looked comical to any outsiders: two renowned crime fighters, cooped up in a cubicle with their heads pressed together over an ancient telephone, talking to the guy they’d mercilessly thrown in jail without a second thought.

“We have questions about Judas Azazel.” Sam ensured his voice-changer was aimed directly into the telephone – he was wary that there were guards around, CCTV cameras, and multiple other things that could reveal who they were to the entire world. The two of them kept their heads low.

“Well, I have nothing to lose, so shoot.” Brady talked like he found the whole situation amusing – there was a manic edge to his voice, a glimmer in his eyes that revealed he wasn’t totally sane. If Dean and Sam were Batman and Robin, he was the Joker.

“You knew John Winchester, Rebecca Wilson, and Ruby Masters. Correct?” Sam’s voice was hard as he referenced their father’s journal, something that hadn’t come up between them for a while, and Dean was impressed by how well he managed to distance himself from the personal attachment he had to the situation. Dean kept quiet, knowing he wouldn’t be so successful.

“Oh, yeah. I’m the reason they’re all dead.” Brady sing-songed.

He twirled the cord of the phone around his finger like a girl talking to their crush in an old 90s movie would. It made Dean feel sick to his stomach, and he couldn’t hold himself back.

“The hell did you just say?!” he snarled, and Sam clamped a hand on his knee so he wouldn’t do
anything else.

“What did you do?” Sam dug his fingers into Dean’s leg, keeping him grounded so he wouldn’t lash out and end up revealing something the world definitely didn’t need to know. He was trembling, because this was the guy he’d been looking for all along. If he had read Dad’s journal, he would’ve been able to kill this guy the second he’d locked him up in that warehouse – damn his pride, and damn his unhealthy need to preserve whatever his father had left behind.

“Azazel and I were… colleagues, back in the day. We worked for Lucas Milton, back when he was a geneticist.” Brady swiped his tongue over his lips, the ghost of a smile playing on his lips.

It was well known that Lucas Milton had originally been interested in genetics, spending the majority of his time in a laboratory rather than in the real world. When he switched over to politics, he was practically unheard of before Chuck Novak endorsed him as the Head of the Science and Medicine Department in the Lawrence City Government. Chuck often gushed about Lucas, citing him as the person he knew was destined to succeed in life.

Years after Chuck went missing, after building a strong reputation across the city, Lucas ran for Mayor just before Dean turned eighteen. Everyone loved Lucas. They loved his wit and intelligence, and especially loved that he had been so close to Chuck Novak. He won the electoral campaign by miles.

“I didn’t know much of what was going on, Azazel always kept me in the dark. But Lucas told me to inject some families with some project he was working on, promised a hefty paycheck. Said they had it coming.” Brady leaned closer to the glass.

“I remember injecting those Novak kids. I told Chuck I was a doctor, flashed my fake ID, and said it was a free flu shot. The guy didn’t even question it!”

Novak. Fuck, no.

Brady seemed to be reliving the moment in his head, eyes wild, as he retold his past.

“Injecting those girls… Meg and Ava, right? I didn’t know they were Ruby and Rebecca’s kids until after they died… Anyways…” the man mused, sliding his tongue over his teeth before continuing.

“Lucas paid me half a million dollars to do it, so why the hell wouldn’t I? I injected them all. Azazel told me John Winchester was the worst, kept meddling where he wasn’t supposed to. I hate guys like that.” Brady slouched back in his chair, grinning at the brothers, proud of himself.

Dean linked together everything he already knew from his dad’s journal in his head. His father had never actually said what Brady was to them, and if he injected all the families with whatever toxic crap Lucas was working on… perhaps those passages hadn’t technically been related, not in John’s mind. Brady James was just a doctor to them.

“Whatever I gave them didn’t work on anyone but John’s wife.”

Dean’s blood ran cold.

“She actually got sick from it. Azazel was totally fuckin’ gobsmacked, said that you should all be slowly dying off from some mysterious sickness. And if they weren’t dead, we didn’t get our money. So, Azazel visited each house, set ‘em all on fire, and did the job himself. All that controversy and job loss didn’t mean jack shit so long as he got the money from Lucas.” Brady finished his retelling of the tale with a satisfied nod and a flash of a grin at the brothers.
“Any questions, boys?”

Dean had been rendered absolutely speechless. The sheer depth of planning that went into his parents’ death, the fact it was Lucas’ plan all along – he couldn’t even tell himself he should have known all along, because there was no possible evidence that he had even known Azazel.

It also meant all the children of the families affected would be susceptible to the mystery drug the same way Sam was. The children. That’s what Gordon had been referring to all along. He could be affected by it, Cas could be affected by it – crap.

That’s why they attacked Cas at the office. They were going to inject him. It wasn’t because of Dean’s relationship with him.

Everything was adding up, and the information had been under Dean’s nose the entire time. Fuck.

“Why did Lucas want them dead?” Sam’s said monotonously into the phone, eyes locked on Brady.

“Like I said, he pretty much kept me in the dark. Just said they were messing around in places they shouldn’t be, that they’d be ideal for his experiment. He knew the kids would live, and wanted to punish the parents for what they’d done.” Brady looked expectant after that, like he wanted more and more questions.

Experiment. That’s what Gordon had called Sam.

Dean snatched the phone out of Sam’s hand. “Why are you telling us all this?”

“It gets awful lonely in here. Maybe my old buddies can join me in here at last.” Brady chuckled sinisterly into the phone, then stopped abruptly when he remembered something.

“Oh, I didn’t inject that older Winchester kid, though. Man, the nerve. The second I touched the needle to his baby brother’s neck he aimed a fucking shotgun at me. That’s what you get for having crazy ex-Marine dads, I guess.” He rolled his eyes and scoffed, as if to say am I right?

“So, I didn’t do anything. Thought he’d make a pretty good mini-me in the future, though.”

Dean’s fingers clenched tightly into a fist, jaw firm, his bottom lip quivered with rage. He needed to get out. If he stayed put any longer, he would snap Brady’s fucking neck.

“Good talk, Brady.” Sam finished icily, slamming the phone back onto its cradle, leaving Brady staring after them with the smuggest grin Dean had ever seen.

 Fucking psycho.

~*~

Dean had to be home in time for his shift at the Roadhouse, but he wasn’t exactly in the happiest of moods.

After leaving the prison, the siblings were silent, digesting the information they’d been given. Dean had been flooded with too many emotions over the past week – over Cas, Sam, Alex, Claire – he had gone numb with the addition of Brady’s honesty-fest. His mind had gotten into an emotional rut, and couldn’t get out – until he jumped into the back of the van and Charlie asked what had happened.

He explained. Furiously.
“So, basically, Lucas Milton hates our guts and he’s the fucking Mayor and can get away with all of this crap!” Dean snapped, slamming a fist into the side of the van. Charlie scolded him for it, saying that if he dented the van he would be the one paying to fix it.

Sam had gone quiet, tucked into the back corner of the van with a solemn slouch in his shoulders.

“From the sounds of it, the drug they gave you as kids in some kind of dormant mutagen. It needs to be activated by a secondary one to give you the super-soldier thing.” Charlie’s voice had gone dark and serious, and her lack of cheeriness made Dean’s insides crawl. It was as if an integral part of Charlie’s personality was gone.

“Basically, think of the mystery drug Gordon gave you as your anime-girl transformation. It activates what you already had.”

The statement would be funny if it was said in any other context, but there was no laughing between the three of them. Dean dropped his face into his hands, feeling the need to scream until his lungs went raw.

His parents had died because of some money-hungry jackass, not for anything valid. He thought he’d feel relieved when he found out why they died, like the burden of his childhood would be gone forever. In reality, he felt worse, because this was an unimaginable scenario, something he should never have found out.

“I have work. Can you drop me off at my place?” Dean sighed, then forced himself to change out of his vigilante clothes, knowing he’d need to rush to work after this or Ellen would definitely fire him.

Dean didn’t think he could deal with another thing going wrong in his life.

Once they pulled up behind Dean’s apartment, Charlie turned to face the brothers with a stern look on her face.

“Sam, I want you to stay with me. We’re gonna research the crap out of this, find out what the fuck Lucas was doing. We need to find out what he did to you.” Charlie’s jaw was tight, and her eyes flitted between them. Dean understood that Charlie had been through hard times with Sam, and would do anything to protect him – if she got him through his freshman year of college, she was going to get him through this, and fix him – no matter what she had to do.

Dean could see it because there was a similar trait in himself. And he found himself admiring Charlie for it.

Sam still hadn’t said a word, just remained sitting in his corner, eyes wide like a puppy’s.

After he had shoved his vigilante gear in his duffle bag, Dean hopped out of the van, giving his brother one last glance before closing the doors behind him. Almost fittingly, rain poured down from the skies, sliding down the blacked-out car windows as Charlie drove off.

Dean marched up the steps to his apartment laboriously, the weight of the day truly settling in his bones. He had no idea how to explain what had just happened to Cas, but knew he’d have to do it anyway, because what had happened to Sam could also happen to Cas.

He so desperately wished he could get Cas out of Lawrence City, possibly to his family, anywhere Lucas, Azazel, and Gordon couldn’t touch him. Then, once everything blew over, Dean could bring him back home and live an apple-pie life with the boy he was so in love with – they could start their shared life together with no disturbance.

But Cas was stubborn and wouldn’t leave Dean behind, even if it meant sacrificing himself.
Dean’s boots creaked on the floor up to his apartment door which he found ajar…

He was immediately concerned, considering Cas had had the day off, and had been home all day.

“Cas?” Dean called tentatively pushing the door open further.

When there was no reply, he dropped his bag and swiftly pulled out the gun that was fastened in the belt of his vigilante costume. His favourite one had been lost during his encounter with Gordon, and this new one felt unfamiliar in his hands, but it would do.

Weapon raised and knees slightly bent, Dean knew if anyone was in the apartment he had already revealed his presence – so he rammed his boot into the front door, swinging it open with a crash, and stormed straight into the front room.

A red coffee cup lay smashed on the floor in the kitchen, a pool of half-dried coffee surrounding it. There was also a kitchen knife peeking out from under the sofa – clean of anything, and Dean wasn’t sure if that was a good thing or not. He swung his gun around, examining the entire room for anyone who could be hiding behind chairs or curtains, before kicking in the doors of all the other rooms and doing the exact same thing.

Nothing and nobody. Cas was well and truly gone.

His mind was running wild, going through every possible awful scenario that could have happened – where was Cas? What had happened? Was he hurt? Dead?

“Oh my God.” Dean’s voice shook ferociously, and he felt his eyes pool with tears. This couldn’t – this couldn’t be happening. Again.

He shoved his fingers through his hair, spinning on the spot as he stood directly between the living room and the kitchen, desperately searching for anything he could have missed. Panic restricted him, and his chest was contracting – this wasn’t meant to happen, he was meant to be a hero and he couldn’t even defend his own boyfriend –

“There’s nothing – oh God. Oh fuck.” His breath came fast and sharp, scratching against his throat like sandpaper – until he noticed something.

In Dean’s haste to save Cas, the door had rebounded against the wall – shutting like it was meant to. A transparent zip-lock bag had been pinned to the back of the door with a pocketknife, one that definitely didn’t belong to Dean or Cas.

Dean felt his heart go static in his chest.

He scrambled to the door, almost tripping over his own feet when he tore down the plastic. His shaking fingers struggled with the opening – trying to slide it, but instead he gave up and ripped the entire thing open at once.

Cas’ phone was inside, and when Dean unlocked it there was a photo on the screen – of Cas’ face, a square of duct tape over his mouth, with a very familiar face peering over his shoulder.

“Blondie,” he growled to himself. Dean felt something on the back of the phone - a sticky note was attached to it. He yanked it off, dropping the phone in his lap and reading what it said.

6066 Detroit Street. Come alone.

Dean recognised the address; he had dropped Cas off there many times. It was the studio he rented,
where he worked on his personal photography or art since there wasn’t enough room in their apartment. Cas had invited him over often, whether that be to watch him work on or to be part of his projects.

He shoved the phone in his pocket, snatched his car keys off the kitchen island, and sprinted out the door – quickly grabbing his duffle bag before bounding down the stairs.

Fuck.
Chapter Eight

Dean arrived at the studio in record time – making his way across the city in twenty minutes, thankful that he had managed to narrowly avoid the rush hour traffic. He pulled his car up into a dingy alley nearby, tugging on his vigilante costume in a state of panic – *Cas Cas Cas Cas. I need to save Cas* running through his mind.

When he was done, he flung open the trunk of the Impala and concealed a set of knives in his boots and pockets, two guns in his belt, even tucked a *machete* into a scabbard across his back. He rooted around some more, hurriedly deciding whether there was anything else he needed, and fuck it - he snatched up the crossbow, locking it into an easy-access position alongside the machete, and then tucked his grappling hook and rope into his belt.

He didn’t care if he was being over the top. No matter who it was, he was going to slit their damn throat and save Cas.

With a grunt, he slammed the trunk shut, then made his way towards the building.

Dean clambered up the rickety metal stairs that led to the studio, which was on the fourth floor. The faster he climbed, the faster he would get to Cas. Skipping two steps at a time, he reached the door at last, yanking a gun out of his belt and knocking the door open with a sharp kick of his foot.

He didn’t know what to expect, but when he saw a ginger-haired woman straddling Cas as he sat strapped in an armchair, eyes closed, clutching a massive knife that was embedded in Cas’ stomach – that was it for him. Between one heartbeat and the next, Dean pulled the trigger of his gun, bullet colliding with the woman and causing her to topple off Cas’ lap.

*No killing,* Sam had said. Sam also hadn’t considered what Dean was capable of when someone hurt the man he loved.

Panic made his shot miss anything vital, he could tell by the whimpering coming from the woman’s mouth – but he didn’t care. His focus was on one thing and one thing only: *Cas."

“*Castiel!*” Dean’s voice broke into a scream, and he bounded over so fast that he skidded to the ground at Cas’ knees, which he desperately gripped as he hauled himself up. Knowing not to remove the knife – it was the only thing keeping the blood in – he grabbed at Cas’ lightly stubbled jaw.

*Fuck fuck fuck* –

What the hell could he do? He couldn’t – he couldn’t bring people back from the dead. With a panicked sob, he held his finger under Cas’ nose, desperate to find any trace of life. But there was no warm flow of air, no sign that Cas was breathing.

“No no no no no. Cas. *Cas,* fucking don’t.” Dean stepped back, frantically searching the room – the redhead woman, anything. With no remorse, he flipped her limp body over and ignored the yelp of pain, and saw a familiar substance in her hand.

A combination set of three needles, filled to the brim with a sapphire substance. Just like what Gordon had given to Sam.

He knew the possible consequences, knew what it had done to his brother, and knew in his soul that he was being a complete idiot. But there was one other thing he knew for sure – he could not and would not lose the love of his life, no matter what it entailed.
With a grunt, he snatched up the set of three needles, not giving himself more than a moment to change his mind before plunging them straight into Cas’ neck.

The veins at the entry point bulged as the liquid settled in, flowing into Cas’ bloodstream. Out of paranoia, he wondered if he had put it in right, whether he had to hit a specific spot – but he couldn’t think that, he had to have hope, or else – he didn’t know what he would do.

*Brady said he injected Cas. This has to work. Please wake up.*

*I need you.*

Dean knew the effect wouldn’t be instantaneous, and hovered over Cas, agonising for what felt like centuries. He ran his fingers through Cas’ hair, his scalp still warm under his fingertips. He watched as his anguished tears dripped down onto Cas’ bare chest where his shirt had been ripped open, dribbling down the crevices in his abdomen like raindrops on windows.

After a significant amount of time, Dean realised his efforts were most definitely futile. And that was when he broke down completely, ripping off his mask – snapping the headband in the process – and letting it drop on the floor. He collapsed in a heap, squeezing his eyes shut, as if it would somehow make him wake up from this inconceivable nightmare.

*This can’t be happening. This is not real. He is at home, he is safe.*

The weight of the world came crashing down, crushing Dean beneath it and leaving him empty. This was the final straw, the final tragedy in his life that he couldn’t haul his way through – there was no Dean without Cas, and that was a fact.

Dean could handle his parents’ deaths, mostly because he had to look after Sam. He had to keep Bobby, Ellen, Jo, and his brother happy, he couldn’t bring them any more heartache than they already had. But now, eleven years later, they were totally fine without him. Sam had his fiancée, Charlie, his life as a big shot lawyer – he would be devastated for a long time, sure, but he could move on from Dean. He wasn’t even Ellen and Bobby’s kid, just a stray they had taken in, and they would forget him one day, too.

He wished for something to end it all, because the pain he felt was worse than anything he had ever experienced in his entire life.

His mind drifted to Claire, and Dean had no idea how she hadn’t attempted to murder him on the spot. The girl who had killed Cas was barely a foot away, and he could do it, end her life and get his revenge – but his body was in just as much agony as his mind, and he couldn’t bring himself to move.

When someone grabbed him by the shoulder, interrupting his thoughts and tipping him over so that he would have to face the world, he screamed “*No!*” so loudly that he ended up almost choking on his own saliva.

“Dean.”

Wait.

That voice.

Was he dying?

Because he was pretty sure that that was –
“Cas?” Dean’s voice shook, his mouth sticky with mucus and tears.

“Dean.” The voice said again. Dean peeled his eyes open.

An angel was leaning over him, eyes bluer than any sky. He looked sad, and Dean didn’t think angels could be sad.

“Look at me, Dean.” Something warm touched Dean’s face, and it took him longer than he would have liked to realise it was a hand.

“Yes, it’s me. Get up.”

Reality rushed to Dean in the form of a sharp slap, and he bolted upright. Sure enough, Castiel Novak was kneeling by his side, stomach knifeless with no evidence of a puncture wound, his stupid goddamn eyebrows creased together in concern. His hand was raised, and Dean realised he had just slapped him. For the second time in 24 hours.

“Cas…” Dean breathed, and hurled himself at Cas so fast that he knocked him over, straight onto his back with a dull thud against the wooden floorboards.

“Dean, I –”

“I love you – I’m in love with you, you’re – you’re everything, you are my everything,” Dean emptied out his heart like he was a freshly opened champagne bottle, burying his face into Cas’ shoulder, wrapping all of his limbs around the boy.

“I love you.”

Dean didn’t kiss him – it didn’t feel right. All he wanted to do was be close to Cas, feel every part of him alive against him, memorise his heart beat and the way his breath made his lungs rise and fall in an even pattern.

They remained that way for a few minutes, Dean slowly coming back to the world completely, with Cas clutching at his hips and whispering words of reassurance into Dean’s ear. The hot breath against his ear was the most amazing thing he had ever felt – he’s alive, he’s breathing, He’s okay.

“You… idiots…” The redhead interrupted their moment, her voice pained.

“I knew you’d… give him exactly what he wanted.”

Dean rolled off Cas, reaching for his gun and aiming it in her direction. Her voice sounded familiar, but he couldn’t put his finger on it.

“Who?” Dean snapped, watching as she slowly turned to face him. And there she was – Blondie. Only, she wasn’t blonde anymore.

“What? Don’t recognise me?” She tried to laugh manically, but it faded down into shallow coughing.

“You aren’t the only one in the city… with a killer costume designer.” She began to haul herself up on to her elbows, but Dean hastily slid across the floor and slammed her back down by her shoulders.

“Who?” Dean snarled again, weighing her down with his knee against her chest. He could see now that his bullet had grazed her waist; scarlet stained her pink tank-top, but it wasn’t anything severe. He aimed the gun at her forehead as he knelt above her, and she eyed up the barrel like she was more
than willing to fight.

“Gordon and Azazel wanted Castiel to have the drug. And you gave it to them.” She giggled, her abdomen vibrating under Dean’s knee.

“Now they have all the remaining children, in Lawrence City, that is. Sam Winchester, Castiel Novak, and Claire Novak.”

Dean loosened his grip on the gun briefly in surprise – Claire?

“Your silly little police raid got the last of the Demon Blood drug destroyed. But it didn’t matter, because Gordon had already given it to Sam, and now he’s given it to Claire. There was one left, and you did it yourself. Changed him… Gordon was gonna do it anyway.” She raised her forehead, knocking it against the end of the gun.

“Azazel will be pleased. Now, he has his children, his experiments, and their blood can be used to make more.”

Dean moved his weapon away, swiftly putting the safety on, and smacked her in the head with the butt of it, knocking her out cold.

Brady had said the Novak children. Claire was alive when the first injections took place.

With a grunt, he heaved himself off of her body and turned to his boyfriend. Their eyes locked across the room, and Dean watched as their breathing synchronised. Neither of them moved their gaze, as if they were having a silent conversation.

Are you good?

Yeah. You?

A drop of sweat trickled down Cas’ forehead, and he began swaying on the spot before his eyes rolled back. Dean dove over, catching Cas under his arms as his knees buckled beneath him.

“Hey, buddy, I gotcha.” He examined Cas’ face – it was pale, but not in any way that should raise any alarms. With a grunt, he lowered Cas to the floor and pressed his fingers to the soft skin below his jaw – his pulse was normal, too.

“Thought I’d be done with carrying you everywhere,” Dean murmured, then wrapped an arm underneath Cas’ shoulders and knees and hoisted him up, letting out a groan from the weight. As Dean lifted him, Cas’ limp arm flopped out of his lap and his head lolled backwards, exposing his throat, where a thick sheen of sweat was caught in his clavicle.

Well, maybe saving Cas every now and again wasn’t all that bad.

~*~

Dean knew exactly where he had to go – Charlie’s place. He fired a quick text to Charlie, telling her where he was going and to call him when they got the message so he could explain.

In the back of his mind came nagging paranoia, that he should get Cas to a hospital. What if he was sick? What if the drug was reacting negatively with his body? What if he didn’t wake up?

He tightened his grip on the steering wheel of the Impala, having shoved Cas unceremoniously in the shotgun seat. In a different context, Dean would have laughed about him being conked out, cheek
plastered against the headrest, mouth wide open and a line of drool trickling down his face.

But he was worried. He just got Cas back. How tragic would it be if he got taken away from him again?

He heard his phone ringing, fumbling with it for a few moments as he tried to snatch it up, and answered it - laws be damned.

“We just got your text, Dean – God! We were – Claire’s gone – Gordon’s got her, Dean!” Sam’s voice burst out through the line, breath coming in heavy and crackling against the receiver. Dean swerved around a roundabout, heading up the highway towards Sam’s college – he knew Charlie lived about five minutes away from it, and that was about as far as he got.

“What?” he snapped – every scenario going through his head, already knowing that Gordon was capable of killing innocent girls. He definitely wouldn’t hesitate to kill another.

“Charlie and I went snooping, ended up at Gordon’s apartment. It had been totally cleared, all that was left was an open laptop to a video call – Claire was tied up, and there was a note– ‘Come find me,’ that’s what it said. Charlie got the IP address, she’s trying to track it, but it’s taking a while.” Sam’s breath was heavy, and Dean could already see it – his brother running his hand through his floppy hair, tangling it up in knots, mind desperately racing as he came up with plans on how to fix this.

“Claire – Claire was compatible, she’s had the injection, this bitch who stabbed Cas told me. She said Azazel had what he wanted, all the children. Fuck, Gordon’s probably kidnapped her for Azazel.” Dean half-yelled through the phone, taking a wary look at Cas; though he was worried about him, he didn’t want to prematurely wake him from whatever his body was doing to fix him up.

Dean could see the sun setting across the highway, staining the sky yellow and painting the clouds pastel pink; he could even see the moon, shadowed in a crescent shape. With the beautiful image came a realisation: Ellen was going to fire him tomorrow. She wasn’t one for pity, and Dean knew exactly how she felt about the vigilante stuff.

“Cas got stabbed?” Sam’s voice wavered on the other line in disbelief, and Dean smacked the steering wheel – fuck. He hadn’t told Sam yet.

“I know – to summarise the shit show I just went through: The drug is called Demon Blood, some bitch stabbed Cas, I had to give him the drug to him to heal him up. He’s okay, he’s knocked out and drooling all over the passenger seat.” Dean frantically stepped down on the gas pedal.

“Jesus, Dean. The drug?” His brother sounded equal parts disappointed and angry, and a muffled sigh echoed down the line. It struck Dean’s heart life a knife, hearing his brother sound so upset – the drug scared him, and now his best friend would be going through the same thing.

Sam remained quiet, but he wasn’t gone – Dean could hear him breathing. He knew he needed some time to process the new information before saying anything else.

“Look after yourself, too, okay? Where are you now?” Sam mustered up the reply, voice thick, as if he was trying not to cry. Dean absently noticed he could hear him clicking open a car door.

“I’m on my way to Charlie’s; I’m gonna need the exact address, though.” Dean took a quick glance at Cas, who hadn’t moved since being thrown into the car. He tapped down on the speaker-phone setting on his phone, dumped it carelessly on the seat next to him, and reached out to run a hand through Cas’ hair. Warm. Alive.
“Alright – we’re heading there, bringing Jody with us. It’s not safe here.” Sam was putting on a brave face over the phone, but Dean could see straight through it – his brother was trying to stop him from worrying about him.

“Spare key for Charlie’s is under the Pikachu gnome.” Sam grumbled to himself out of frustration.

“We need to take all three of them down, Dean. Gordon, Azazel, and Lucas. Find out what they did, record it, and ship it right off to the LCPD, like with every other criminal we’ve locked up.”

Dean nodded, though Sam couldn’t see it, and set his gaze firmly on the road ahead. The highway was empty – not many people headed out of Lawrence City in this direction unless they were college students – and he let the familiar rumble of the Impala’s engine calm the tension that had built up in his shoulders during the day.

“Claire’s the priority here. Save her, then give those sons of bitches what they deserve.”

Sam cleared his throat on the other end.

“So is Cas.” His voice was stern, and Dean was more than certain he was trying to get some kind of emotional response from his older brother. Sam was a firm believer in ‘sharing with the class’, whereas Dean was completely against it. His brother knew enough about how he felt – he’d walked in on the pair of them making out against the counter, it didn’t get more obvious than that. Sam didn’t need to hear anything else about his love life.

Some time seemed to pass, because Sam was the one who broke the silence.

“He’ll be okay, Dean. We’re gonna get our revenge. Not just for Cas – for Alex, and Claire, our parents. Everyone they hurt in the process.” Dean could hear some voices in the background, most likely Jody and Charlie having a conversation. From what he could tell, Sam was in the back of the vigilante van.

“Yeah, we will,” Dean replied, though his thoughts kept drifting to the image of the knife wedged in Cas’ gut, how he had witnessed him die – and how whatever happened next went right against nature, because the drug inside his boyfriend was the only reason his heart was still beating.

Dean ran his hand over Cas’ thigh.

“I’ll call you in a bit, okay? I think the time alone might do you some good.” Sam cleared his throat. He was probably desperate to video chat with Eileen; Dean knew he missed her, and if he felt the same way about her as he did about Cas, he would be going crazy without the company.

“Yeah. Thanks, brother.” Dean managed to keep his voice even, waiting for his brother to say anything else before hanging up. Nothing came, so Dean ended the call and was met with the familiar hum of the car engine. If all else failed, at least he still had his real home – his baby.

Dean was haunted with a feeling of melancholy, so much so that he didn’t even feel like putting on some music to try and cheer himself up somewhat. All the things that could make him feel better were unattainable in that moment: his brother, his boyfriend, and revenge.

Claire is absolutely fucking terrified, her girlfriend’s dead, how much more could she lose?

It was then that he realised he was tired – no, exhausted. The last two weeks had toyed with his emotions, his physical health, more than any other time in his life. So much good, even more bad – he needed to take a goddamn break from it all.
“After we’re done, we’re going on vacation. How does Hawaii sound, babe?” Dean patted Cas’ thigh, pretending he could hear it.

~*~

Just as the sky turned ink-blue, Dean pulled the Impala up outside Charlie’s home. She lived in a two-story house, on the smaller side, but definitely not the kind of thing a regular full-time college student could afford. He knew that for a fact, because himself and Cas could barely afford their own apartment and the two of them had full-time jobs. Well, used to.

Even though Sam had told Dean to let himself in, he felt it would be rude if he actually did. In the end, he’d only known Charlie for about two weeks, and she hadn’t even really spoken to Cas. He hoped that the situation would change once everything with Azazel and Lucas was sorted – he liked Charlie. As Bobby would put it, she was a good egg.

Speaking of his stand-in family, while he was sitting in the car it would be a good time to call in – he had time to kill. Ellen would more than likely be fuming, and it would undoubtedly be better to get his firing over and done with than procrastinating until the next time he got home.

Dean speed-dialled their landline, which was the exact moment Cas jolted awake.

“Woah, buddy!” The shock caused Dean to drop his phone into his lap, and he hurriedly hung up before anyone answered. His family would have to wait.

Cas’ eyes were wild as he swiped away the half-dried drool that clung to his chin; they roamed around the car as he got his bearings. A look of bewilderment troubled his face when he finally set his gaze on Dean.

“Hey, you good?” Dean asked, palms up.

“We’re in the Impala, parked outside Charlie’s house. Remember her? I told you all about her.” He scooted around in his seat to fully face his boyfriend, not sure what to expect from this post-Demon Blood Cas. Sam had been totally fine, but like most regular drugs, he guessed it affected everyone differently.

“Yes… I’m good.” Cas rubbed at his neck, the precise place Dean had injected the drug – crap, did he do something wrong?

“Is that bothering you? Does it hurt?” Dean grabbed Cas’ wrist, trying to take a good look for himself.

“I’m fine, really. injections just make me queasy. And stiff. And sleepy.” Cas stretched out his neck and let out a moan that… actually sounded kind of hot.

“Remember those shots we got before college? I was the same then.”

Dean remembered vividly: the two of them had their appointments back-to-back, and Cas had been scared totally shitless. With a stern glance, Cas had snatched up Dean’s hand the second he was told to sit on the chair and get injected, and barely three minutes after the needle went in, he was on the floor and out cold.

He smiled fondly at the memory, and liked the fact he had an entire past with Cas. That was something he hadn’t had with Lisa – even if Dean had stayed with her, it was pretty much a given that their relationship would’ve dwindled into nothing.
“I – what am I doing? I was dying –” Cas snatched Dean by the neck, to which he yelped in surprise, and crushed their lips together.

Everything felt so right with Cas, and it was something Dean experienced every time they kissed – like their souls were the last two pieces in the puzzle of his life, and once they connected, his entire world seemed to make sense. It was a brand new feeling, giving Dean the kind of high that no drug and no alcohol could ever offer.

Dean thrust a hand into Cas’ hair, bundling the strands between his fingers, and clutched at Cas’ hip with the other. They hadn’t had a chance to really have a moment alone – with Sam being a cockblock and all – but this was it. It was happening.

When Cas didn’t react to Dean’s grasp, he snaked his hand over the back pocket of Cas’ jeans, and rejoiced when his boyfriend pulled away with a heated gasp.

“Dean.” Cas’ hands were locked around Dean’s neck, their noses grazing against each other’s. For a moment, they just breathed together; their chests rose and fell in sync, and the words I’ve been waiting for this forever chimed in Dean’s head like a bell. He didn’t dare to respond, didn’t dare to break the moment they were having, and gripped the back of Cas’ thigh tighter, and Dean squeezed his eyes shut at the sound Cas made from the touch.

I’ve never wanted anything more.

That was when they met in the middle, hungrily licking into each other’s mouths and grabbing at the other’s body. Dean’s blood was like gasoline, and Cas was the spark he needed to ignite it – with every kiss, every touch, it was like his soul was lighting itself on fire.

Cas hooked his fingers around the collar of Dean’s vigilante costume, bringing the pair of them down so Cas’ back lay flat against the seat. Dean clung desperately to the headrest with one hand, the other fixed beside Cas’ head, to keep himself from falling right on top of him. He was struggling to breathe, the air thick with the heat that radiated from their bodies.

Absently, Dean realised he had never known that two men, both much taller than average, could lie across the seats in the Impala comfortably. He guessed it was a good fact to stow away for later.

“Sam and Charlie’ll be here soon,” Dean warned, and paused for a moment – his voice was hoarse, and he hadn’t realised how turned on he was because he had been completely swept up in the heat of the moment. Out of curiosity, he let his sight meander downwards, seeing that yes, Cas felt the same.

When he looked back up, Cas was smiling knowingly. Wasn’t he supposed to be the blushing virgin?

“We have time to kill.” Cas wriggled his shoulders and tugged off his shirt – which, admittedly, didn’t change much, considering all the buttons had been ripped out back in the photography studio, but Dean appreciated it nonetheless. He leaned back, straddling Cas’ thighs and intending to admire the view, but was met with a hollow thunk when his head hit the roof.

Doing anything in the Impala would definitely be a task. But totally worth it.

After recomposing himself, he felt Cas’ fingertips brush the front of his chest until they reached the zipper right at the bottom of Dean’s clavicle. With his teeth sunk into his bottom lip, Cas tugged it all the way down, all the way to just above –

“You wear a t-shirt under your costume?” Cas remarked, hand still fixated on the zipper and dangerously low on Dean’s body, radiating warmth.
“Don’t you overheat?”

Dean couldn’t bring himself to answer immediately, and instead heaved his arms out of the tight sleeves of his suit, out of the sweaty t-shirt underneath, and let out a dramatic sigh when he was done. Clothing felt so constricting.

“Yes, I do.” He edged himself further up, one foot planted on the floor of the Impala so he wouldn’t fall off the seat, and lowered his lips back onto Cas’.

Their tongues were tangled together in less than a second, the kissing getting messy and desperate. The hot, tingling feeling it left on Dean’s lips – it was irresistible. He couldn’t get enough of it, his body craving more and more and more, but he wasn’t entirely sure how to get it without making Cas uncomfortable.

He moved his mouth with a smack of the lips, and instead grazed his teeth over the injection-free side of Cas’ exposed, shiny neck. The ligaments and veins protruded out, emphasising the muscles there – Dean hastily licked at them, tongue rolling over the crevices. Cas moaned loudly, and his hips bucked upwards – colliding with Dean’s.

Dean leaned back, struggling to hover right above Cas in such an uncomfortable position, but he needed to be sure of what was going on.

“I’ll stop if you want me to.” He looked at Cas straight in the eyes, and was met with a wicked grin. It was an echo of what he had said back in the apartment barely a day ago, Dean realised, and prayed he would get the same response.

“I don’t want you to.”

_I don’t want you to._ It resonated in Dean’s brain for a good five seconds before all hell broke loose, before he surged forward and crashed his body straight into Cas’. He cupped the back of Dean’s upper thighs, making their bodies collide in a wave of heat, scorching out the world around them so it was just the two of them.

Never in his life had Dean felt so close to Cas, physically or emotionally, than in that moment.

They could hardly kiss – instead exchanging hot breaths and gasps, until they began teetering over the edge. Cas sank his nails into Dean’s solid shoulder, pressing down as he called out his name, the touch so hot that it left a burn that Dean would never forget. He could cry out his boyfriend’s name as his own vision whitened out, seeming to put a blurred filter over everything except for Cas.

_Cas._

When his vision came back, he was met with the gaze of an overly-sweaty Cas, their sticky chests pressed together and hearts pounding as one.

_Oh my God. I just partially deflowered Cas._

Dean heaved himself off Cas’ limp body, the separation of their skin leaving a cold trail down Dean’s abdomen. The two rearranged themselves, sitting upright yet half naked in their seats, coming to terms with what had just happened.

Cas squirmed a little, adjusting his jeans accordingly, and locked eyes with Dean.

It was Dean’s mouth that morphed into a smirk first, and then out came a tumble of shy laughter – which then turned into the two of them guffawing like a pair of immature twelve year olds who had
just found something dirty on the internet, like they had just done something they shouldn’t.

“That was…” Cas began, tugging on the remains of his shirt.

“Judging by all that noise you were making, I’m guessin’ you had a great time,” Dean shot back with a snarky edge, pulling up the sleeves of his costume. When he tugged it over his left shoulder, he hissed – it felt like he had a fresh sunburn there, despite the fact there was no way he could have gotten one.

He would have questioned it further, but when he turned to Cas, he noticed his cheeks had faded into a deep crimson, and the thought left his mind completely.

“I’m… gonna need – I’m gonna need to borrow some clothes.” Cas chose his words carefully, despite the fact Dean knew exactly what had happened, because he had the same problem.

“I have some spare things in the trunk.” Dean peered out of the window, glad to see Charlie’s car just pulling up in the driveway now. That meant nobody had witnessed anything that he didn’t want anyone else to see. Especially his goddamn baby brother.

He felt Cas link their fingers together across the seat, which made him turn back.

“Dean.” Cas said his name, the way he had always said it, but now Dean knew it had so much more weight to it.

“Yeah?” He replied softly.

“I love you.”

The words left Cas’ mouth so effortlessly, and were spoken as if they were having a casual conversation, despite what had just happened between them. Dean had dreamt about Cas uttering those three words in a thousand different scenarios, but none like this one.

Dean was about to reply, but instead flinched at a sharp knocking on his window – he whipped his head around to see a familiar sheriff, a disapproving look all over her face. Dean felt a wave of nostalgia, having a brief flashback to every wrongdoing of his childhood.

He quickly opened his car door and clambered out, trying to look as innocent as possible. Which, he realised, would have been more convincing if his vigilante costume wasn’t still unzipped.

“I hope you weren’t committing public acts of indecency, Dean,” she lectured, then shifted her gaze to Cas as he got out of the car, buttonless shirt flapping in the shallow breeze.

“Wait – what?”

Dean simply grinned at her reaction, and once Cas had made his way around the Impala, he took his hand in his and let their fingers intertwine. He wasn’t sure if he imagined it in his post-almost-sex bliss, but he felt like the contact gave him an electric shock.

Jody’s face was priceless.

~*~

Dean and Cas had hastily changed in Charlie’s spare room – Dean was so thankful he had used ‘just going to the gym’ as an excuse for vigilante shenanigans, because there were at least four pairs of new underwear, sweatpants, and tank tops stowed in the back of the Impala.
He was also thankful because Cas looked downright *sinful* in a pair of low-rise black joggers and a matching tank top. In that moment, Dean definitely realised he had a thing for Cas’ arms and hipbones – although, subconsciously, it was old news.

When Dean tugged off his vigilante suit, the burning on his arm made a comeback – though he could see some redness, he couldn’t quite make out what it was. He headed into the bathroom and hurriedly flipped on the light so he could examine whatever it was in the mirror.

And… there was a blistering *handprint* on his shoulder.

“The hell?” Dean prodded it, wincing at the contact, and watched the door creak open in the mirror as his boyfriend entered the room.

“What happened?” Cas asked, his eyes widening at the scar on Dean’s shoulder. Almost immediately, he snatched Dean’s arm and turned on the shower, ensuring it was on the coldest setting before he shoved his boyfriend under the flow of water in just his boxers.

Though it was initially a shock, the cool water massaged the burn softly, taking away the sting that came with it.

“I think… I did that,” Cas confessed, and Dean shot a frown in his direction.

“How the *fuck* could you have done this? It’s probably just some allergic reaction,” Dean tried to insist, but definitely didn’t believe it himself. He had had passing thoughts that Cas’ grip had become abnormally hot in their car escapades, but was… distracted, to say the least.

“I don’t know, but that’s definitely my handprint.” Cas reached into the shower, hovering his hand over the grotesque looking skin – sure enough, it looked like a perfect fit. He looked back at Cas, intending to ask more questions, but saw his boyfriend was facing the other way.

“Cas?” Dean saw Cas falter, but he didn’t turn around to look at him.

“You’re almost naked and in a shower, Dean,” Cas stated, his tone making it very obvious how he felt about the matter, and Dean couldn’t help the smile that tugged at the corners of his mouth. He was almost tempted to pull Cas in with him, but knew that the two of them would get a long lecture from Sam if it looked like they’d been doing the dirty in Charlie’s shower.

“Do you think I’m hot, Cas?” Dean teased, pulling a towel off the metal rack next to the shower and stepping out of the water stream. After running it through his hair and over his body, careful to avoid the burn, he eyed his boyfriend up and down with a shit-eating grin.

Cas could barely splutter through a denial before he marched out of the bathroom – instead, flinging some clothes at Dean through the open door. If Claire’s life hadn’t been in danger, Dean was fairly sure nothing else would motivate him to leave that bedroom without pinning Cas to a wall and continuing what had gone down in the car.

After Dean dressed himself, they left the bedroom, making their way to Charlie’s miniature kitchen. The couple were met with three separate looks: one of apprehension, one of pride… and the other a bitchface.

“Dude… in your car.” Bitchface Sam sounded like a disappointed parent, also known as his usual way of communicating with his older brother. Dean threw him a smug grin as he leaned against the archway next to the fridge, noting that the magnets on the door spelt out ‘LIVE LONG AND PROSPER, UNLESS THERE’S NO COFFEE.’
Cas stood at his side, silently taking in all the attention that he wasn’t used to, and Dean snaked an arm around his waist.

Jody was leaning back against the countertop, but straightened her posture abruptly.

“Look, I get this is shocking – and I’m happy for you Dean, really, but my daughter is gone.” Her tone was icy, but Dean knew she was masking the dread that consumed her.

“And now – Dean tells us she has this **drug** in her system? That’s why Gordon took her?”

She pinched the bridge of her nose, and Dean realised how selfish he was. While she had been worried sick about her own damn kid, Dean had been frolicking around with his boyfriend like a horny frat boy.

“There’s still some missing points, but we’ll get our answers.” Charlie, who had just met the sheriff, rubbed supportive circles into Jody’s shoulder. When Charlie moved to get something from her living room, Sam tucked her neatly under his shoulder, resting his chin on top of Jody’s choppy pixie cut.

Some people, for no reason whatsoever, had tragic lives. And Dean didn’t have a doubt in his mind that Claire was one of them.

“So I wrote down everything we know so far in a Word document.” Charlie’s voice sounded distant as she entered the kitchen again, holding an iPad in one hand and tapping at the screen with the other. Her brows creased together, and her face glowed ominously in the light of the screen.

“While you were saving Cas, Sam and I tried to find Gordon. Got his address and everything, but the man’s packed up – his apartment was empty, save for that passive aggressive I’m-too-edgy-for-you sticky note that was attached to the laptop. I’ll get the IP address used for the call in a few minutes.” Charlie scrolled down, biting at the inside of her cheek.

Dean drew Cas to his side, remembering his short encounter with Gordon – the man was a creep, and the idea that he was holding a young girl hostage… \*fuck.\* That man had tortured and murdered Claire’s girlfriend, and Dean didn’t have a doubt in his mind that he could do it again.

“I couldn’t find any clues on how Gordon and Azazel met and what exactly Gordon’s role is in this – but I *did* find out some stuff about Azazel, and why he might be responsible for Claire’s kidnapping.”

Charlie eyed the four other people in the room, making sure they were paying attention. Dean gave her a reassuring nod.

“Azazel initially started up Lawrence Gas because he wanted to give people cheap power – he was really active about the environment, wanted lower crime rates. Pretty typical left wing agenda.” Charlie flipped her screen around, showing the four of them screenshots of old articles from the 90s she’d pasted together.

“You did an entire background check?” Sam had a smile in his voice, and Charlie nodded sheepishly.

“People don’t really change that much, so I figured it would be useful.” She tapped on the screen again.

“Also, you meatheads wouldn’t have thought of it. Thank God you have me on Team Righteous, I’m probably the reason we’re gonna save Claire’s life.”
Jody gave her a cold look, and Charlie uttered a quick *sorry* before returning to the point. She flipped the screen around again, displaying a short and pixelated video clip – it was Azazel, looking significantly younger, preaching about the importance of lowering crime rates.

“He starts to get kind of extreme about it. When Chuck was Mayor, he was pretty open about criticising him for ignoring the increase in figures.” After shooting Cas a wary look, she tucked a short strand of scarlet hair behind her ear and reached for her coffee cup. Drinking caffeine so close to bedtime probably wasn’t the wisest of ideas, but then Dean realised they were probably going to be up until the unholy hours of the morning if they were going to rescue Claire.

“When Chuck endorsed Lucas, he was also open about wanting crime rates lowered, even though he was Head of the Science and Medical department at the time. And then, I managed to root this one out.” Charlie flipped the iPad around one more time – it was a photo of Chuck, but in the background… that was definitely Azazel and Lucas Milton shaking hands. It could mean nothing, but with the knowledge they got from Brady, it more than likely wasn’t.

“We keep describing what I have as… being a *super-soldier,*” Sam thought aloud, swiping his thumb across his bottom lip.

“What if we aren’t wrong? If Azazel wanted crime to go down, perhaps he became desperate and went to Lucas for help. And we all know he was a fantastic geneticist… what if he’s even better than we thought?” Sam barely looked like he believed himself, it almost seemed too fictional… but, weirdly, all the facts added up to that being the logical truth.

“If he’s like any other criminal we’ve taken down -” Sam flashed a look at Dean.

“They become obsessed. With the goal, the riches, any advantage they can get from winning. Can’t think about anything else,” Dean finished his brother’s sentence, although he wasn’t necessarily talking about the people who were behind bars because of them. He was talking about himself, and how much he needed to get his revenge. That had always been his goal – avenge his parents. And he had done next to everything to get there.

“Well. Looks like we found our Abraham Erskine. The nasty version, that is.” Charlie muttered.

“And that’s why Gordon took my kid. For some comic book, biological-warfare crap, because he’s working for a psychopath.” Jody stared into space, the hand she had placed on Sam’s chest tightening into a fist.

“That girl who was responsible for Cas’ kidnapping – she said she could use their blood to make more people like you. Super-soldiers.” Dean contributed, and subconsciously found himself squeezing Cas tighter. In another situation, if Dean hadn’t got to Cas in time, it would probably be him in Claire’s position, half-dead on a metal table, his blood being drawn through long wires and into syringes similar to the Demon Blood ones.

He shuddered at the image, and realised that in reality, that could be Claire.

Charlie continued to study her iPad, staring intently at the screen with her tongue poking out.

“Where would Gordon take her that we know of? I reckon the old police station is a good shot, considering that’s where he hooked me up with the drug.” Sam said, but it felt too obvious. Why would they take Claire somewhere that they already knew? It would be a major disadvantage.

“Lawrence Gas might be an option. It’s been abandoned since the fires,” Cas said. “We could always split up, cover more ground.”
Dean immediately hated the idea – they would be in smaller numbers, more vulnerable, and far away from each other if someone else needed help. And with Sam by himself, hunting down the very men who probably wanted to use him for what they believed was extreme crime fighting? They probably knew how to take him down, even with the strength he got from the drug. No way was that happening.

“Guys. They aren’t at either of those places,” Charlie interrupted, and moved so that she was between them – her knuckles were white from how hard she gripped the tablet.

“The Skype call was coming from the Lawrence Scientific Study Centre. Where Lucas used to work before he got a job in government.”

Jody moved away from Sam, peering at the iPad screen with her arms folded firmly across her chest. Dean guessed that cool-mom had been replaced with scary-mom.

“That means it isn’t just Gordon there. It’s Lucas, too, he wouldn’t pick that place for no reason. We have more than enough evidence to search it, and I’m in charge of that, so I say we can. My force will be more than willing to help, I can call in an emergency right now. Have it done within the hour.” Her eyes were steely, and she settled her gaze on Dean.

“But I think we’re going to need you with us, Righteous Man. And your partners. What do you say?”

Dean was the one who had started whatever they were, out of pure anger and desperation for revenge. As time had gone on, as more and more people had found out what he was doing, The Righteous Man had become bigger than what he was. He was their leader, their origin, and in the end, Jody considered him to be their hope.

Dean had never considered himself to be the inspirational type. But in that moment, he dared himself to believe it.

“I’m trying to think of a badass one-liner to agree with you, but I really can’t.” He gave Jody a beaming grin instead, and she rolled her eyes.

“You never really were the think-on-your-feet type.”
Before leaving, both Sam and Dean had washed their vigilante costumes, so when Dean put his on, it wasn’t reeking with the stench of blood, sweat, and sex. Cas entered the spare room just as Dean zipped himself up, and he reached into his pocket to grab his mask – which, he realised, was back in the photography studio. And ruined.

“Aw, dammit,” Dean cursed, stepping towards Cas as he patted at his many pockets.

“I don’t have a mask.”

With his face cast in shadow by the late-night darkness, Cas pushed into Dean’s personal space, fiddling with the buckles on the front of his costume and locking them into place.

“You don’t need one anymore.” He swiped his fingers through Dean’s hair, and trailed them along Dean’s coarse jawline. His hand stayed there, and Dean closed his eyes slowly, revelling in the soothing warmth.

“Maybe it’s better if the world knows your real name.”

Dean shuddered at the prospect.

“I think I’d like a normal life after this, and telling the world I’m the guy who’s prancing around their city like a wannabe Batman? It would definitely take that away. No more vigilante-justice after this is done. I’m retiring.” He looked down at his costume, and Cas tucked a finger into his weapons belt.

“That’d be a shame. Now that I’m over the shock, I think it’s kind of hot that my boyfriend is a superhero.” Cas’ gravelly voice made the hairs at the back of Dean’s neck stand on end.

Boyfriend. Something he had been content calling Cas in his head, but something that he didn’t dare to say out loud. He supposed they hadn’t really had time to discuss what they were, where they went from here, because of all the drama going down. Hell, they hadn’t even discussed the effect of the Demon Blood on Cas despite the fact that his handprint had been seared into Dean’s skin, and that was relevant to their current cause.

“Your boyfriend is also going to need to make a living somehow. I’m guessing Ellen is gonna fire me, and me satisfying your superhero kink isn’t gonna help pay the bills.” Dean let himself be tugged against Cas by the belt, and skirted his hands around Cas’ waist. The smile on Cas’ face was… indescribable, and Dean was convinced he fell in love all over again just by looking at it.

“I love you, Dean.” Cas pressed his nose to Dean’s cheek, his eyelashes fluttering against the high points of his face.

“I love you, too, Cas.” Dean couldn’t stop himself from smiling against Cas’ mouth when they kissed, trying and failing not to let it escalate into anything more. The leftover tension from the car was present between them, and Dean felt totally powerless; what he was feeling was out of his control.

Sam swung the door open to the spare room just as things became heated. Of course it could only be Sam to cockblock them for the third damn time. When they jumped apart, Dean noticed his brother didn’t even bat an eye at what he had walked in on.

“I’m not even slightly shocked,” he deadpanned, and gestured towards Charlie’s living room.
“We’re ready to go when you are.” There was something in his voice that was cold, absent from Sam’s usual persona – Dean knew his brother was thrilled about the new relationship, and would be for weeks to come, and the careless response the pair received confused him.

He narrowed the response down to nerves. Dean knew they had to get back to Lawrence City as fast as possible – nobody had any idea what was happening to Claire, the only clue being the cryptic video. And it didn’t look good.

They would also more than likely be facing down their parents’ murderer – that would put a significant damper on anybody’s mood.

He turned his glance to Cas, and hastily took his hand.

“‘We’re ready.’” Dean nodded at his brother firmly, and after grabbing the two duffle bags of weapons they had managed to accumulate between them (most of them were Dean or Sam’s, but Charlie had collected a few realistic knives and swords for cosplaying and LARPing – which Dean had chosen not to ask about), the trio made their way out to the superhero van.

Going in the Impala would raise some alarms for the bad guys, considering they knew exactly who Dean was. And if anyone knew Dean, they knew precisely what kind of car he had – and it wasn’t exactly common. They needed the element of surprise, to keep Lucas, Azazel, and Gordon thinking they had skipped town.

Jody and Charlie climbed into the two front seats, while the boys piled into the back. And for the first time in his life, Dean truly felt like he was invested in something, that he had worked his hardest and achieved something. This was his success story, and he hoped his luck lasted long enough to get a happy ending.

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Jody’s police officers were setting up for the attack behind the LCPD, most of them being night-shift workers on the force who were all being deployed for the attack. Before starting the raid, everyone – including Charlie, who wouldn’t be inside the building, Dean had insisted – was getting suited up with a good amount of Kevlar, weapons belts, ammo, and given a basic lesson on how to use a gun if worse came to worst.

Lucas was a private and rich man, and if Gordon was anything to go off of, then he definitely had a few tricks up his sleeve that could get someone hurt at any moment.

Dean was already prepared thanks to his vigilante experience, and snuck off into a quiet corner just behind a dumpster – he had neglected his family over the last two weeks, and needed to update them on the situation. He doubted Bobby and Ellen would be awake, so he fished his phone out of his pocket and fired off a quick call to Jo. Without the mask present, he kept his hood low, making sure none of the police officers could potentially ID him.

“Dean, it’s two in the fucking morning. Are you drunk? ‘Cause if you want a lift, you’re gonna owe me fifty bucks minimum.” Jo’s voice was tired; Dean had woken her.

“No. I’m just checking in. I’ve got a big vigilante thing comin’ up, and I missed work for it.” He eyed Cas beneath his hood, watching as Jody set up a gun for him. His eyebrows were scrunched in concentration, and Dean pulled a similar expression, because seeing his boyfriend get caught up in this chaos… it worried him. Dean had also insisted Cas be on the sidelines with Charlie, but he needed a weapon to be safe.
“Oh, yeah.” Jo yawned through the phone. “She’s gonna fire you, I hope you know.”

“Trust me, I know.” He pulled his hood down when a police officer walked past, and tucked himself further into his established corner.

“Man, I’m… exhausted. Can you call me in the morning?” Jo didn’t understand the weight of the situation, which was no fault of her own – Dean had kept his family in the dark, too much so, and felt a wave of guilt invade his gut. He had completely prioritised himself the past two weeks, and not what his family might think.

“It’s no problem, I will. Sleep tight, asswipe.” He paused, and realised he should probably say something in case things went south.

“You’re real important to me, you know that, right?”
Jo snorted on the other end of the line.

“Yeah, yeah. The end of the world speech isn’t necessary. You’ll be fine. G’night.” Though the words were harsh, Jo’s tone was not, and it was her own way of saying she felt the same about him. The other end of the phone went dead, and Dean slipped his phone back into one of his many pockets.

He was desperate to make sure his family was safe, but knew the city was his priority for the moment – whatever Azazel and Lucas had planned for Sam, Cas, and Claire could be deadly, for them and possibly for everyone if the plan really was to use their blood to make more soldiers. Get that blood into the wrong hands – something Lucas could do as a government official – and it could trigger another world war.

He felt a hand on his shoulder, just below the burn, grounding him, and turned to see Cas standing there was a crease between his brows.

“Everything okay?” he asked, and Dean knew what they needed to talk about: the Demon Blood. Because what else could have caused Cas to almost burn his arm off?

“Are you feeling alright? The drug doin’ anything to you?” Dean could only see Cas’ lips from beneath his hood, so that was what he focused on.

Dean realised how much he was acting like a mother hen – calling up his family, making sure they were good, now he was questioning Cas to make sure he was alright. Next thing he’d be licking his thumb and wiping off stains from police officers’ faces and telling them to take a snack break whenever they needed it.

“I can sense that something has changed, but I’m not entirely sure what,” Cas admitted, and peered down at his hands – he flipped them over, examining them for any differences.

“I feel hotter than normal. But I’m sure you already knew that from the handprint.”

“Buddy, I’ve known how hot you are for a long time.” Dean couldn’t not seize the opportunity, and was met with a playful punch from Cas.

“I’m serious!” he insisted, though there was a smile on his lips when Dean snatched up his fist in his hands – and he was right. Dean didn’t notice in the car… because, well, things always got heated during intense makeout sessions. When he clutched at Cas’ hand, without the distraction of kissing, he could really feel something… different. It was like the blood in his veins was humming, radiating a kind of heat that didn’t feel natural. Rather than coming from beneath his skin, it seemed to be
That definitely hadn’t happened with Sam. By this point in his super-soldier journey, he had torn down a tree with his bare hands. Cas just seemed like the regular, calm Cas, just with an increased body temperature and apparent spontaneous combustion capabilities.

“That’ll be nice in the winter if you learn how to control it. I don’t want any more hand-shaped burns,” Dean remarked, though it alarmed him, and pressed a quick kiss to Cas’ knuckles.

“A human radiator. Maybe you’re becoming the Human Torch.”

He knew Cas didn’t get the reference, but he smiled anyway – a shine of relief reflected in his eyes, and Dean realised his boyfriend was nervous, too, but for a different reason. Cas had no idea what his abilities were or how to control them, and he couldn’t ask Sam for advice – they were different, despite taking the same drug.

Unless it wasn’t.

“I’ve never used a gun before.” Cas stopped Dean from pondering further and pulled the weapon from the belt he had been given – a basic 9mm, nothing too hard to fire.

“It’s just in case anything happens. I don’t think you’ll need to use it.” Dean placed his hand over Cas’, tucking the gun back where it came from.

This was the last thing Dean had ever wanted for Cas. He knew being a vigilante would put Cas in danger, but he never realised how much – his heart was hurting, because if his lover got hurt again, he only had himself to blame for it. Hopefully if anything drastic happened, Cas’ Demon Blood ability would kick in and save all their asses – that is, if he didn’t turn into a rage monster like Sam had.

Speaking of his brother, he turned to see what he was doing. He looked extremely out of place, dressed in a deep scarlet body suit and swiping knives out of a bag while police officers loaded up their guns and strapped on helmets and bullet-proof vests. Then he took a better look, and could see Sam’s jaw clenched tightly, his posture too straight – the Demon Blood.

Dean patted Cas’ shoulder quickly and jogged over to see what was going on. Although he had already prepped himself with an entire arsenal – mostly of guns and bullets – it wouldn’t hurt to make a few additions.

When he peered into the first of their duffle bags, he noticed the tranquiliser gun was there – fully loaded, and Dean almost laughed to himself. The first hardcore attack he had experienced that had to do with this mission was won mostly because of that particular weapon, how ironic it was that it showed up again. Maybe it was for luck.

He picked it up and strapped it to his back – just as he saw Sam tuck a pair of fucking katanas into the scabbards on his back.

“Who are you, Deadpool?” Dean eyed the handles that poked out over his shoulders. In combination with the red suit, he really looked like he was dressed up as a biker version of the antihero.

“Charlie cosplayed Lady Deadpool last year. She said I could use them.” He rooted through the bag again, pretty much picking up any knife he saw – earning another befuddled look from his older brother.

“Dude. This ain’t a war.” Dean grabbed his brother’s wrist, stopping him from picking up the eighth
throwing knife in a row.

“Says the guy with a massive round of bullets tied around his waist.” Sam flicked Dean’s hand out of the way, narrowly missing the end of his sleeve with the blade of his knife – a little too snidely for Dean’s liking. He marched his way into Sam’s path, and saw the tell-tale vein on his forehead that his blood was slowly boiling.

“Dude. Now’s not the time to go all Incredible Hulk. We ain’t killing anyone.” Dean reached to take the two-and-a-half-foot-long blades away, but Sam swatted him to the side like he was a pesky bug. It was startling to almost got knocked down on his ass from the uncoordinated flick of his brother’s hand.

“I’m good, Dean,” his brother sniped, and before Dean could protest, Jody began to call everyone to their vehicles. It was time to start the mission. In his heart, Dean knew if he pestered his brother it would make the situation worse – better to leave him raging out on the enemies rather than in the car on the way there.

He didn’t say a word as he climbed into the back of the Team Righteous van (Charlie had named it, and in a way, Dean liked it. After all, it matched his superhero alias.), seeing Charlie in the shotgun seat, typing furiously on her laptop. Cas was in the driver’s seat, and peered over his shoulder, taking a good look at Sam before locking eyes with Dean.

The drug had made Meg and Ava erratic, bursting into random fits of rage at any given moment. Perhaps an overdose didn’t matter. Perhaps anyone who was given Demon Blood ended up like them.

Dean stared back at Cas, the only thing that could possibly distract him from all of his qualms. He knew he couldn’t walk into a potential fight in such an antsy state, and needed to calm down.

Claire’s life depended on them. And if they failed, so would many others.

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The Lawrence Scientific Study Centre looked exactly how Dean expected a spy headquarters to look – it was one of the only taller buildings in Lawrence City, made entirely of white, marble-like stone and seamless mirrored glass. Spotlights lit up the building like a Christmas tree, making it stand out against the redbrick buildings that surrounded it.

After Charlie had confirmed she’d taken control of the security cameras, Cas pulled up right outside, along with the other police vehicles, and that was when it all began: the final rescue and revenge mission. Everything Dean had worked for since December – it was time to finish it all off. It was the moment Dean had been waiting for since November 2nd, 2001.

Before Dean could say a word to Cas, a simple goodbye or I love you, Sam was pushing him out of the back of the van, too roughly for Dean’s liking, but he knew the intention wasn’t malicious. They had absolutely zero time to waste, with the element of surprise no longer an option, and Sam simply wanted them to get going.

Charlie would be getting her bearings of the place with the help of a blueprint on her laptop and the advantage of security cameras, so they wouldn’t be clueless when crashing the party. Very little could go wrong when it came to entering the building, and Dean put his faith in hoping that they had the upper hand.

Dean led the way into the centre’s reception through the automatic doors Charlie had rigged, with
Jody, Sam, and the force at his tail. They walked in on an eerie scene – every single light was on, but there wasn’t a soul around. Dean had expected to be greeted by guards, Blondie and her men, even Gordon, Azazel, or Lucas – anyone. The only noise came from their boots thudding against the linoleum flooring.

He felt kind of stupid holding two guns in the air, but kept them up. A lack of enemy company didn’t assure safety, and Dean knew all too well that surprise attacks were one of Gordon’s favourite pastimes.

“I’ve got Gordon’s whereabouts. Basement, with Lucas – Claire’s strapped to a table, they’ve got needles. Fuck, get down there now! Go left, I’ll guide you!” Charlie’s voice rang through their earpieces, and without even a second to discuss, Jody took off in the instructed direction.

That’s when all hell broke loose.

Because Jody ran in such haste, she hadn’t examined the area for any traps – and her foot collided with a trip wire that has been strung up in one of the archways, sending her tumbling to the floor. At first, nothing happened – just an exchange of horrified stares between the brothers and Jody as she stood up cautiously… and then they heard the hissing sound.

It sounded like someone was releasing the air slowly from a balloon, and Dean whirled around to try and pinpoint the source – but it was coming from everywhere, and it was getting more intense as time passed. His heart began pounding, because he should have known better, should have known that Lucas would have tricks up his sleeve –

A policer officer dropped to the floor, right next to Sam, their gun clattering against the floor like a plastic toy. Sam didn’t hesitate to go ahead and rip the helmet off their head, thanks to his enhanced Demon Blood strength, and stuck his hand under their nose.

“She’s breathing,” he confirmed, his voice constrained. Dean could see he was trying to resist the anger, like he knew that was the Demon Blood and not him, and Dean’s heart went out to his baby brother. Even in the direst circumstances, he put everyone else’s turmoil over his own.

When two other officers, one of whom was Jody, fell to the ground next, Dean clutched at his earpiece.

“Charlie… What’s going on?” he called desperately, helplessly watching as more and more officers fell.

“I don’t know! Gordon and Lucas haven’t moved, Azazel’s nowhere in sight –” Dean could hear her tapping, and then was met with a deafening bout of static. He yelled Charlie’s name, convinced somehow Azazel was loitering around outside, hurting his best friend just because he could –

“Dean. It’s me. The building seems to have gone into lockdown.” Cas’ voice crackled through his earpiece, and sent a wave of tranquillity down his spine. Cas was like Dean’s tether, stopping him from losing his mind.

“Don’t panic. Charlie’s got enough on her plate, so I’ll guide you to Lucas and Claire.”

Dean nodded, although Cas couldn’t see, and took a quick glance at his brother. A bead of sweat was rolling down the crevice between his brows, which were angled downwards, and the eye-holes in his mask highlighted just how bloodshot they were.

“Dude, you don’t look good – is this gas or whatever affecting you?” Dean’s voice was laced with worry, and he knew Demon Blood-Sam wouldn’t like his tone.
“No. It’s the Demon Blood. I’ll be fine, let’s go get Claire.” He averted his gaze from his brother and began marching in the direction Charlie had been describing before. It appeared their roles had been reversed: now Dean was chasing Sam for his feelings, and Sam was denying him of it.

Damn, if Dean had known how frustrating it was, he might have actually given his brother some slack as well as a little insight.

The brothers were hyper-aware of any kind of traps, whether that be trip wires or something else, and stuck to the middle of the corridors, taking cautious steps. Sam watched the floor while Dean kept his eyes on the ceiling, and he couldn’t imagine how stupid the two of them must have looked. Their steps were slow, and Dean was itching to go faster, but knew after the stint with the police force that he couldn’t risk going down with them.

Claire’s life depended on it.

“Incoming… That blonde girl who stabbed me. One other with her. No guns, but watch out.” Cas had nailed the helpful sidekick voice, making sure he was clear as a bell and getting straight to the point. So, Dean wasn’t even mad about the fact that they were about to get attacked, until Sam unleashed his borrowed katanas and let out an honest-to-God growl.

“Sam, don’t-” Dean warned, grabbing his tranquiliser gun and raising it, preparing himself for the oncoming fight.

Sam launched forward, and Dean swung his arm out to wrap his fingers around his brother’s hood – but his attempt at stopping him failed, and instead, the material came clean off the back of Sam’s suit. He spun the katanas around in his hands, one of them scraping against the corridor walls like nails down a chalkboard, making Dean wince.

“Fuck!” Dean cursed, just as an idea entered his head. He briefly took a glance at the tranquiliser gun, raised and ready to stop Blondie and her minion the moment she rounded the corner.

“Dean. She’s almost there,” Cas warned, and Dean had made his decision.

“Babe. Put on some fight music. I’m gonna need it.” He took a tentative few steps forward, readjusting the aim of his gun. And just as Blondie rounded the corner, his finger squeezed the trigger.

Suddenly, Eye of the Tiger began booming through his ears, just as his baby brother dropped to the ground like a stone, a dart sticking out of the back of his neck.

It didn’t matter that Blondie had killed Cas. If she ended up dead, then they were no better than she was – and despite almost losing it so many times, almost killing whoever he needed to get revenge, he knew it would just intensify his guilty conscience. And he didn’t want to live with that.

Dean was the Righteous Man, and a man who was truly righteous wouldn’t murder in cold blood.

This time, rather than thin cargo pants, the two people storming down the corridor wore SWAT-like body suits, the Kevlar bulging beneath the fabric. The only vulnerable points were their heads, and their night vision goggles had made a comeback.

Before they could do anything, Dean tucked away his tranquiliser gun and spread his feet in a battle stance. He knew all too well that this one was going to hurt like a bitch.

The guy with Blondie, who was much smaller than he was, threw a punch so clumsily it was almost laughable – Dean wrapped his hand around his knuckles lightning fast, not hesitating to flip his arm
around until he felt a grotesque snap travel through his wrist. The guy fell to the floor in barely a second, and Dean couldn’t believe they had sent that and intended it to slow Sam down.

Dean spoke too soon, because then Blondie pounced, as speedy as a miniature bullet.

Her thighs were clamped around Dean’s waist, holding her up as she leaned backwards, her back bending like it was made out of elastic, and flung him straight into the ground. He crumpled in a heap, bullets, guns, and Kevlar digging into him, and knew his nose was going to be swollen the next morning.

Hot blood trickled down his front lip when he forced himself to get his bearings and rolled over, and was met with the tiny spitfire digging a heel into his chest.

“Didn’t expect that, huh? Guess who got pumped up with the good stuff, thanks to you.” She squeezed down a little further, and despite the fact that Dean was protected, the pressure made him gasp for breath. In a desperate attempt to throw her off, Dean snatched up her ankle and forced it to the side – but it did nothing, she just ended up tumbling onto his chest.

“Lucas told me that if I got Castiel injected, I’d be his trial run for a blood transfusion with one of the children. He also told me there was an 80% chance I’d die from blood poisoning, but hey. I’m still kicking.” She traced a gloved hand over his bare face, licking her lips when the leather grazed over his own.

He sharply rammed his forehead straight into Blondie’s, managing to throw her off for a brief moment and scramble away. This wasn’t like the convenience store fight at all, there were no wine bottles to grab or counters to hide behind. Sam was in a heap on the ground, and if the building was in lockdown, his only hope had gone down the drain.

And Cas had gone radio silent. Fuck. He was going to get beaten to death by a chick who was half the size of him.

Dean remembered how he’d been taught to fight in kickboxing during middle school and by Bobby – back then, he was a puny kid, and was told to utilise his elbows and knees and aim for them on the other person. Bend either one the wrong way, and it would be one hell of a painful experience for them.

He also knew never to throw the first punch.

So when Blondie threw a punch, Dean fell to the ground, only feeling a fraction of the hit as it knocked down his hood. With barely a millisecond to gain an advantage, he drove his boot straight into Blondie’s kneecap, wincing, because he imagined it to be the worst kind of injury a person could possibly experience, having a joint be bent the wrong way.

But it did nothing – she just stumbled back a few steps, gave Dean a snarling grin, and snatched him by the foot. He slid across the floor despite how much he clawed at her hand, anything to slow himself down, and coughed when she jumped down on his chest and straddled it, her thighs forcing the air from his lungs.

“You’re cute, Mr. Righteous.” Blonde then fastened her hands around Dean’s neck, clamping his throat shut. He gagged, his lungs already deprived of air, and she squeezed even tighter – and he could feel that it was it for him. He could see black rims around the edge of his vision, spots appearing like he’d been staring into bright lights, and though he tried to tear her arms away, he couldn’t.
After all, she had no reason to let go. He wasn’t Demon Blood compatible. He was no use to anyone in the building.

His eyes screwed shut because he felt like they were going to pop out their sockets if he didn’t, and waited for the darkness to take him.

But then the pressure was gone, and he heaved in such an enormous breath that some saliva got caught in his throat, and he ended up coughing it all back up. He clutched at his neck, sore from the contact, and rubbed at the raw skin as his breathing returned to normal.

When his eyes flew open, he saw her on the ground… smoke billowing from her face, the skin blistering and bubbling in the shape of a familiar hand.

And there stood Cas, sweat droplets catching at the base of his neck, panting like a thirsty dog.

“‘I think I know what the Demon Blood does to me.’ was all he said, and Dean could only stare because he couldn’t fucking believe it.

“How the… How the fuck did you get in here?” Dean denied Cas’ hand when he reached out to help him, scared it would still be white-hot and turn his hand into deep-fried mush. Cas didn’t look too offended, and instead nodded his head in understanding.

“I melted the glass doors,” he stated, as if it wasn’t the strangest thing that had ever happened to him.

“I saw Sam go down, and I knew you’d need help. I needed air anyway… I was boiling, and when I touched the glass my finger passed through like it was liquefied.”

He pinched the front of his tank top, flapping it around to try and get some air. He looked like he had just run a marathon: his face was red, his bangs were glued down to his forehead, and his skin was shiny with perspiration.

Dean could feel himself blush.

“I don’t get how Lucas could have done that to you… Wouldn’t it burn your skin clean off?” Dean waved his hand in front of Cas’ face, trying to help cool him down with a small stream of air.

“I don’t know, Dean. I take photographs for a living,” Cas deadpanned as he whipped off his glasses, which had fogged over, and it looked as if the frames had melted slightly. He grumbled, and shoved them into the pocket of his borrowed joggers.

Dean heard rummaging in his earpiece, and was relieved when he was met with a familiar voice.

“Sorry. Cas… seemed to have fused the spongey bit to the microphone. I had to go set up another one.” Although he was, quite frankly, scared to death of what Cas could do with a single touch, the comment made him smile.

“No problem, Charlie. How about you guide me and Johnny Storm here to the basement?” He watched intently as Cas’ chest rose and fell, the sweat-stained material of his tank top clinging to the muscles underneath… and was that a burn mark in the fabric?

“I can see you objectifying Cas from here, Dean. Keep following the corridor and turn right.”

Right. He had a life-saving mission to finish. He could get distracted by Cas later.

“What should we do about Sam?” Cas asked, glancing at the unconscious Winchester, who was a
few feet behind Blondie. They couldn’t leave him – the chances of someone taking him away and sucking out his blood were too high. They couldn’t know what else Lucas and Gordon had up their sleeves, and with Azazel MIA… Dean didn’t have a doubt in his mind that he could appear at any moment and cause even more havoc.

The tranquiliser wouldn’t fade off for another hour or so, and that was time they simply didn’t have.

“Maybe your heat mojo can do something?” Dean suggested, but then realised it was a bad idea – Cas seemed to be unable to control whatever his new abilities were. He was about to take it back when Cas’ face went blank, a sheen over his eyes, and he reached for Sam’s face.

“Wait – Cas, stop!” Dean reached for Cas’ bicep, trying to tug him away, but instead of the layer of heat he had felt before, a wave of serenity washed over him. Dean noticed his neck begin to feel less stiff, the raw sensation where Cas’ handprint was beginning to gradually fade into a dull throb, then nothingness. His body felt lighter, free of the aches and bruises that he had accumulated over the past two weeks.

And then Sam’s eyes fluttered open, the pain that swarmed them completely gone.

“Dean… What?” His voice was slurred, but Dean could already tell his voice was less strained, like the rage from the Demon Blood had lost its hold over him and dissipated entirely.

Cas returned to a standing position, looking questioningly into Dean’s eyes, as if he had the answers to what had just happened.

“Dude… I think you just healed us.” Dean removed his hand from Cas’ arm and thoroughly examined it, as if it would somehow give him a clue about how his boyfriend had managed to do what he just did. From what they knew, he had been given an identical drug to Sam, there was no reasonable answer as to why Cas was totally different from his brother, Ava, and Meg. The only way they could find out –

“We need to get to Lucas and Gordon.” Cas stared into a blank space, the muscles in his jaw contracting. Dean wanted to touch him, hold him close, and tell him they would fix it, but he was afraid of what would happen if he did.

Cas’ abilities were too unpredictable.

Dean reached out to help his brother up. Sam was looking disoriented, but not because of the tranquiliser. He was staring warily at Cas, overwhelmed by what he had just done.

“Thanks, Cas,” he said out of guilt rather than gratitude, knowing Cas must have been terrified of what he had managed to do. Sam gave him a quick once over before peering at his katanas on the floor, pressing his lips together, and stepping away from them.

“ Aren’t you taking those?” Dean asked, turning to make his way back down the corridor. His heart was fluttering with hope, hope that his brother was back to himself.

“No. The real me doesn’t want to kill anyone.” He shot his brother a barely-there smile of reassurance.

“We should get going. Charlie, where we headed?”

“Straight ahead, take a right. Elevator will be right there.”

Cas shuffled awkwardly, swiping his sweaty bangs out of his face – Dean noticed his fingers were
trembling, and knowing it would be a risk and a half, he grabbed for them. Though his heart skipped a beat when they touched, there was nothing different about it – no heat, no healing, just regular Cas. After a few seconds, he felt a spark jolt through his fingertips; it was nothing too alarming, so he didn’t let go.

“We’ll figure this out.” Dean clasped his hand tightly, and watched Cas’ face light up. The worry in his face totally faded with the touch, and Dean edged closer, gravitating towards Cas as if he was the ocean, and Cas was the shore –

“Guys. Later.” Sam barged through them, ripping their fingers apart as he jogged down the corridor, and if anyone else had been around they would never have guessed he’d been unconscious barely a minute ago.

“Four times in two days, Sam! Four times!” Dean called after him as he fell into a run, with the man he loved by his side.

~*~

When the elevator doors opened, Dean had his gun raised and ready to shoot whoever so much as breathed in his general direction. Brother and boyfriend close behind him, he headed down the corridor. It was ominous, lined with pipes, wiring, and dimly lit by a few flickering ceiling lights. Considering how much government money was funded into the science centre, Dean was surprised to see it in such a state of disarray.

From what he could see, there were no other doors – the corridor ended abruptly with a solid concrete wall, stained with dust, dirt, and age. Once he reached it, he turned to face his teammates, who looked equally as confused.

“Charlie? There’s nothing here. Just a corridor and no doors,” Dean alerted his companion, his brother heading back towards the elevator to double check, gloved fingertips skimming the walls.

“That’s the only way down to the basement. There’s no camera wherever you are now, so you’re on your own. I’m sorry – the blueprints I have don’t detail the basement very well,” she confessed mournfully, and Dean chewed on the inside of his mouth. Where the hell did they go from here?

Cas, who had joined Sam in searching for a door, made his way back into the elevator. It caused Dean to frown, and he watched as his boyfriend began tapping and pounding at the metal. When he stamped on the floor, a hollow clang that sounded anything but normal reverberated through the corridor, and he locked eyes with the brothers.

“Here. It’s hollow.” Cas knocked around some more, the square of metal in the centre of the elevator clearly designed to be removed. It wasn’t screwed down, and when Cas stood on it, it moved ever so slightly with a quiet rattle. He tucked his nails around the edge, losing his grip a few times before managing to peel away the metal.

Sure enough, it revealed a hole going downwards, much like the way entrances to drainage systems looked. A rusty ladder guided their eyes downwards, where a metal-crated floor lay at the bottom, dimly lit by lights embedded in the walls.

“Dang. This gives me the creeps,” Dean remarked, mostly to lighten the mood, but was met with a stunner of a frown from his little brother. Without an answer, Sam crouched down, lowered his never-ending legs down the hole, and swiftly climbed down the ladder.

When he reached the bottom, the metal rattled and rang around the tunnel below, the sound making
its way back up to Dean and Cas. Not giving himself even a moment to hesitate, despite his initial apprehension, Dean flung his legs over the edge of the elevator next, blundering down the rungs of the ladder as fast as possible – if they heard the sound, then Lucas and Gordon definitely did, too, and Dean couldn’t have his baby brother handling that alone.

Lucas and Gordon knew what makes Sam tick, considering they had been the ones working with the drug.

He reached the bottom, gun out and safety off in no time, but was met with nobody. There was an arched hallway in front of them, the dim lights highlighting the texture of rusted steel and bolts. A feeling of claustrophobia crept up Dean’s spine – the corridor ceiling was lower than Sam was tall, and the air felt thick, as if they were in an underground subway station.

Once Cas landed behind the two brothers, they skulked down the too-small corridor, Dean’s skin crawling more and more with every step. Sam made a point of getting his phone out, opening the voice recorder app, and shoving it back in his pocket – he really hadn’t been kidding when he said he was going to ship off the confession to the LCPD, just like any other case.

The corridor took a swift curve to the right, and once they rounded it, they were met with the exact scene Charlie had described: Claire, strapped down to a table, eyes rolled up into her skull. A tube had been poked into her arm, filled with blood, which lead into an IV drip carefully positioned next to another empty chair – that was where Blondie had gotten her blood transfusion.

Gordon’s back was to them, and out of sheer anger, Dean fired a bullet straight into his leg. With a howl of pain, the man tumbled to the floor, knocking his forehead against the metal table where Claire lay – good. You fucking deserve it.

“Dean, Sam! So glad you could join us.” The slimy voice of Lucas Milton echoed around the room, and as they marched to the end of the corridor, he came into view. Dressed in a simple grey t-shirt, jeans, and a lab coat, he looked just like a regular lab worker. There was no evidence of alarm on his face, despite the fact that his partner was screaming as he clutched at his leg, blood spilling through his fingers.

Dean loaded his gun and aimed it directly at the mayor’s forehead, prepared to kill him there and then.

“You prick.” Dean snarled, watching as Lucas raised his hands in the air in mock surrender. A grin of pride formed on his face, which faltered slightly when he realised Cas was behind the pair of them.

“Oh! Castiel Novak,” he commented, genuinely appearing to be astounded by the addition to their company. “I heard you took the Angel Blood I sent April to give you. It’s nice to know it actually works!” A cheerful laugh sprang from his lips, which simmered down into a maniacal smile.

“You look so much like your daddy.”

Cas said nothing, the muscles in his jaw tightening. April must have been the blonde lady. He was always the kind to internalise his anger, and Dean wasn’t surprised when he didn’t say a word – he knew Cas was imagining six different ways to murder the man that stood in front of them. Dean was doing it himself, because how dare that motherfucker address Cas the way he did?

“Give us some fucking answers, dickhead. Why are my parents dead?!” Dean roared, marching straight into Lucas’ path. His gun was barely a foot away from Lucas’ head, and his eyes crossed slightly when he stared down the barrel.
“Just do it. Shoot him. The answers don’t matter at this point.”

“Shouldn’t you be trying to save poor little Claire? Isn’t that what you’re here for?” he taunted, though his tone was unnaturally light, and he waved towards the unconscious blonde.

“Getting a little side-tracked by your own selfish needs, I see. Booooring.” That was when he finally seemed to register Gordon, who was crying for his boss to help him.

Dean noticed something then – the skin by Lucas’ hairline, it was peeling away, revealing a blistering-red, dried out mess. If he hadn’t been so close, he probably wouldn’t have noticed it.

“The fuck is happening to you?” Dean flicked his gun vaguely towards the injury, and Lucas smiled at him as if he was a half-dead bug.

“My own silly mistake. I’m dying, Dean Winchester.” He patted the top of Gordon’s head as he whimpered like a kicked puppy.

“I’m being serious. I’m sure that’s what you want to hear.” Lucas walked towards the IV drip, Dean following him with his gun every step of the way, and watched as he stared longingly at the blood inside the bag.

“I entrusted Azazel and Gordon with my company because of it. I assume you know all about the Demon Blood, correct?” His gaze bore into Dean’s, and the eye contact made Dean’s gut squirm uncomfortably.

“I don’t know. Why don’t you tell me?” Dean felt his brother and Cas by his sides, seeing Sam’s arm raised with a throwing knife in his grasp out of the corner of his eye.

Lucas gave Dean a grin that didn’t reach his eyes. He circled around to the table, standing over Claire’s unconscious body, and twirled a strand of her golden hair between his fingers.

“Azazel and I discussed making something to strengthen the police force, because Daddy Novak was a fool. So, I worked on this. The Demon Blood.” He tapped at Claire’s forehead.

“Bela Talbot was the first to try it out, but she died. Oopsie.” He didn’t sound sorry at all.

Dean hoped Charlie had taken initiative and called in backup from the police. She had stopped speaking directly to them, but Dean could definitely hear her voice from a distance, as if she had taken a step outside and was on the phone. At least, that’s what he prayed that she was doing. They needed to take this man down as soon as possible, ideally while he was distracted by his egocentric retelling-of-the-story villain speech.

“Little did I know, Rebecca Wilson, my pesky security guard who doubled as a cop, saw me put the needle right into Bela’s neck. Went and tattled to her buddies. Some of them were your parents, if you didn’t get the implication.” The way he circled the room, it was like a lion in a fight, declaring his superior position in the situation.

“I knew if it worked, I could sell it off. Become a weapons dealer. Before we get world peace, we’re gonna need some chaos, right? Also—” Lucas pointed his finger, emphasising his next point, “—getting a trillion dollars for it isn’t so bad.”

By this point, Gordon was lying on the floor, a shallow snivel escaping through his quivering lips. His calm and collected manner had been totally diminished. Lucas smiled down at him in a similar, icy way to how he had smiled at Dean – it was like he knew how jarring his presence was, and utilised it as much as he could until it became unbearable for whomever became a victim of it.
He tapped his toe against Gordon’s forehead, tipping his head back, and let out a short huff of laughter.

“Your families tried to stop Azazel and me, so I hired someone else to inject you all with my drug. Kind of harsh in hindsight, but hey, I was pissed off. The drug never worked, so Azazel burned down your houses instead. Much nicer way to go! What a swell guy, huh?” Lucas flung his arms out, flashing his too-white teeth to what he treated as his audience.

“It took me an entire decade to figure out why it didn’t work. None of you know anything about genetics, so I’ll put it simply: I forgot to add the final ingredient, which is what’s in the Demon Blood and Angel Blood syringes. Wanna know where it came from? ‘Cause that’s the best bit.”

The three heroes remained silent, letting the speech settle in silently. If they reacted, it would give the backup less time to get here and sort it out. That is, if they were coming.

“Ah, Cassie. Your daddy was one of Rebecca’s friends, too. He was gonna leak all of it to the press and have me arrested, and I couldn’t have that. So I used him. Good thing I did, too.” His posture straightened, his face lowering, the shadows cast by the dim light sharpening the planes of his face.

“Testing on your daddy’s blood gave me the final thing I needed to make you what you are today. And after that, he was useless to me. So, y’know, he’s gone. I made the Angel Blood especially for you, Castiel, mostly for shits and giggles, but also because it came from your daddy’s corpse.”

Cas inhaled, his breath trembling, and Dean had to actively stop himself from pulling the trigger of his gun.

“Cas, don’t listen to him, he’s trying to provoke you!” But it was too late, because Cas knocked the brothers aside and rammed straight into Lucas before anyone could so much as blink.

The two slammed into the back wall, the force of it eliciting a crack so loud that Dean could feel bile rise in his throat. The only thing that could have been was done, and as Dean looked on, his heart dropped in disbelief. Cas pounded a punch straight into Lucas’ cheek, his head banging against the concrete once more.

When Cas let go of Lucas, the blond man dropped to the floor, a splatter of blood staining the grimy wall where his head had collided with the stone.

“Fuck you!” Cas screamed, his voice cracking against his vocal cords. With a fierce roar, he smacked his foot straight into Lucas’ gut – he was conscious, barely, and made a loud wheezing sound at the blow.

“Castiel! Stop!” Dean called after his boyfriend, knowing Lucas was the only man who had the answers to his remaining questions, and leapt over Gordon’s limp form. He used every ounce of strength he had to collide with Cas, trying to push him away, knowing the Angel Blood would have enhanced his resistance. Though Cas didn’t seem affected by the hit, he did come out of his blinding rage, staring hopelessly into Dean’s wide eyes as he recomposed himself.

“My dad is dead.” The corners of Cas’ mouth turned downwards, his bottom lip wobbling and eyes hazy with tears. Sam moved to take a good look at Claire, hastily removing the drip from her arm and ripping off the straps that kept her down.

“It’s okay. He’s gotta be lying, Cas.” Dean tried to comfort his boyfriend, but couldn’t even convince himself. Lucas had admitted to the former Mayor’s murder, and even if he had been lying and Chuck had just been missing, they no longer had a way of finding out where he was. There was
a chance he wouldn’t even be Chuck, considering how much Lucas must have experimented over the past decade to come to the final Demon Blood product.

“But, this means – this means Dad was here, right? He didn’t actually go missing. Until recently, he was… here. Right under our fucking noses.” Cas sniffled, and then the waterworks began – he let out a heart-wrenching sob and shoved his face into his hands. He fell to his knees, collapsing under the pressure, and cried and cried and cried.

Dean didn’t care if Lucas was conscious, or about Gordon, or even Claire in that moment. Because Cas was being torn apart, after so many years of hope, after letting his family leave so he could stay in his Dad’s city, hopeful that he would come back one day. Dean had thought his parents’ death was painful, but he couldn’t imagine having them be gone for so many years, then finding out they had been tortured for years and killed.

He dropped to Cas’ side, scooping him up into his arms as if he was a small child, and let him sob into his shoulder. Someone had to give him a chance to get everything out of his system. Just as he pressed a kiss to Cas’ head, he noticed Gordon struggling silently to his feet – and that was when he saw the glint of a knife, which he jammed straight into the small of Sam’s back.

His brother let out a deep groan, falling against the table and narrowly missing Claire – Dean scrambled away from Cas’ grasp, feeling momentarily guilty when he let out a confused yelp. There were only two words crossing his mind over and over: Kill him. Kill him. Kill him.

“You… are abominations,” Gordon strained, pressing down on Sam’s shoulder to keep him upright.

“From the moment Brady James put a needle in your necks, you were… disgraces.” Sam was grabbing at the table for dear life, trying to keep himself upright, but ended up on the floor –

“You’re dead,” Dean snarled, gun ready to fire, but he kept hesitating.

Just do it, Dean.

“Bela was my girlfriend. She’s dead because I killed her,” Gordon confessed, swaying precariously without utilising Sam as his support.

“You’re experiments at most, you lost your humanity years ago. Including you, Dean Winchester. When I captured you, I injected you with the last set of Lucas’ first drug.” Gordon let out a guttural laugh, and Dean’s arm shook as his aim remained locked on the patch of skin between Gordon’s eyebrows.

“Demon Blood or not, you’re the most fucked up individual I ever came across. You, Sam, Claire, Castiel, even Lucas and Azazel – you all deserve to be dead –”

A shot rang out through the room, and Dean couldn’t tear his gaze away as Gordon’s eyes rolled back into his skull, a bullet hole searing through the side of his cheek. Dean stared down at his gun, and was certain it hadn’t been him who pulled the trigger.

Then, he peered under the table and saw Sam holding a pistol, arms shaking and face ghostly pale. That was Dean’s call back to reality.

“Sam, Sammy!” He immediately dropped his weapon and bolted over, collapsing at his brother’s side – his knee sank into a pool of blood, but despite the tell-tale sign that he couldn’t do a thing, he lifted his brother into a sitting position.

“You… Tell Eileen…” His phrasing was sluggish, just like he’d been tranquilised all over again.
But that wasn’t the reason this time; this time, Sammy was dying. He clung at his brother’s face, shaking it when his brother’s eyes fell shut.

“It’s not that bad. It’s not that bad!” Dean heard voices coming from the tunnel – multiple, and he knew there was hope, there had to be hope, because the only people that could be coming were the police, right?

His brother’s eyes closed again, and when he shook him, they didn’t open. Dean raised his hand, desperately slapping at his brother’s slack jaw to try and wake him up again.

“Sammy. Don’t do that, don’t die on me, or I swear I’ll bring you back and kill you myself.” He could see Sam’s awareness of the world drifting away, his mouth falling open and releasing heavy and uneven pants. There was no way in hell he was going to make it.

That was when he was heaved away from his baby brother, and Dean assumed the worst – that he was being captured by Azazel, who had turned up to the fight, or Lucas had woken up and managed to gain the strength to take him away. Instead, he was met with Jody, who crouched at his side.

She was yelling in his face, but Dean couldn’t hear her. His body had gone totally numb, the only sense left functioning was his sight – which was fixated on Sam, as three medics attended to him, hauling his limp body on to a stretcher. The situation played out like a nightmare – everything was surreal, the world desaturated and in slow motion.

This was not real, it couldn’t be.

_He can’t be dead. He can’t be dead. He can’t be dead._

~*~

Exiting the Science Centre was the worst part. Dean had lost the ability to function, and Jody had to pull his hood up as she helped haul him out of the front entrance – where he was met with a blinding flash of cameras, screams from news reporters and journalists, thanks you’s, and even accusations. Microphones were shoved in his face, but Jody held his hood over his face, preserving his secret identity when he couldn’t bring himself to.

_Sam. Sam. Sam._

He numbly registered the garish flashing of red and blue from an ambulance light; the body of either Lucas or Sam being lifted into the back was highlighted by the glow. When he looked hard enough, he could see a red sleeve, and knew it was his baby brother.

A hiccup of a cry escaped his lips, and Jody stopped, turning Dean in a different direction. He couldn’t bring himself to look back at the ambulance, despite the fact he should have been going to the hospital with Sam – perhaps it was for the better. Seeing his brother in such a critical state was killing him slowly. He could feel it in his bones.

Jody led him to a police car and struggled to open the door – probably because she was supporting a man who weighed twice as much as she did. Unceremoniously, she tossed Dean on the seat with a grunt.

“There’s a manhunt for Azazel, and Lucas is definitely being charged on multiple felonies after this. You did it, Dean.” Jody played at a comforting tone, but she was too wary of Dean’s state for it to be even moderately convincing.

He didn’t want to speak, didn’t want to feel, didn’t want to be conscious. The world was too much,
and for the first time in a long time, he prayed to God that he could stop existing for a little while. The weight of what had just happened was too much for him to even consider bearing, and it presented itself as a throbbing ache that spanned his entire body.

“Sam didn’t say anything, but he handed in your father’s journal. We have enough evidence to lock Azazel up when we find him.” Jody patted Dean’s shoulder, then pinched the bottom of his chin – he had no choice but to look her in the eye.

“Honey, I know you don’t want to talk right now. Maybe you’ll never want to. But if you do, I’ll be here.”

Dean was beyond exhausted, both emotionally and physically, but he gave the Sheriff a small tilt of his head. It was his confirmation that, yes, he would try.

For a brief moment, he realised that this was what mother’s were supposed to do, and a searing pain tugged at his heart – because it reminded him of his own parents, and his parents had died for doing exactly what Dean, Sam, and Cas had just done: bringing down Azazel and Lucas Milton.

And now, Sam would probably be dead, too.

Dean would be alone.

When his gaze drifted, a familiar figure faded into his vision – Cas, still in his partially-burnt tank top and joggers, was standing in the middle of the parking lot of the Science Centre, brows creased together as he looked on.

Dean’s world seemed to fall into focus at that point, the shock washing away like sand on a shore, and that was when he knew. Cas was going to be the last person he would ever love, his tether to the real world when it felt like his soul was consumed by darkness.

Cas was his lifeline.

With this crumbling realisation came a burst of energy, a determination to keep on grinding, and he tumbled out of the police car – apologising to Jody, the first word he had spoken since leaving the basement, for knocking her in the shoulder – and ran, because he couldn’t wait another moment. He felt his hood fall down with the momentum, but didn’t care.

He didn’t care who saw him, that every newspaper and news station reporting for Lawrence City were barely ten feet away, hungry for a story. He clamped his hands to Cas’ cheeks and vigorously crushed their lips together.

Whatever the Angel Blood had done to Cas, something that couldn’t possibly be healthy, it was working on Dean in that moment: the layer of heat surrounding Cas was back, just the right, soothing temperature to make him forget, just for a moment, every single one of the wrongdoings in his life. He was whisked away to a temporary paradise in his mind, each touch of their lips generating a different scenario of himself and Cas in his mind. Moving out together into a real house in suburbia, going on vacations somewhere far away, goodnight kisses after dates. And finally marriage, even kids. An apple pie life.

It was his glimpse at bliss; a small taste of heaven.

It was only when Cas pulled away for air that it dawned on Dean.

The Angel Blood.
Cas had healed Sam before.

“Cas – we need to get you to the hospital. To Sam!” he rushed, barely a second after kissing him senseless, but was met with a blush and a final press of the lips. When Dean took a quick glance to his right, he saw every camera aimed straight at them. His identity – something he had been determined to keep quiet – was a secret no more.

Then again, at least his big reveal had been an epic one: a broadcast to the entire nation of Dean kissing the love of his life. Go big or go home.

“Let’s go.” Cas slid his hand down Dean’s forearm before tangling their fingers together. With the free one, he flipped Dean’s hood back up, despite the fact that the truth would be in the process of circling around the entirety of America.

“Wait –” Dean’s mind circled back to the perfect life he’d been imagining, and he knew if he didn’t say anything about it in that moment, he would never bring it up again. Regular Dean wasn’t a sap, but post-my-brother-got-stabbed-and-my-world-is-falling-apart-Dean definitely was.

“Everything okay?” Cas asked, swinging Dean around so he faced away from the crowd. And the moment he looked into Cas’ eyes, he felt his tongue tie itself up. That was how he ended up gaping awkwardly, reminiscent of a goldfish, trying to speak but realising nothing was coming out.

Cas’ lips quirked into a smile, and he pressed a finger to Dean’s lips.

“Tell me after Sam’s better, alright?” He began pulling Dean along, his feet slapping against the floor because he was quite frankly dumbfounded at that point and walking had become a task and a half.

When Jody greeted them with a poorly-concealed grin, she gestured towards the back door of her car.

“To the hospital, I’m guessing?” She checked Dean for any signs of abnormality, seemingly satisfied when she found hope instead.

“Cas can save him, Jody. You better step on it.”

~*~

The looks Dean got when he entered the hospital… Damn. He understood what celebrities felt like in that moment, like he was naked for all the world to see. More than half of the people in the waiting room pulled their phones out as he, Cas, and Jody stormed into the hospital, having to push people aside to make their way to the front desk.

The other half caught up fast enough, considering the TV screens in the waiting room had his face plastered all over them.

“We’re here for Sam Winchester. It’s urgent,” Jody stated with a huff, the young girl at the desk occupied with her computer. When she looked away, pushing her cat’s eye glasses up on the bridge of her nose, the shock on her face was palpable.

Dean couldn’t be dealing with slow people today, so he barged in front of Jody.

“Yes, I am the Righteous Man, alert the fucking media. I need to see my brother.” Dean wasn’t in the mood for time wasting, and threw the woman one of his father’s trademark ‘I’m-an-ex-Marine-let-me-through’ death glares, one of the things he would never forget about him.
She stammered and typed shakily at her keyboard – Dean didn’t fail to notice how many times she hit backspace.

“He’s in room 307, I’ll – I’ll take you. It’s no problem.” She was the only woman at the desk, and Dean frowned – he couldn’t risk others’ lives just because his brother was hurting.

“No. Tell us where to go, we’ll manage.” Dean’s hands were pressed onto the front desk, his palms sweating.

“To the right, take the elevator to the third floor, and it’ll be the seventh room ahead of you. G-good luck, sir.” She tried to smile, and looked friendly enough with her glasses and pink lipstick, but ended up merely stretching her lips in an awkward shape. Dean appreciated her help, thanked her quickly, and darted towards the elevator.

Righteous Man privileges consisted of barging past doctors, patients, anyone in his way, just to get inside the elevator first. The three of them managed to storm into the elevator just as the doors were closing, earning several terrified glares from medical professionals.

“Sorry, folks.” Dean knew the apology had utterly no meaning to these people, who had all definitely seen the news reports – a small guy, clutching a clipboard in his hands, was staring at Dean and Cas like they were the winning contestants of *The Bachelor*. Dean was fairly sure he could see his heart rate speeding up, and thank God the guy was in a hospital, because if he held his breath for any longer, he’d really need urgent medical attention.

Dean nodded briefly at him, and was fairly sure he’d just turned the man gay – that is, if he wasn’t already.

The elevator dinged at the third floor, and the three of them poured out, sprinting down the corridor at the speed of light. 305, 306, 307 –

Dean peered into the room, seeing his baby brother surrounded by doctors who were sedating him – probably to prep him for surgery. He knew all too well he was breaking hospital policy by entering the room, but he had to do it – he needed to fix it.

“You shouldn’t be in here!” yelled one of the doctors, whose face was hidden behind a mask, their hair tucked into a hairnet.

“Trust me, doc, I know I’m breaking the law. But *this* guy can heal him. I know I sound batshit crazy but you gotta hear me out, okay?” Dean knew he would have to pull the Righteous Man card, because it seemed to be the only way anyone would listen to him.

“Look. I’ve seen things you can’t even fucking imagine, and I know for a fact this dude has weird-ass healing abilities. I’m the Righteous Man. I’m not fucking with you.”

Cas gulped when all the eyes in the room were on him. He was a mess – hair ruffled, his tank top partially burned off, with bruised knuckles from his showdown with Lucas.

“I can. I’ve done it before.” Though Cas was supposed to be assuring the room of his ability, it sounded more like he was trying to convince himself that he was able to heal Sam. If this worked, Dean knew the doctors would think of him as a miracle, and probably try steal him away, use his power to heal others.

But this was Sam. And Dean knew that Cas loved Sam as if he was his own blood, almost as equally as Dean did.
The doctors avoided Cas as if they were the sea and he was Moses, all of them wearing identical expressions – they were scared totally shitless.

The room went silent; the only sound being the slow beep of Sam’s heart monitor. Though it meant he was alive, it didn’t necessarily mean he would survive, or even wake up from the trauma he had experienced in the basement.

Before reaching out for Sam, Cas set his gaze on Dean and Jody, who were positioned near the doorway.

“If this doesn’t work, I’m so sorry.” Cas’ voice wobbled, and Dean knew if he spoke any more, he would end up crying. He hated to put Cas through so much pressure, but he was possibly their only hope. The knife had gone into his back… what if he ended up paralysed? Sam loved being a vigilante, and though he’d be alive, it would kill him to stop.

Cas pressed his lips together, a bead of sweat dripping down the back of his neck, and touched his hand directly over Sam’s heart. The heart monitor began to speed up, soaring past the usual rate and not showing any sign of slowing down. But Cas kept going, kept trying.

It’s not working. The thought echoed around Dean’s skull, and he felt a drop deep in his gut.

Sweat was pooling at Cas’ nose and dripping onto Sam’s bare chest. The doctors remained behind him, but they looked uneasy, too – like they knew it wasn’t going to work, even though they had never seen anything like what they were experiencing before. It was as if they were a gaping crowd witnessing a fight, mortified by the events but doing nothing to stop it.

The heart monitor went silent.

And then Cas fell to the ground, toppling so he hit a couple of doctors – Dean immediately fell to his knees and skidded towards him, snatching his face in his hands and shaking it.

“Cas?” he whimpered, shaking his hands and trying to force his boyfriend’s eyes open. A doctor shooed him away, flicking his hands away and checking Cas’ pulse – she nodded, and signalled for one of the other doctors.

“Fast heartbeat, he’s feverous, breathing pattern uneven. Call Doctor Barnes and get him to room 405.” She shoved Dean away roughly, and he tumbled back onto his ass – at first he was offended, but it didn’t take him long to realise he was obstructing the doctors who were putting him into the recovery position.

A beat echoed around the room. Then another, and another, each coming closer together – the heart monitor, it was beating. Beating normally.

Dean leapt to his feet so fast that he was almost certain he pulled a muscle.

And then Cas fell to the ground, toppling so he hit a couple of doctors – Dean immediately fell to his knees and skidded towards him, snatching his face in his hands and shaking it.

And there was Sam Winchester, peeling the mask off his face and looking totally disoriented – it was as if they were back in the corridor of the science centre, and he was just waking up from the tranquiliser dosage.

“I think I just… died?” was the first thing he said, and Dean launched at his baby brother so fast, not considering that he might still be in pain, and received a groan in response to his affection.

That was how he stayed for the next thirty seconds: clutching desperately at his brother, openly weeping like a worried mother, his tears catching in Sam’s mattered hair.
“Dean…” A gravelly cry came from the floor, and when Dean whipped his head around, he saw the doctors had parted, revealing a disgruntled Cas. He resembled a grumpy cat that had just been awoken from its nap.

“Cas. Cas, oh God.” Dean heaved out, collapsing against the wall by Sam’s hospital bed just as Jody Mills entered the room. For the duration of the dramatic montage, she had been standing outside – and of course she walked in when Dean broke down completely and began sobbing. The past two weeks finally crashed down on him, shattering his emotional barricade at last.

Everything was okay.

*Everything had turned out okay in the end.*
FOUR MONTHS LATER

Dean’s eyes opened to the warm glow of golden sunlight. It was too bright for the first few seconds, so he scrubbed at his sleepy eyes roughly, and turned to peer at the body next to him. Cas, with a halo of sunlight surrounding his messy hair, was breathing evenly in his sleep. His mouth hung open precariously, a sliver of saliva clinging to the corner of his lips.

“Cas? Cassieeee…” Dean cooed, kissing his boyfriend’s shoulder. Cas let out a small whine, reminiscent of a mewling kitten, and Dean grinned at the sound. Cas was not a morning person, something Dean had known for a long time. He resembled a grumpy old man if he didn’t get his coffee.

“What?” Cas’ voice was muffled by his pillow but his eyes stayed closed – Dean chewed on his lip to conceal a laugh.

“It’s Sunday. Up and at ‘em, it’s park day.” When Cas didn’t reply, Dean yanked the duvet away, causing Cas to recoil into a ball at the loss of warmth. That was when Dean full on cackled at his boyfriend, a six foot, keen marathon runner dressed in just his boxers, who began whining like a toddler having a temper tantrum.

“Sunday is called the day of rest for a reason, Dean.” Cas insisted, though he lifted his head up anyway. There was a kink in his hair from where he’d been laying on the pillow, and his eyes were puffy with sleep – Dean had never seen anything as beautiful.

“Sam goes back to school tomorrow and the park trip is a double date with him and Eileen. You are not sleeping through it.” Dean poked playfully at the rolls in Cas’ tummy, causing his boyfriend to squirm at the touch.

“Dean.” Cas warned, stretching out on the bed. Dean seized the opportunity to check out his boyfriend, eyes raking over the soft ridges of his bare chest. Sure, Cas liked running, but he didn’t have the photoshopped-model body type – and Dean adored it. So, he poked at the small amount of pudge over Cas’ belly again, which ignited a poke-war between the pair of them.

Dean couldn’t stop laughing, right to the point where he could barely breathe and couldn’t fight back – he ended up straddling Cas’ hips instead, pinning his arms down by his head.

The past four months had been the happiest of Dean’s life, and it showed.

After the events at the hospital, Cas and Sam and been on lockdown in private rooms for four days straight. It was mostly because of people running tests – or rather, authorised geneticists taking samples of both Cas and Sam’s blood to make sure they weren’t undergoing any life-threatening mutations. To lighten the mood, Dean had made an unhealthy amount of X-Men references, none of which Cas understood. However, he had managed to get a few chuckles out of Sam.

Gordon’s admission that he had made Dean compatible to the Demon Blood kept him in the hospital, too. It was the reason the mystery gas in the science centre hadn’t caused himself and Sam to pass out – the Demon Blood made them immune, despite the fact that Dean showed no signs of Hulk-rage and super strength. He was given the all clear the same day as Sam and Cas, and the doctor
explained that over time, the experimental drug inside Dean would wear off. They weren’t sure if the same could be said for Sam, but Cas was already showing signs of recovery.

Reporters had parked themselves in the hospital waiting room, eager to get the latest scoop on the new drama of Lawrence City. Some even tried to go undercover, posing as doctors, but Dean had ratted them out pretty fast. They were given a security guard from Jody’s force after that, a Southern guy named Benny Lafitte, built like a brickhouse, who referred to Dean as Chief. To put it lightly, he was excellent at getting rid of unwanted visitors.

Dean had noticed that since his grand reveal, he had gotten over a hundred new friend requests on Facebook – something he never used – and a worrying amount of texts from people he hadn’t spoken to since high school. Dean got a new number, email address, and Facebook account after that.

Dean and Cas struggled to get back into their apartment after their identities were broadcast across the entirety of America – they had reporters outside their apartment building, pitching camp outside the lingerie store below them for days at a time. In fact, the store beneath them had such an increase in sales that they expanded, opening a new store downtown – even going as far as selling Righteous Man-themed underwear. Jo had bought some for shits and giggles, and gave them to Dean as a ‘well done for saving the City’ present.

Dean and Cas moved out after that, starting fresh in a small house just outside Lawrence City. It whisked them away from the hustle and bustle, their neighbours left them to themselves, and they finally had a fully-functioning shower. In other words, it was a massive plus in Dean’s book.

His family was proud of him, much to his relief. Ellen had fired him, sure, but it didn’t matter because Jody immediately employed him as her right-hand man, and the two of them had become an unstoppable crime-fighting duo. At least, that’s what they were in Dean’s mind – he was still in training. They shared an office in the station, where Dean did all of Jody’s dirty work, and Claire stopped by after college all the time to say hello.

After the incident at the science centre, Claire had taken longer to recover than Sam and Cas, mostly because of blood loss. After hearing of the events, Gabriel had flown down to Lawrence City for a few days, intending to see his brother but ending up in a confrontation with his daughter. Dean had heard she’d almost beaten him to a pulp, and didn’t have a doubt in his mind that she had. Gabriel deserved it, after all. If she hadn’t done it, Dean was more than certain he would have thrown a few punches himself. In fact, he was still debating it.

Lucas Milton had died a month after the event. Dean had persuaded Jody to give him the autopsy information, and Jody described exactly what had happened to Alex. The blistering near Lucas’ hairline must have been his body slowly deteriorating, and Dean didn’t have a doubt in his mind that he had tried to see if the Demon Blood would work on himself. He truly was a mad scientist, and Dean had never been so happy to flip on the news one day and see the announcement of his death.

There was still a hunt for Azazel, who had once again dropped off the face of the earth. The man was a disappearing act, and there were no possible leads as to his location. Each time the police gained a tip, it ended up being false, frustrating them to no end. Though it nagged at Dean sometimes, he tried not to take it too much to heart. As long as Azazel couldn’t hurt him anymore, he would be okay.

Both Sam and Dean had put being vigilantes on pause. In fact, Dean had ruled it out completely, fulfilling his wish of retirement. Sam, however, wanted to get back in the vigilante business at some point, especially since he was given the okay that the Demon Blood wouldn’t affect him any more than it already had. Sam insisted that he could use the power for good, learn to control it, and finish
what his brother had started. Though Dean disagreed, he knew he couldn’t stop his brother – after all, nobody had leaked his identity to the world. They only knew him as Dean’s brother. In fact, Dean had read an article on all the reasons why Sam couldn’t be his sidekick, because ‘that was the obvious answer.’ Dean had read another one listing all the potential identities – the most laughable ones being Charlie and Claire. And so, Tampon Man’s identity remained a mystery to the world.

He had made his peace with Sam’s decision, and luckily his brother was sane enough to want to finish his degree before getting back in the vigilante seat.

“Hey.” Cas broke Dean out of his trip down memory lane, and was met with a cautious smile. “Everything okay?”

Dean leaned down, connecting his lips briefly with Cas’ – thanks to the Angel Blood, there was always a literal spark present whenever they kissed, despite the fact that Cas’ powers had worn off over time. The stint at the hospital had apparently drained the majority of the power Cas possessed, so there was no more life-saving on his part, much to medical research’s disappointment.

However, as each day passed, the spark became less intense – but that didn’t mean Dean didn’t enjoy it any less. It actually made him love kissing Cas even more, because every time their lips connected, the more normal their lives became. And that was all he wanted: normalcy.

Dean released a satisfied hum, smiling against Cas’ lips.

“Never been better, babe.”

They didn’t leave their bedroom for a while.

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The September air left a bitter pinch on Dean’s cheeks as he entered Oak Grove Park, hauling a picnic basket and a bag of blankets to the spot he and Cas had claimed months ago. His shoulder kept knocking into Cas’ as they walked closely together, his leather jacket scraping against his boyfriend’s brand new trench coat.

Dean smiled every time his boyfriend stopped to take a photo of the slowly-reddening leaves, or of Eileen and Sam, who trailed just behind them. They were signing a private conversation to each other, and it captivated Cas into taking photos of them. Cas always described them as a ‘gift for visuals,’ and Dean pretended to understand what he meant. His boyfriend had an eye for detail, something Dean definitely didn’t possess.

Eileen, who was a total stunner, something Dean would never deny (because she was out of Sam’s league), blushed as his brother undoubtedly tried to smooth-talk her. She tucked a long curl of chocolate-coloured hair behind her ear shyly, and Dean didn’t think he’d ever get sick of seeing people be in love – as sappy as that sounded.

He knew it was because he was hopelessly in love himself, but he would never admit it to anyone – except for Cas, who pried it out of him during their deep conversations at three in the morning. That didn’t matter though, because Cas was allowed to know that.

When he faced his boyfriend, who had run ahead, he found the camera was aimed right at him. A lifetime ago, he would have pulled a weird face immediately – but instead, he let his happiness show, because he wanted it to be documented for his future self. He wanted to be reminded of this period of his life, where everything was blissful; his life has truly peaked, and he couldn’t imagine it getting any better than this.
He caught up with Cas quickly and gently pushed the camera aside, gripping Cas’ hip tightly with his free hand, and planted a kiss straight on his lips. He had reached a point where he no longer gave a fuck if someone saw him, snapped a picture of it, and posted it all over the internet. The less he acknowledged his fame, the happier he was.

“Oh, gross!” Sam called after the two of them, looping an arm around Eileen’s waist and squeezing her tightly. Dean waited for them to catch up, then made camp at his and Cas’ usual spot – a patch of grass under a circle of trees, their reddened foliage blocking out the occasional bursts of bright sunlight that broke through the cracks in the clouds.

The four of them sat in a circle, Eileen’s head in Sam’s lap while Cas was cosied up against Dean’s shoulder. They were talking about everything and nothing all at once, letting the conversation flow, and slowly ate the sandwiches and snacks they’d each brought. Eileen had made some killer brownies, and Dean inhaled at least four of them, moaning every time he took a bite. The stomach-ache he would get later would be worth it.

Dean took a quick glance at his brother, who had grown his hair into a flowing mane, and noticed something was off – he kept chewing his lip, tightening and untightening his scarf, and sticking his hand in his pocket… oh.

Oh.

He tried to catch his brother’s eye, but Sam had gotten lost in his thoughts – Cas was talking about a new project he was planning, something about using glow in the dark paint on people’s bodies and taking pictures of it, and Dean was sure it was very interesting. But his brother was fretting, and Dean wanted to reassure him.

“You should paint Sam, he’s certainly got the hair for modelling,” Dean emphasised his brother’s name, bringing Sam out of his thoughts.

The brothers had a certain way of communicating, probably because of the unhealthy amount of time they’d spent together, and Dean shot him a quick eyebrow raise and nodded his head, trying to gesture towards what was clearly in Sam’s pocket. Sam frowned at first, and when he realised what Dean meant, his face went from ghost-white to scarlet red.

The mental conversation that went down after that went something like this:

Dude. Fucking do it, she’ll say yes and you know it.

You don’t know that, Dean. She’s too good for me, the vigilante thing will make her worried sick, I won’t bring in any money from it –

Sam, I swear to fucking God if I have to wax poetic about how awesome you are to make you ask, I will.

Fine, fine! Give me a minute.

Dean gave his brother a satisfied smile, his silent meddling accomplished, and the two brothers waited for Cas to finish explaining his project.

“Hang on a sec, Cas. Sorry to interrupt.” Sam’s voice shook, and Cas sat up from Dean’s shoulder. His brother gripped Eileen’s shoulder, getting her attention – she sat upright, moving so she could read Sam’s lips.

“I… want to say something, I guess.” He signed as he spoke, something Dean couldn’t master for
the life of him, and felt his heart fill up. Sam didn’t have to say anything he wanted to say out loud, but he was, and was including himself and Cas in such a life-changing moment.

Cas instantly knew what was going on, of course, because he turned to Dean with the biggest goddamn smile on his face, and snatched up his camera in a flash.

“I’ve had my lows, and for every single one, you were there to pick me up, put me back together. And you’ve been there for all my highs… because all of them were with you.” Sam signed each word eloquently with his long fingers, and the expression on Eileen’s face… it was like she was coming home for the first time in years, and Dean felt his heart yearn at the sight.

Cas rapidly snapped pictures at Dean’s side, and he didn’t dare take his eyes off his brother and future sister-in-law.

“I know I can be… a little much, sometimes. You’re so selfless, and put my needs before your own – I don’t think I can ever repay you. But I’d like to try, if you’ll let me.” Sam clumsily hauled himself off Cas’ garishly orange blanket, and positioned himself on one knee. When he pulled out the ring, Dean felt his heart stop – it was stunning: instead of a diamond, it was an emerald-green crystal, one he recognised –

Mom’s ring. One of her few possessions that had been salvaged from the fire. Fixed up and shinier than ever, little Sammy was using it for the love of his life. Dean had wondered where it had gone, assuming it had gotten misplaced over the years, but his brother had had it all along.

Eileen had tears in her eyes as she whispered a quiet and heartfelt “Yes.” - an uncontainable smile on her face as Sam placed the ring on her finger – Sam looked exactly the same. They fell into one another, oblivious of anyone but each other, their lips pressed together and arms wound around each other likes vines.

Cas put his camera down after that and experienced the moment in real time – though Cas enjoyed the way he could capture snippets of reality through his camera, he had told Dean he needed to stop living through the lens as much as he did. Sometimes the memory of an event was better than the picture itself.

So, Dean didn’t take his eyes off Sam and Eileen, because it was something he wanted to remember when he was a cranky old man, rocking in a chair on the porch of his family home with Cas by his side.

When his boyfriend snaked his arms around Dean’s waist, tucking a hand underneath his jacket and pressing his forehead to his chest, the thought of a similar moment for himself and Cas crossed his mind. In the end, he knew it was inevitable – they had been in each other’s lives for so long that there was no chance of separation or break-ups at this point. However, they had only been together for four months – Dean wanted a little more of the boyfriend life before the husband life.

“Cas – before I forget, be our wedding photographer?” Sam pulled away from his now-fiancée, who tucked her head under Sam’s chin, giggling as she squeezed him tight.

“Sam… Wow. Of course I will.” Cas’ voice was laced with sincerity, and he was genuinely touched by the fast request – weddings were his favourite events to photograph, and to be doing it for his best friend? Dean knew there were few things better than that for him.

“Alright, alright, you giant saps. I think I’m gonna need a beer and an arm wrestle to reinstate my manliness.” Dean reached for one of the beer bottles that poked out of their cooler, and Cas passed him a bottle opener without prompting – further proof in Dean’s mind that they were made for each
“Hey. It’ll be you two next, and we’ll be dealing with your sappiness.” Eileen waggled her finger at them, one of her angular eyebrows raised in the sassy way she had mastered over the time she’d been dating Sam. Mostly because she was usually aiming it at him.

Dean let out a loud, fake laugh, and downed a good amount of beer so he wouldn’t have to say anything else.

“We’ll see about that,” Cas answered, and Dean lowered his bottle and coughed loudly, the lovebirds opposite them astounded by the response and laughing enthusiastically. Dean had no fucking clue how to respond to that one.

“I think you broke him.” Sam grinned, a dreamy expression on his face as he twirled a finger through Eileen’s cascading locks.

“That wouldn’t be the first time.” Cas looked through his lashes at his boyfriend, looking really damn proud of himself, and Dean playfully slapped his hip.

“Shut up.” He tried to sound pissed off but failed miserably – there was no way in hell he could stop himself from smiling. He was too damn happy.

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Jody and Dean sat in Jody’s truck outside Lawrence Community College one late September afternoon. Claire had been distant lately – staying out until ridiculous hours in the morning, locking herself in her room, coming back from school with a dazed look in her eyes. Jody was dead-set on the idea that she was doing drugs, despite the fact that Dean knew otherwise. She had interrogated her daughter the night before, gaining absolutely nothing from it, and was desperate for some kind of clue as to what was going on.

“I thought Claire hated drugs. She told me Alex didn’t like them,” Dean said from the shotgun seat of Jody’s truck, munching on a bag of Doritos that had been propped up between them.

“Alex didn’t like them, not Claire. I’m telling you, Dean, she’s acting the way you did at her age.” Jody pinched one of the corn chips out of the bag, flashing a wink at her partner.

The two of them had developed a unique kind of banter, most of it involving cheap insults and a bucketful of sarcasm, and Dean found he enjoyed coming to work every day because of it. Though he liked working in the bar before, his family around him all the time, it often became boring and repetitive. Serving alcohol only had so much variation, but working for the police – every day there was something new and exciting to delve into.

Including the mystery that was Claire Novak.

“And this is what I spent six months as a vigilante for: to watch your adopted daughter secretly from a car to see if she’s getting high out of her mind.” Dean revelled in the taste of the sweet chilli flavour chips, knowing full well that his shared snack time with Jody was the reason why he was getting out of shape. At least when he was the Righteous Man, his late-night rampages were keeping him fit.

Now, he just gossiped with his boss all day as they observed potential crime from afar.

“You’re getting paid to eat Doritos, Winchester. Which I paid for, might I add.” She craned her neck, watching as a crowd of kids exited the building.
“I need to pick her up anyway, she’s going to the dentist at four. Might as well kill two birds with one stone.”

Dean licked orange powder off his fingers, taking a quick sip of his Coke when Jody let out a gasp.

“There she is! See! In the crowd – I bet they’re stoners,” the Sheriff cried, snatching Dean’s arm and almost knocking the can straight out of his hands. He quickly downed the last of the soda and followed Jody’s finger as she pointed out Claire’s whereabouts.

Sure enough, Claire was standing in a crowd of kids, all of them laughing at something another girl had said.

“That would be a more exciting statement if weed hadn’t been legalised in our state already,” Dean commented, which earned him a quick slap to the bicep.

“Hey, hey, that girl’s taking her aside – maybe she’s trading, huh? Maybe it’s pills.” Jody inhaled another handful of chips, filling her mouth.

Dean looked on at the situation, and Claire was talking to the girl who had made a joke away from the group, who had resumed conversation. Her chestnut-brown ponytail bounced as she spoke, and her expression was wistful as she focused on Claire, nothing else… and Dean realised what was going on way before Jody did.

“Uh, Jody. I think –” Dean stopped, because then the answer was practically handed to Jody on a silver platter – Ponytail Girl laced her arms around Claire’s waist and pressed a quick kiss to her lips. Dean couldn’t help but smile.

Good on ya, kid.

It filled him with pride to see the young girl getting over what had happened over the summer, moving on with her life and changing for the better. In a weird way, Dean thought this was how proud fathers felt about their children, despite the fact that Dean was young enough to be Claire’s older brother.

Older brother. Dean could deal with that one.

“A girl? That’s why she’s been acting so – oh. Oh right.” Jody knocked her head back against the headrest, realisation hitting her like a truck. Dean let out a smug chuckle, but recoiled when Jody shot him a cold glare. The Sheriff could be downright terrifying if she got rubbed the wrong way.

Ponytail Girl tucked Claire’s golden hair behind her ear, then embraced her tightly – when she let go, she gave a shy wave to Claire, who returned it with a wide smile as her apparent girlfriend walked away.

Jody snatched up her phone and before Dean could stop her, speed-dialled Claire’s number, watching her as she waited for her to pick up the phone.

After a few seconds of dumbstruck staring, Claire pulled her phone out of her coat pocket.

“Hey, sweetie. I’m pulled up outside.” Jody put on her fake nice-mom voice, the kind she always used when she wanted to get something out of someone. Dean had been a victim of it many a time, and felt a smack of empathy in his gut. Claire was going to get one hell of a lecture the millisecond she got in the truck.
“Oh. I see you, I’ll be right over.” Dean heard Claire through Jody’s phone, and poured a handful of Dorito crumbs into his hand. Things were about to get dramatic, and he needed a good supply of food if he was going to witness The Talk.

The back door swung open, and a dazed looking Claire climbed into the back seat. Dean could see where Jody had gotten her idea about the drugs – the kid was beaming like a fool, as if she was on a high.

“Hey, Dean.” Claire registered his presence with a genuine smile; the two of them had developed a positive friendship over the past few months. At first, Claire was convinced she owed her life to Dean, but the two of them had worked it out into something based less on life-debts and more on real friendship.

“Prepare yourself, Squirt,” Dean warned, pinching up some shards of Doritos and piling them into his mouth so he had an excuse to stay quiet.

“Claire Amelia Novak. When did you get a girlfriend?” Jody leaned towards the centre of the car, facing her daughter and giving her no choice but to respond. She was totally cornered.

Dean watched as Claire’s face fell, her blue eyes looking at anything but her mother – busted. Dean felt a nostalgic pang at the look, remembering how Jody given him similar lectures just seven years prior: Is that alcohol I smell? Should I get the breathalyser? Maybe I’ll just call up Bobby instead. I’m sure he’d love to hear from me.

“Mom. It’s nothing, let it go.” That was something new: before the incident at the Science Centre, Claire had referred to Jody by her name or as The Sheriff. The life-or-death situation she’d gone through had given her a reality check, and since meeting her dad she had wanted to establish who she considered her real family to be. Her way of doing that was by calling Jody Mom right in front of him, and she hadn’t stopped since.

Dean secretly revelled in how brutal Claire could be.

“Oh? So, nothing is you kissing her in front of your entire school?” Jody had a fine-tuned interrogation technique that she had mastered over her years of being a cop, and she could grill information out of the most secretive people. Claire didn’t stand a chance.

“Fine. I’ve been seeing her for a few weeks, but that –” Claire gestured towards the patch of grass where they had been standing, “ – was my first kiss with her. Alright? You happy now?”

She tossed a section of blonde curls over her shoulder, something else Dean noticed had changed – rather than her punk-rock, heavy eyeliner look that she sported over the summer, she began toning it down; she even wore dresses sometimes. The last time Dean saw her, the pair of them had gone mini-golfing – the second she arrived, he immediately noted the immaculate coral lipstick she wore, and proceeded to ask whether she had gotten over her emo phase. Claire retaliated by absolutely annihilating him at the game.

“Much better.” Jody was grinning, now into proud-mom mode.

“What’s her name, sweetie?”

Claire’s cheeks faded into a crimson colour, and she folded her arms to her chest.

“Krissy. Krissy Chambers.” She couldn’t hold back a smile, and Dean immediately cooed.

“Claire and Krissy sitting in a tree –” he began to mock sing-song, pouting his lips and making
ridiculous kissing noises.

“Says the guy who can’t go a goddamn second without mentioning how the exact blue of Cas’ eyes is his favourite colour,” she snapped over him, grabbing the seat in front of her so she could lean over and get right in his face.

“Okay, that was one time when I was drunk. We all say weird chick-flick shit when we’ve had a few, okay?” Dean retorted, sticking his finger up to emphasise his point.

“Children! Please,” Jody interrupted the pair of them, revving the engine of her truck, but Claire could not be tamed.

“When are you gonna give me some cousins, Dean? Since you’re gonna be my uncle, too, one day…” She flashed a wicked grin, and Dean had no idea where she had gotten her attitude from – because it definitely wasn’t a Novak trait.

“Hey, kid. Tone it down,” Jody warned as she reversed her truck out of the parking lot.

“Seriously, though. When are you gonna pop your man the question?”

Alright. Claire had definitely learned her attitude from Jody, because her expression was an uncanny resemblance to her daughter’s.

“Holy crap.” Dean rolled his eyes, shoving the rest of his Doritos in his mouth, trying to ignore the giggling.

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Dean and Cas had decided to host a relatively small Christmas party that year. For the first time in years, there wasn’t a flood of snow bringing Lawrence City to a standstill, so nobody dropped out due to weather conditions. Dean’s entire family, blood-related or not, would be joining them for Christmas dinner.

And a lot of drunk party games. A lot. Both Dean and Cas had bought alcohol for everyone, racking up quite the bill, and they were currently standing in front of their new collection.

“I think we’ve got a lifetime supply, babe.” Dean picked up one of three enormous bottles of whiskey, the golden liquid sloshing around as he read the label.

“We can always gift some of it to Bobby,” Cas suggested, rolling up the sleeves of his navy blue Christmas sweater. Silhouettes of reindeer had been knitted into it, and it made his boyfriend look so goddamn cuddly. Dean barely managed to keep his hands off him for more than five minutes at a time.

“True. Charlie might like some, too.” Dean heard the doorbell ring, and snaked past his boyfriend to go and answer it. However, said boyfriend smacked him right in the ass, and let out an enormous, proud laugh.

“You’re gonna pay for that!” Dean called after him, over exaggerating as he rubbed his hand over the area Cas had slapped, but laughed heartily as he ambled towards the foyer.

Bobby, Ellen, and a very different looking Jo appeared at the door – she’d cut her hair short, and instead of the baby-faced, Rapunzel-curls sister Dean was used to, he was met with a grown-up looking woman who sported a chic bob. He raised his eyebrows, pointing at Jo as if he didn’t recognise her.
“Who’s this ugly kid? Where’d my sister go?” Dean teased, and Jo smacked his hand away. He let his family in from the cold, guiding them into his home with a grand gesture.

“You’re a dick, you know that?” Jo’s version of a greeting was expected, and Ellen smacked the back of her head.

“Be nice to your brother, Joanna Beth. It’s Christmas.” Ellen shimmied off her coat, and hung it on the vintage coat rack positioned by the door. A purchase on Cas’ part, Dean had told everyone who’d asked.

“Merry Christmas, son.” Bobby gave Dean a rough slap on the shoulder, the equivalent of a hug, and Dean beamed at him. He clutched a large bag of boxes, something Dean recognised as presents.

“We got a few things for you boys, your house was lookin’ kinda sparse the last time we were here.” Ellen explained as she followed Dean’s line of sight.

“Aw. You guys didn’t need to do that.” Dean smiled bashfully, and guided them into the living room. Their Christmas tree was rather small, just a basic plastic one covered with cheap baubles from the mall, and a few presents were already positioned underneath. Most of them were for Dean’s family, but there was a handful there for Cas, and even some for Dean himself.

Bobby dumped the bag down by the tree and took out each present one by one, positioning them with the rest.

Dean offered them drinks after that, and when they asked for Cas, he told them he was occupied in the kitchen. The pair of them were cooking Christmas dinner together, but Dean had been given the task of greeting guests – mostly because Cas’ immediate family, save for Claire who came the closest, wouldn’t be joining them.

Cas had been mildly upset, and Dean understood the cooking would distract him for a little while – Christmas could be a painful time for some.

As people arrived, the smell of comfort food filled the house; it was making Dean’s stomach rumble, and once everyone was settled, he joined his boyfriend back in the kitchen. The amount of time they spent testing each other’s creations or kissing against the counter meant the meal was served later than scheduled, but nobody said anything about it. Therefore, Dean didn’t feel the need to apologise.

The meal was a hit: Charlie tried to blackmail the recipes out of Dean, and when he didn’t cooperate, she insisted she’d force alcohol down his throat and make him drunkenly confess. He wished her luck with that, then ruffled a hand through her new pixie cut.

Since quitting the vigilante life, Charlie and Dean had become best friends in the space of a month – they even hauled their asses all the way to San Diego for Comic-Con, cosplaying Captain America and Black Widow. Their costumes were a hit, and Dean was relieved that nobody recognised the people behind the outfits.

Dean would never admit that it felt pretty good to be a superhero again.

Cas had been seated next to Dean and Claire, and for the first time ever, he got a chance to really talk to his niece. The two mostly made small talk, and Dean was proud of Claire for not sassing him once throughout the entire meal – it was as if she genuinely wanted to get to know him, to reconnect with her roots. At one point, she affectionately called him a doof, whatever that was, and Cas had cocked his head to the side. Claire had laughed, which in turn made Cas smile.

Sam and Eileen were still in post-engagement bliss, twiddling one another’s fingers and brushing at
the other’s hair, or wiping a food stain off the corner of their mouths… It was sickly sweet, but Dean didn’t call either of them out. It was better to leave them in a world of their own.

Jo and Charlie got on like a house on fire, bonding over insulting the two people they considered to be their big brothers. The topic of vigilantism came up fairly quickly, and ended with Jo wondering out loud just how Dean had managed to fit into a skin-tight superhero suit; Dean chucked a napkin that landed directly over her face. A round of laughter ensued after that, the plentiful amount of alcohol finally starting to take its toll.

Cas shuffled in his seat next to Dean, the wooden legs scraping against the floor. And when Dean took a look, he could see Cas bouncing his knee anxiously under the table, so Dean slid his hand over it.

“You okay, babe?” Dean had gotten into the habit of calling Cas ‘babe’ at the end of nearly every sentence aimed at his boyfriend, but he didn’t seem to mind. Cas hadn’t given Dean a pet name yet, but he supposed Cas wasn’t the pet name type.

Cas made a point of standing up, grabbing his plate and Claire’s, and nodding at his boyfriend.

“Are you just going to sit there, or be a good boyfriend and help me clean up?” The sentence should have been light-hearted, but Cas’ voice was blunt – something was wrong, and Dean didn’t want to worry anyone, so he quickly obliged.

After scooping up his plate and a few others, he scrambled after Cas into the kitchen, trying his hardest not to drop anything. When he entered the kitchen, Cas was dumping the dishes in the sink, and let out an enormous sigh.

“What’s wrong?” Dean’s brows furrowed together, and he joined his boyfriend at the sink. Cas cranked on the faucet, squirting a healthy amount of soap into the basin and not replying for a long moment. Tiny bubbles floated upwards, one of them popping against Cas’ cheek. Dean joined him, scrubbing at some of the dishes.

“I’ve been… thinking about us, for a few weeks.” Cas wouldn’t look at Dean, and a knife seemed to penetrate him right through the heart. Oh God, was Cas breaking up with him?

“Wait… what?” Dean removed his hands from the soapy dishwater, waving his hands to remove the excess moisture. No, Cas would never break up with Dean on Christmas, that would be absolutely fucking cruel. Even the cruellest of people wouldn’t destroy someone’s entire holiday like that.

“Oh – not anything bad, I’ve just been thinking.” Cas pushed away from the sink, and shoved a still-soaking hand in the pocket of his jeans – Dean took in a gulp of air after that, relieved. Even so, Cas kept looking at anything but him, no matter how much Dean tried to grab his attention.

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“What about what?” Dean’s voice had deepened with sincerity, and the contagious happy-vibe from the dining room seemed to be a world away. He tried to think of all the things Cas could be doing, but his mind was like a blank slate.

“It’s… about your Christmas present. I know it’s soon, but… I – I went to a jeweller’s the other month…”

Dean’s jaw dropped, because that was the dead giveaway. The frown he had been sporting softened into an expression he didn’t think he’d ever used before in his life – his face had become an open book, and if someone looked at him in that moment, they’d know just how in love he was.

Cas removed his hand from his pocket, and sure enough, out came a ring. It was nothing fancy, just a
plain, thick silver band with a single diamond embedded in the metal, glinting multi-coloured in the light.

“Sam actually recommended the man who restored Eileen’s engagement ring, and I’m glad he did. Because it’s perfect.” Cas wiped hurriedly at his eyes, because he was crying and Dean had to gulp a few times before he managed to dislodge the lump in his throat.

“Cas…” was all Dean could choke out.

“Marry me?” The words came out as a sob, and Dean guessed the two of them must have looked quite the picture: two grown-ass, twenty-something men weeping in the middle of a kitchen, dirty dishes piled up in their sink.

Cas was too busy crying to get down on one knee, and Dean didn’t blame him – the emotions he felt forced him into a temporary state of paralysis, his brain having totally shut down. He didn’t know whether to laugh at himself, the situation, or out of sheer joy.

“I thought you were breaking up with me, you prick.” And in that moment, Cas surged up to his boyfriend, tugging him into his arms so tightly that he felt like his lungs were going to explode. Dean tangled his arms around Cas’ waist, pressing his nose against his neck.

“Where’s the bathroom – crap, are you okay?” Claire walked into the kitchen, her boots tapping against the tiled flooring. When Dean wormed away, Claire caught sight of the ring in Cas’ hand and let out a girlish shriek. The high-pitched noise made Dean wince, and he was briefly astounded that Claire could be anything other than brooding.

“Here we go.” Dean said to no one in particular, and let out a loud oomph when Claire slammed straight into the two of them at the speed of light.

“You’re getting married!” Despite Claire being rather small, the Demon Blood strength was definitely still present – her puny arms were tangled around both Cas and Dean’s waists, squishing them together uncomfortably. Dean had tears caught in his eyelashes, and Cas was the same – but they laughed anyway, because how many couples had a nineteen-year-old niece around to announce their engagement to the rest of the family?

Because she had screamed at the top of her lungs, naturally, the rest of the family bombarded the scene – a mixture of laughter, tears, and wolf-whistles ensued in a loud chorus. Dean didn’t even have the ring on his finger yet.

So, when the cool metal finally slid over Dean’s ring finger, something he didn’t think he’d ever experience in his lifetime, he spoke the only appropriate thing to sum up the moment:

“Thank God I became a vigilante, or this jackass wouldn’t have dated me in the first place. He’s got a superhero kink, I’m telling you –”

“Dean.” The judgemental tone was back, but Dean silenced his boyfriend by pressing his index finger to Cas’ lips.

Dean felt the corner of his mouth quirk upwards, and the world seemed to fall into slow motion – as he stared at his now-fiancé, it was like there was nobody else in the room, despite the ruckus they were causing. He removed his finger, taking a long look at his ring before sliding his hand over Cas’ pointed jaw.

He swiftly angled his head to the side, kissing Cas, a kiss that was fuelled by nothing but love – and for the first time in months, there was no electric-shock when they collided. They parted for a
moment, grinning like fools because they both knew what that meant, but ended up gravitating towards the other barely a moment later; they were like magnets, always drawn to each other, never separating.

And for the first time, Dean could predict what the rest of his life would be like: *perfect.*
Ahh it's all over!
I have many thanks for the wonderful people who helped me finish this fanfic that took me over a year to write holy shit.
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If you made it this far, thank you for reading. I hope you liked it :)

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